

HEIDEGGER'S FOURFOLD

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This monograph attempts to show that Heidegger's fourfold is neither as mysterious as some commentators have claimed, nor is it inconsistent with the position that Heidegger held when he wrote *Being and Time*.

After a brief introduction, I proceed to an analysis of *earth*. In the second chapter, I argue that Heidegger's view on this subject is, in many respects, heavily indebted to his interpretation of Aristotle.

The third chapter is an analysis of *sky*. This chapter is both an investigation into the many aspects of sky and an analysis of the relation between sky and Heidegger's various uses of "world" in *Being and Time*.

The fourth chapter is an analysis of the most interpretively difficult member of the fourfold, *gods*. Gods allow for open spaces and ground fields of meaningfulness.

The fifth chapter is an analysis of *mortals*. This chapter focuses heavily on Heidegger's analysis of death in *Being and Time*, his middle works, and his later works. The most important insight into the understanding of the relationship between Heidegger's earlier and later work is presented in this chapter. Namely, here I argue that *ownedness* and *releasement to things* are not opposed to one another. The claim that these two ways of being are opposed to one another is the usual grounds for the claim that Heidegger radically changed his views between the time that he wrote *Being and Time* and his later works.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It seems to me appropriate to begin this introduction with a brief history of this monograph. Several years ago I began a side-project, purely out of personal interest, aimed at giving a Heideggerian interpretation of Ásatrú mythology, especially of the poems contained in the *Poetic Edda*, using Heidegger's poetic works as a source. The first Heidegger work that I owned and read, was *Poetry, Language, Thought*. By the time that I began this project, my copy of *Poetry, Language, Thought* looked more like a coloring book than a philosophical work, given all of the highlights and marginalia (many of which hardly fit in the margins by this time). But my understanding of Heidegger's poetic works, like that of most commentators on Heidegger, was superficial and composed of many isolated fragments of understanding obscured mostly by ignorance. Two interesting things, however, happened during my attempt to work through this Heideggerian interpretation of Ásatrú mythology. First is that circumstances dictated that I immediately defend a dissertation proposal. Next, and more fortuitously, I found that in using Heidegger's poetic works to interpret the Ásatrú mythology, I had not only learned a great deal about the mythology itself, but I, for the first time, came to an understanding of Heidegger's poetic works. In particular, I had gained insight into one of the most mysterious aspects of Heidegger's thought: the fourfold. The precursor to the present paper was composed primarily of insights into Heidegger's poetic works gained in my

attempted Heideggerian interpretation of Ásatrú mythology, with the mythology for the most part set aside.

To ignore the fourfold is to all but ignore Heidegger's mature thought. Unfortunately, this is precisely what has been done. Commentators have either strategically latched on to aspects of Heidegger's later thought – whether it be his discussions of technology or poetry – only insofar as it suits their own ends, without making any real effort to figure out what Heidegger's actual views on either poetry or technology are. Perhaps more importantly, commentators on Heidegger's later work seldom make any effort to get clear about how Heidegger's views of technology and poetry relate to one another, or to his view in *Being and Time* (with the exception of the claim – either implicit or explicit – that Heidegger's view radically changed between *Being and Time* and his later works). The internal connection between Heidegger's discussions of technology, poetry, *Being and Time*, and the history of Western philosophy are usually, if not always, ignored or denied. Most commentators, without having investigated the internal coherence of Heidegger's later view, claim that Heidegger has abandoned the basic position laid out in *Being and Time*.

Unfortunately, the difficulty for Heidegger's reader is compounded by the fact that there are almost no useful interpretations in the secondary literature that would help Heidegger's reader gain any real insight into what it is that Heidegger is trying to get at with the poetic definitions of the members of the fourfold. The opacity of the primary texts themselves combined with the near total lack of good secondary literature has led to the marginalization of and, where taken seriously, misunderstanding of Heidegger's later

works. His so-called poetic works are either dismissed as mysticism, used merely as an instrument for the interpreter's own ends, or ignored altogether. Heidegger's technological works appear to be more popular in the academic world. But it is seldom understood just how much those works both rely on his poetic works and are each integrated into the other. Lacking a proper understanding of Heidegger's poetic works, many interpreters attempt to figure out, employ, or attack, Heidegger's technological works without understanding them in any depth.

According to Sluga, for example, Heidegger "turned to Nietzsche only *after* he had abandoned the assumptions and doctrines of *Being and Time* and after 1929 when he had embarked on new lines of thought."¹ Polt similarly states: "[P]erhaps his love of questioning led him to exert himself deliberately to cast off his old concepts."² Rather than the exception, this view of the progression of Heidegger's work seems to be the rule. This is a rule that I would like to explicitly overturn.

What motivation might one have for overturning the accepted scholarly consensus in favor of a view that finds unity and consistence, along with some admitted development, between Heidegger's early and late works? Because Heidegger himself says of all great thinkers: "With the term *thinker* we name those exceptional human beings who are destined to think one single thought, a thought that is always 'about' *beings as a whole*. Each thinker only thinks one *single* thought."³ And, even more directly: "The thinking of the turn *is* a change in my thought. But this change is not a

¹ Sluga 2005: 102.

² Polt 1999: 117.

³ Heidegger 1991b: 4.

consequence of altering the standpoint, much less of abandoning the fundamental issue of *Being and Time*. The thinking of the turn results from the fact that I stayed with the matter for thought, 'Being and Time,' by inquiring into the perspective which already in *Being and Time* (p. 39) was designated as 'Time and Being'."⁴

I have one simple goal in this paper: to make clear, at least in outline, Heidegger's fourfold. My goal is not to give a complete interpretation that will make this rather obscure view completely and utterly transparent. Rather, I take my project to be more akin to one of the goals that Walter Kaufmann set for his interpretation of Nietzsche. Namely, to lay out the basics of the view in such a way to open a ground for further study, elucidation, and interpretation. This being the case, I will be more succinct with some aspects of this discussion than one, including myself, might prefer. This is often because of time and space constraints, and other times for the simple reason that I have yet to discover Heidegger's precise meaning or his reasons for a given view. In essence, I am attempting to present a general overview of his position. For those who might doubt the philosophical value of such a project, Julian Young makes perfectly clear why in this instance even a general overview would be of great worth. On the subject of the fourfold Young writes that "Baffled by Heidegger's poetic brevity, commentators have consigned it to silence of the too-hard basket."⁵ By producing even a sketch of the fourfold, I hope to remove it from the "too-hard basket" and put it in the ripe and ready for further study basket.

⁴ As quoted in White 2005: 45.

⁵ Young 2006: 373.

Of course, one may doubt whether or not removing the fourfold from the “too-hard basket” is worth the effort at all. Other commentators on Heidegger have warned me that the later Heidegger is more mysticism than philosophy. What, precisely, they mean by “mysticism” has never been entirely clear to me. Perhaps they are turned off by Heidegger’s talk of gods and so regard his view as a quasi-religious one calling for faith. Such an objection carries little weight, esp. insofar as it presupposes an understanding of Heidegger’s later work that is (as I will show in chs. 3 & 4) fundamentally misguided.

Still others have claimed that the fourfold (and Heidegger’s poetic works more generally) is not a proper subject for study in academic philosophy. Perhaps this charge is right. I once heard Hubert Dreyfus tell a story about American filmmaker Terrence Malick. Malick, who was studying philosophy at Oxford University, told his advisor, Gilbert Ryle, that he wanted to write his thesis on Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein’s later works. Ryle’s response, according to Dreyfus, was “That all sounds very interesting, but your thesis should be on something philosophical.”⁶ Perhaps Ryle is right, and ~~that~~ Heidegger’s later work does not meet the requirements for whatever counts as academic philosophy these days. For those who agree with Ryle, I have no reply. I will, however, simply proceed under the assumption that my reader disagrees with Ryle.

My general strategy is to argue through interpretation. While this is, of course, not the sort of strategy likely to be found in a course on formal logic, it nevertheless strikes me as a legitimate way of proceeding in the present circumstances. If I can make

⁶ I am retelling this story from memory, so I make no claims that this quote is a verbatim reproduction of Dreyfus’ own words. The sentiment is, however, entirely accurate.

sense of the fourfold without ignoring or putting too great a strain on Heidegger's own words in interpreting the fourfold, and can make the view internally consistent, then I take it that my interpretation is on firm footing. Furthermore, if I can so ground my interpretation *and* show the coherence of Heidegger's later works with his view in *Being and Time*, then my interpretation is a strong one that ought to be strongly considered in any interpretation of Heidegger's later works. Finally, insofar as Heidegger commentators have been "baffled" by Heidegger's poetic works and "have been consigned it to silence of the too-hard basket," if I can produce a strong interpretation, then, in the absence of any other such interpretations, my interpretation will stand as the best interpretation of the fourfold.

One of the benefits of this strategy is that, in interpreting the fourfold, I will not simply be clarifying the fourfold itself. I will be clarifying Heidegger's later works more generally. Clarifying the fourfold will open a path for an investigation into Heidegger's works on technology (though this will not be my focus). In using *Being and Time* to assist me in my interpretation of the fourfold, my interpretation will have the added benefit – perhaps the most important philosophical contribution of this monograph – of achieving deeper insight into some of the major concepts of *Being and Time* itself.

As is well-known, Heidegger was quite clear in his displeasure with the reception that *Being and Time* received in philosophical literature and in academic discussions more generally. Amongst the most important complaints – one which Heidegger himself has accepted responsibility – was that the basic project of *Being and Time* was missed, and the book was simply re-assimilated into the philosophical tradition. For example,

Heidegger complains that his interpreters completely misread his discussion of death so that “the worst and most absurd misinterpretations creep in and spread – and naturally, a ‘philosophy of death’ is made up”⁷ and that “the danger of misinterpreting *Being and Time* ... ‘existentiell-anthropologically’ and of seeing ... Dasein from the perspective of a moral resolve ... instead of *the other way* ... is basically excluded ... if from the beginning we hold on to the grounding-question of the ‘meaning of Being’ as the *only* question.”⁸ *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, a transitional work, in particular is littered with complaints that *Being and Time* has been misinterpreted, in part b/c Heidegger’s own language all too easily allows for these misinterpretations.

Heidegger’s response to the attempt to interpret his work according to the metaphysical tradition that he is attempting to overcome is to increasingly move away from a style of writing that, while admittedly strange and unique, nevertheless remains in a relatively traditional philosophical style. As Heidegger moves farther and farther from the traditional style of philosophical writing, he moves closer and closer to [writing in] poetic imagery. He stresses his rejection of formal philosophical doctrines as the sole legitimate subject of philosophy. His focus is instead on the grounds of any system of knowledge whatsoever. Such a ground is not itself a system of knowledge, but an open and ambiguous background that must be brought into focus – into an understanding of Being that opens up the systems of knowledge that such an understanding of Being will allow. Poetic imagery does not easily lend itself to formalization or to assimilation into

⁷ Heidegger 1999: 199.

⁸ *Ibid.*: 61.

formal systems of knowledge. This fact, along with Heidegger's understanding of the word "poetry" [i.e. ποιήσις] as 'revealing' helps make clear why Heidegger favors the language of poetry in his later works. "Essential poetry" – poetry that thinks Being – is thoughtfulness about just this kind of ambiguous ground that must be brought into focus such that an understanding of Being may be grounded. Such poetry need not be poetic, in the sense of poetry as studied in creative writing departments at universities, or more generally in the sense of the written word. But the unusualness of Heidegger's presentation serves Heidegger's end. His presentation, as Young notes, is difficult to understand. It strikes its reader as an ambiguous field of possible meanings and interpretations which must be brought into focus in order to be understood, but which resists any easy interpretation back into the tradition.

The ambiguity of Heidegger's later works is, however, only superficial. If one reads through Heidegger's corpus carefully, one will discover that most, if not all, of the enigmatic points that Heidegger makes – often so briefly as to give no definite direction for interpretation – are expanded upon in more detail at other points in his writings and lectures. As with many pre-Christian religions, a proper understanding of Heidegger's later work requires more than simply understanding a given doctrine or isolated aspect of his thought. Rather, one must become acquainted with much of his thought and. By working in this way, Heidegger seems to have hoped that his audience, rather than drawing Heidegger's thought into their own or into that of this or that traditional thinker, would think along with him. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that Heidegger does not

himself assimilate quite a bit of the tradition, but his way of doing so requires that one thinks that tradition in a distinctly Heideggerian way.

There are a few thinkers that one must always keep in mind when reading Heidegger, namely Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Hölderlin, and, most importantly, Aristotle. It is no accident that in *What is Called Thinking?* Heidegger tells his audience that in order to think through Nietzsche's philosophy (in a Heideggerian way) "it is advisable ... that you postpone reading Nietzsche for the time being, and first study Aristotle for ten to fifteen years."⁹ Aside from Heidegger's obvious indebtedness to (his interpretation of) Aristotle, it seems to me that Heidegger's obscurity in his poetic works was not an accident. Rather, he wanted to be read for ten to fifteen years before his interpreters could understand him; i.e. [to make it so] that it would be impossible to read him in a quick and superficial way and to force his readers either to dismiss him or to think through his thought – not his words or doctrines – along with him. While I have spent a decade trying to make sense of Heidegger's poetic works, I hardly expect my reader to have to do the same. Perhaps for this, I owe Heidegger an apology.

Leaving all apologies aside, probably the most well known interpretation of the essential fourfold is that of Julian Young from his article "The Fourfold" in the second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. I begin three of my following four chapters by presenting Heidegger's own poetic definition followed by Young's interpretation of it. In each case, I will seek to establish that (and how) Young's

⁹ Heidegger 1968: 73.

interpretation is mistaken, while still using this mistaken interpretation as a starting point for making sense of the four members of the fourfold.

There are several terms that we briefly have to look at, before we turn to the four chapters that make up the majority of this monograph. The remainder of this introduction is primarily for readers who are not familiar with the terminology of *Being and Time*. My intention at this point is not to give a full introduction to *Heideggersprache*, but to familiarize my reader with certain Heideggerian terms used throughout this monograph for which no other, more natural opportunity at explication presents itself. Thus, I will only cover a handful of terms here, explaining others terms as appropriate in the context of the monograph itself.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger distinguished between ontic and ontological investigations. While there are no concise definitions that can be quoted to clarify the distinction, it does become clear throughout the course of the book as a whole. Ontic investigations are investigations into beings or the being of those beings. “Beings” in Heidegger’s terms include what we would normally think of as such – e.g. sand, trees, birds, grassy fields, animals in the grassy fields, etc. – but also beings like facts, properties, relations, and predicates that are ascribed to beings, as well as any other abstract objects more generally. For the sake of consistency and to avoid certain ways of using the word “entity” that I do not like, I will always call beings “beings” and, where other translators have used the word “entity,” I will replace their word with the word “being.”

Heidegger calls any way of describing or classifying beings or referring to the ontological characteristics of beings “categorical.” For example, what Descartes calls primary and secondary qualities in his own investigation into beings along with the formal relationships that they have to one another, categorial determinations of these beings.

When Heidegger talks about ontological investigations, he is talking specifically about an investigation into Being, not beings. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger never completes his investigation into the meaning of Being in general. As I will subsequently make clear, this is not a flaw in *Being and Time*, but rather a necessity, insofar as part of what it is to be a mortal Dasein is to have the possibility of asking the question of the meaning of Being anew time and time again when some decision that we have given in response to the question fails to ground beings as a whole. In brief, whatever Being is, it grounds beings, but is itself not a being. Given that the fourfold constitutes an investigation into Being, our focus will primarily be on Heidegger’s ontological, rather than his ontical, investigation.

By “existence” Heidegger does not mean the traditional concept of “existentia” which usually means something like “located in time and space.” Rather, Heidegger explains his use of the term “existence” as follows: “That kind of Being towards which Dasein can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow, we call ‘*existence*’.”¹⁰ Thus, what Heidegger means by “existence” is anything towards which we can comport ourselves. Anything that can matter (or,

¹⁰ Heidegger 1962: 32.

deficiently, not matter) to us in some way or another exists. So, everything that exists exists insofar as it can, and in some way always does, matter or not matter to us. While this “either/or” appears to eliminate all other possibilities, it actually does not. For example, quantum mechanics neither mattered nor did not matter to the ancient Egyptians. It is only in a world where quantum mechanics has been disclosed that it can matter or, deficiently, not matter.

Since existence will come up in the monograph proper, I here only introduce the concept in order to help make sense of the distinction that Heidegger draws between an existential analytic and an existentiell investigation. Heidegger explains his term “existentiell” as follows: “The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself. The understanding of oneself which leads *along this way* we call ‘*existentiell*’.”¹¹

What matters or does not matter to us is only disclosed by our understanding of things that has been historically disclosed. Does quantum mechanics exist? For the ancient Egyptians, it clearly did not. For them, there was no understanding of anything like quantum mechanics. Thus, it could neither matter nor fail to matter to them. But, now that we understand quantum mechanics, isn't it true that quantum mechanics did matter to the ancient Egyptians, even if they did not know about quantum mechanics? Here the question has been changed. It is no longer about whether or not quantum mechanics actually mattered to the ancient Egyptians – it clearly neither mattered nor did

¹¹ Ibid.: 33.

not matter to them. The causal effects that we now describe according to our formulation of quantum mechanics, of course, mattered to them, but not quantum mechanics.

But this view of disclosure should not be limited to scientific structures of understanding; it includes all social structures of understanding. An ancient Egyptian could not understand himself as a saint or a sinner, in the Christian sense. Being a saint or a sinner neither mattered nor did not matter to the ancient Egyptian.

All such kinds of mattering and not mattering, the existentiell possibilities, are historically and in some ways individually determined. I, for example, have discovered through experience that I am a poor jumper and that I cannot palm a basketball. So, existentielly speaking, I cannot understand myself as a legitimate threat to win the National Basketball Association's slam dunk competition. This possibility is individually determined, but many are historically determined. Neither my readers nor I have the existentiell possibility of being a medieval knight. This is simply not a live option for us. Similarly being an astronaut was not an existentiell possibility for medieval knights.

Existentiell investigations are investigations into particular beings or understandings of Being, never into the being of these beings or to Being as such. In contrast to [the] existentiell possibilities, and the investigations of these live possibilities, Heidegger presents his explanation of the "existential": "The question about that structure [i.e. the ontological structure of existence] aims at the analysis of what constitutes

existence. The context of such structures we call ‘*existentiality*’. Its analytic has the character of an understanding which is not existentiell, but rather *existential*.”¹²

The existential analytic at the heart of Heidegger’s work is an investigation of the structures of existence. Insofar as Heidegger’s existential analytic is an investigation into the structures that allow for any existentiell possibilities whatsoever, it does not depend on any specific way of developing these existential structures according to any particular existentiell possibilities. *Being and Time*, for example, is an existential analytic, not an existentiell investigation. While Division II of *Being and Time* owes quite a debt to Søren Kierkegaard’s work, Heidegger is clear to note that Kierkegaard’s own investigations are lacking precisely because they are merely existentiell and not existential. By contrast, Heidegger’s entire corpus ought to be understood as fundamentally an existential analytic. Even in Heidegger’s relationship toward the technological understanding of Being, his existentiell investigation is only instrumental. He is concerned that, if the technological understanding of Being becomes sufficiently dominant, then it may make an existential investigation existentielly impossible. I return to this concern in Chapter 5.

The fact that Heidegger’s focus is almost always on giving an existential analytic, never merely producing an existentiell discussion for its own sake, will assume particular importance when we look at Young’s interpretations of the members of the fourfold. Those interpretations almost invariably fail to deal with the fourfold as general existential

¹² Ibid.

structures, but rather treats them as kinds of beings or as a particular understanding of Being. This will be a recurring theme in my arguments against Young's interpretations. Against Young and others, I take the fourfold to be an ontological-existential structure, and Heidegger's investigation into the fourfold to be an existential analytic, not an ontic-existential investigation.

As a final note on terminology, I should alert my reader that, following more recent translations of Heidegger's works, I translate the word "*eigentlichkeit*" as "*ownedness*" rather than "*authenticity*". My adoption of the former comes from a discussion that I had with professor Hans Sluga while I was an undergraduate at the University of California, Berkeley. He told me that Heidegger had intended to stress the *eigen* in *eigentlichkeit*, not *eigentlich*. Thus, it was the word "own" that was key to understanding this term, not "authentic." Professor Sluga suggested that it was Jean-Paul Sartre's translation of Heidegger's term into French that had started the mistaken tradition of translating Heidegger's *eigentlichkeit* as *authenticity*. Heidegger himself had no intention of suggesting that unowned Dasein is somehow inauthentic or, as the English reader is likely to understand from this translation, not really Dasein, less Dasein than owned Dasein, or even Dasein that is being disingenuous with itself. In fact, it is this misguided translation that makes Heidegger's readers suspect the sincerity of his repeated claims that he is not being pejorative whenever he introduces and discusses the existential modifications of Dasein that make it unowned. Rather than take Sartre's word on Heidegger, I will take Heidegger's.

An additional benefit of translating *eigentlichkeit* as ownedness is that it allows me to make clear the connection between this term and the term “enowning”. “Enowning” is a translation of the German word “*Ereignis*.” Ereignis has also been translated as *appropriation* or *the event of appropriation*. I have some minor objections to both, though for current purposes, suffice it to say that I prefer the trans. *enowning* because it helps clarify that there is an “owning” connection between ownedness and enowning. The importance of enowning will become clear in the conclusion, as the fouring of the fourfold and, more importantly for this monograph, showing precisely how the fourfold is united.

Now that we have looked at a few key terms, let’s look at the basic layout of this paper. In Chapter 2 I investigate the first member of the fourfold, *earth*. I begin with Young’s interpretation of earth as the totality of beings with which we share our world. As with all of Young’s interpretations, I will ultimately reject this interpretation in favor of one that takes its start from a hint that Heidegger himself offers, namely that earth ought to be understood according to the ancient Greek concept of φύσις (*phusis*). I then proceed to follow Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of φύσις, which affords key insights into Heidegger’s own use of the term “earth.” As evidence of this importance, I will show that Heidegger’s own presentation of earth in *On the Origin of the Work of Art* closely mirrors Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of φύσις. In the end, it will become clear that earth for Heidegger does not refer to the totality of beings with which we share our world, but rather to the being and nature of self-emergent beings, in contrast to τέχνη ὄντα (artifacts).

In Chapter 3 I continue the investigation of the fourfold by looking at the member of the fourfold that Heidegger says is essentially in *strife* with earth, namely *sky*. Again, I will begin this chapter with Young's interpretation, which in this case understands Heidegger's term as the literal sky and all things that are thought of as "higher." Unlike the other members of the fourfold, Heidegger's poetic definition of sky does not name sky directly, but only indicates the modes in which sky presences. Thus, in Chapter 3 I set aside any direct discussion of sky as such and attempt instead to interpret the many modes of the sky's presencing that Heidegger explicitly names in his own poetic definition. Unlike the other members of the fourfold, Heidegger has no single, sustained discussion of sky anywhere in his corpus that brings together all of these various modes. This fact forces me to draw from a rather large number of sources in Heidegger's corpus. To my knowledge, no previous interpretation of Heidegger has gathered together everything Heidegger has to say about each one of these modes of the sky's presencing. Ultimately, whereas earth describes beings according to their nature, sky presents the historical possibilities in which beings may or do presence. The earth and sky are in a relationship of strife because beings in their being are always only made actual, possible, or impossible, on the grounds of a historically changing understanding of what it is to be. Earth is a sheltering agent, insofar as we come to understand beings as actual, but sky opens possibilities in which these beings may be grounded or may lose the grounding that gives their being the meaning that it has.

The fourth chapter constitutes the heart of this monograph. In Chapter 4 I begin by looking at what Heidegger takes to be the core challenge of the age of technology,

which I call “Nietzsche’s Challenge.” Heidegger’s rather hefty focus on gods in his later work is a response to Nietzsche’s interpretation of the West as the nihilistic self-undermining of all of the highest values that occupy the role of the Platonic Form of the Good (e.g. the Judeo-Christian theological god, the representing subject). Nietzsche’s challenge is summarized in the following question: “when all such ‘highest beings’ have devalued themselves, how can we ground the meaningfulness of our world (and the beings in it) without delusion?” In his discussion of gods (esp. the *last god*), Heidegger is trying to show how his own position can respond to Nietzsche’s challenge.

I then turn to Young’s interpretation of the gods as role or life models. I also look at Dreyfus’ interpretation of Heideggerian gods as cultural exemplars. I attempt to show that these interpretations are not only inconsistent with what Heidegger says about gods, but they fail to capture what is so significant about gods. If all that Heidegger had in mind was role or life models or cultural exemplars, then it is difficult to see why he finds it so excruciatingly difficult to speak directly about gods in any of his works, or why he thinks of them as essentially mysterious. This discussion will finally lead us to lay out the structure of sky, what Heidegger had called “worldhood” in *Being and Time*, in order to make sense of the gods as those who dwell in the sky (or “heavens”). Much as in Chapter 2, the indebtedness of Heidegger’s own position to his interpretation of Aristotle will become clear.

We need not and usually do not think about the question of the meaning of Being as such or of the groundedness of the locations in which we dwell; hence we are not always directly and explicitly in confrontation with our gods. It is only in very special

attunements that we do so. This forces us to get clear about how Heidegger understands attunements. In the end, I will argue that gods are those which beckon us, in response to a need – a deep disturbance in our understanding of Being which must be addressed for us to return to a stable and transparent understanding of what it is to be – that forces us to address the question “What is the meaning of Being in general?” It is only in response to this question that the possibilities for beings, given our historical situation (i.e. sky) can come into focus and that the being of beings (i.e. earth) may be grounded in a grounded understanding of Being. The gods are normally absent insofar as this question need not be asked, but are present even in their absence, insofar as it is the decision that we have made in response to the questioning of the gods that serves as the measure for all that is. Thus, the gods are a mysterious measure that presences in their absence in everyday experience. It is also in this response that we find that it is in this decision in response to the gods that our world and the beings in it are grounded without delusion; i.e. that Heidegger’s position serves as a response to Nietzsche’s challenge.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I turn to an interpretation of the member of the fourfold that Heidegger calls “mortals.” This chapter follows Heidegger in focusing on his concept of death. Young’s interpretation here is not of much use, so I instead take my start from the relevant interpretations of Taylor Carman and Carol White’s in order to get clear about Heidegger’s concept of death and, consequently, mortals. To make clear Heidegger’s concept – or being-toward-death – I begin by getting clear about Heidegger’s distinction between *perishing*, *demise*, and finally *death*. First I look at Carman’s interpretations of each concept. Carman conveniently offers alternate terms for the first two – biological

death (which I call bio-death for short) for “perishing” and biographical death for “demise.” I argue that each of these two interpretations fail to capture what Heidegger has in mind when he talks about perishing or demise by failing to recognize them as specifically existential phenomena. While White does capture the existential nature of perishing and demise, her interpretation of perishing is simply inconsistent with what Heidegger himself says, and her interpretation of demise fails to explain why Heidegger calls demise an *intermediate* phenomenon between perishing and death. Carman’s interpretation of death is correct in a limited way, but he understands the phenomenon in an unacceptably limited way. I argue that White’s interpretation, taking into account what is right about Carman’s interpretation, does a better job of capturing Heidegger’s conception of death. It is in the attunement of anxiety that mortals are able to be called to the question of the meaning of Being and to make a decision in response to the question. In doing so, we decide on what it is to be and, consequently, decide on both the grounds of the being of beings (earth) and the currently historically possible possibilities of their being (sky). In being-toward-death, mortals resolutely await the beckoning of the gods to this question. Once we are clear about death, we will be able to get clear about the phenomenon related to death – resolute ownedness – which grounds perhaps the most significant objection to my claim that Heidegger’s later view is consistent with his earlier view: namely, that Heidegger’s position in *Being and Time* on the proper relationship for Dasein toward Being is to be understood as a voluntaristic and manipulative relationship toward beings, resolute ownedness, whereas, in his later works, he argues that mortals’ proper relationship toward Being is a non-voluntaristic resignation in which we do not

dominate beings, but rather leave beings to be, which he calls *releasement*. In response, I argue that interpreters have misinterpreted *both* resolute ownedness and releasement toward things, and that, properly understood, releasement toward things is precisely the form of resolute ownedness that mortals may have within a technological understanding of Being.

In the conclusion, I will briefly discuss what Heidegger calls the fouring of the fourfold, which he calls “world” – which he had called Being-in-the-world in *Being and Time*. This analysis will allow me to explicitly show how the members of the fourfold are united. It should also help clarify the interrelation of my four semi-autonomous chapters as aspects of a single coherent position.

CHAPTER 2

EARTH

The first member of the fourfold to which Heidegger introduces us is *earth*. He offers us two definitions, which only slightly vary from one another:

Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising into plant and animal.¹³

Earth is the building bearer, nourishing with its fruits, tending water and rock, plant and animal.¹⁴

As with each member of the fourfold, Heidegger's explicit poetic "definitions" – if they can be called definitions at all – the definition of *earth* is, in itself, hardly illuminating. It is exceptionally easy to read Heidegger's own definitions and then understand "earth" as earth (soil), or Earth (planet), or as nature as understood in a naturalistic way, whether that be in some sense of philosophical realism or in the sense of some kind of romanticism. But any such claim is, as one can see from the definitions' seeming vagueness, extremely speculative and, ultimately, not clearly useful in interpreting the fourfold.

Hoping to help us remove the fourfold from the "too-hard basket" and to place it in the clarity of plain, straightforward, and simple English, Julian Young offers one of the few focused attempts to make sense of the fourfold. Insofar as Young's attempt, unlike most, does not seem to be using the fourfold for some other end, without deep regard for what the fourfold actually means, Young's analysis warrants special attention. Thus,

¹³ Heidegger 1971b: 147.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 176.

throughout this paper, I will begin my analysis of each of the three of the four members of the fourfold by presenting Young's analysis and using it as a starting point for our interpretation of the fourfold.

In *The Fourfold*, Young claims that "Thought less pictorially [than Heidegger's own presentation], 'earth' seems to embrace the totality of things, animal, vegetable, and mineral, with which we share our world."¹⁵ If Young is right, then Heidegger's term "earth" is simply another word for physical beings. Using Heidegger's terminology from *Being and Time*, what this later term "earth" refers to is "world." In *Being and Time* Heidegger distinguishes between four uses of the word "world." If Young's interpretation is right, then "earth" refers to the ontic categorial sense of "world." Heidegger notes that, whenever he is referring to the ontic categorial use of the word "world" throughout *Being and Time*, he will put 'world' in single quotes. I will follow his convention.

Of the ontic categorial sense of "world" Heidegger says: "'World' is used as an ontical concept, and signifies the totality of those entities which can be present-at-hand within the world."¹⁶ Every being that can be present as present-at-hand within the world, i.e. the sum total of all such beings, constitutes the 'world.' Thus, rocks, plants, animals, formal relationships, concepts, and any other possible or actual object in the world is counted amongst "earthly things."

¹⁵ Young 2006: 374.

¹⁶ Heidegger 1962: 93.

Following Young's interpretation of "earth," we could easily imagine that Heidegger is simply offering a fairly straightforward view of metaphysical realism. Perhaps this form of realism would include abstract objects like numbers, but, given Young's presentation, one might think that we should limit Heidegger's realism to physical objects or even merely natural beings. If it is either of the latter possibilities, then "earth" could, of course, then be understood to be the physical matter that exists whether or not we exist and that the strife of the sky with the earth is merely the relationship between those beings that exist whether or not we exist and impose our conceptual scheme on them (or, perhaps, it). Young's own interpretation of sky does not clearly follow this path, though it is implied. Young claims that sky is both the literal sky and those things that are thought of as "higher." I assume that this means something like the forms or meanings that this physical material takes on as determined by our conceptual scheme. As beings surprise us and our conceptual scheme is always open to revision, we can see how one might think of this relationship as a strife-relationship between the earth-as-physical-material and sky-as-forms-and-conceptual-scheme.

Consequently, the result of such an interpretation of earth (in its strife with sky) is that Heidegger's view is, at least in this dichotomy, simply a very opaque way of offering just the kind of interpretation of Aristotle that one finds in just about any introduction to ancient philosophy course. Heidegger's view is merely a very poetic and inaccessible account of hylomorphism.

Young is hardly making a mistake in trying to draw Heidegger's view close to Aristotle's. The influence that Aristotle (along with Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and

Hölderlin) had on Heidegger's thought simply cannot be overstated. In fact, as we proceed, it will become increasingly clear just how indebted Heidegger's view is to Aristotle's and how understanding Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle will help us understand Heidegger's own view.

Unfortunately, the view that we have come to following Young's analysis of earth simply cannot be Heidegger's view. Heidegger explicitly tells us that by "earth" he is referring to the "emerging and rising in itself and in all things" which "clears and illuminates" and "on which and in which man bases his dwelling" that Greek thinkers called "φύσις" (*phusis*).¹⁷ That φύσις cannot be understood to be the sum total of all beings will become clear as our interpretation progresses. But to look forward it is key in understanding φύσις to understand that no member of the fourfold is an ontic structure of Being. Each member of the fourfold is an ontological structure. In simple terms, what this means is that none of the four members of the fourfold refer first and foremost to beings or to the beingness of those beings either as specific features or properties or as general features or properties. To understand any aspect of the fourfold as being an ontic structure, as referring to beings or the beingness of beings, is to draw Heidegger back into the very metaphysics which he takes such pains to avoid and, ultimately, to reject. But, for the time being, let us return to an analysis of φύσις as beings or their beingness and see where the analysis leads us.

By φύσις, the modern tendency is to think that what the Greeks were talking about was the *physical*. If this is right, one might think. then it seems like there is good

¹⁷ Heidegger 1971b: 41.

reason to think that Heidegger is simply referring to the physical and Young's interpretation of earth would be correct. But whether or not the modern tendency is right is irrelevant to the current discussion. The only relevant question is whether that is how Heidegger interpreted the ancient Greek understanding of φύσις and, in fact, it is not. Young's mistake is not his attempt to draw Heidegger's thought closer to Aristotle's, rather, to draw Heidegger close to the Aristotle that we find in the standard interpretation. To understand how Heidegger's view relates to Aristotle's, we must understand Heidegger's own interpretation of Aristotle. For my purposes here, I am not interested in Aristotle's view as such. I am, instead, interested in what we can find of Heidegger's view in his interpretation of Aristotle. It is well known that Heidegger's interpretations of his predecessors are atypical. Whether Heidegger's atypical interpretations are radically mistaken or grant us new insight into what these thinkers thought is irrelevant for my purposes. Rather, I want to extrapolate something about Heidegger's own view by looking at how he understood the thinkers that influenced him.

On the Essence and Concept of φύσις in Aristotle's Physics B, I is specifically directed towards an interpretation of Aristotle, but it is worth noting that most of the thought contained therein also appears, though often in painfully abbreviated and opaque fashion, in Heidegger's poetic works, esp. *Origin of the Work of Art* and *The Thing*. If we are able to gain some insight into Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's term φύσις, then we ought to be able to use what we learn in our having done so to gain some insight into Heidegger's own view of earth (understood as φύσις).

“[W]hat [Aristotle] perceives to be decisive for the projection of the essence of φύσις [is] κίνησις, the state of movedness.”¹⁸ This initially strikes us as an odd statement. Earth, φύσις, the physical, does not essentially consist in movedness, in κίνησις. The physical is matter that happens to be in motion, but conceptually need not be. The physical – Young’s totality of things, animal, vegetable, and mineral – can be fully described while leaving motion completely aside.

The physical can be essentially described as being that which has height, width, breadth, and some level of solidity; i.e. the physical is made up of spatially extended material. In fact, minerals are, at least understood within their local domains, usually without motion. The lowest layers of salt in Utah’s alkaline flats merely lay there motionless. Is this salt, then, not earth? If we take Young’s explanation of earth seriously, then there at least some cases in which earth is not in motion, thus earth is not essentially in motion. If earth is not essentially in motion, then Heidegger and Aristotle have a fundamental disagreement about the nature of earth (i.e. φύσις) and, consequently, there is little reason to take Heidegger’s positive analysis of Aristotle’s understanding of φύσις as directly relevant to clarifying Heidegger’s use of the term “earth.”

However, in *On the Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger claims that “Only what is in motion can rest.”¹⁹ Heidegger here is specifically referring to earth that has been set up in a world. It is worth noting that Heidegger’s term “world” here ought to both be distinguished from his term ‘world’ (ontic categorial) and that it should be equated with

¹⁸ Heidegger 1998b:186.

¹⁹ Heidegger 1971b: 47.

Heidegger's term "sky" as it is used in the fourfold. In early presentations of the fourfold, including *On the Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger used the term "world" instead of the term "sky." The reason for the change in terminology will have to wait for another chapter. But what is important is to note that "world and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separate."²⁰ That is to say, earth is always in its strife-relationship and, thus, Heidegger is claiming that earth is always in motion. φύσις on Heidegger's view has its being in motion, just as it is according to Aristotle's view.

Even such things as the salt lying around in Utah's alkaline flats must, then, be in motion, insofar as we have just said that it is at rest. This claim initially strikes us as completely unintelligible. In what sense is the lowest layer of salt in the alkaline flats in motion? And what would it mean for this motion to be a necessary condition of the salt's resting at the bottom of the alkaline flats? If we maintain Young's interpretation, Heidegger's claim remains completely unintelligible. Thus, in order to make sense of Heidegger's claims, we have reason to deny Young's interpretation of earth.

In fact, there is additional reason, which is less tenuous, that serves as evidence against Young's interpretation. Heidegger explicitly says, in discussing the ancient Greek notion of phusis, that "nowhere here are we dealing with 'nature' (neither as object of natural science nor as scenery nor as sensibility)."²¹ Things, animals, vegetables, and minerals – i.e. those beings with which we share our world – are precisely the kinds of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Heidegger 1999: 133.

things that serve as the objects of natural sciences. If Young means animals, vegetables, minerals, and all of the beings with which we share our world in some other sense, then he has done little to elucidate what it is that he means by these things. If Young's view is that earth is just such beings as understood by the natural sciences, then his interpretation is false. If Young's view is that earth is all beings with which we share our world in some other way, then he has done little to illuminate what this other way is or where this other way is to be discovered in Heidegger's work.

When we look at Heidegger's own poetic definitions of the term "earth," it becomes clear that he does not say that earth is the beings with which we share our world, but rather that earth is the "serving bearer" or "building bearer" from which the beings with which we share our world arise. That is to say that Young confuses the earth (understood as a kind of ground from which beings spring) for the totality of beings that spring forth from the ground that Heidegger has called "earth." Whereas Young claims that "earth" refers to 'world' – to the totality of beings with which we share our world – what should be clear is that here Heidegger is referring not to 'world,' but to the being of these beings. This is the second sense of "world" that Heidegger offers in *Being and Time*. "'World' functions as an ontological term, and signifies the Being of those beings which we have just mentioned [i.e. the present-at-hand]."²² This second use of the word "world," the ontological categorial sense, neither refers to specific features or properties nor general features or properties of beings. It, rather, refers to their meaning. Precisely

²² Heidegger 1962: 93.

what this means will become apparent as we work our way through Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's term φύσις.

I take it that this second objection to Young's interpretation of earth is sufficient to show that his interpretation is, at best, insufficient and, at worst, false. With our rejection of the Young's interpretation of earth in *The Fourfold*, we have taken a step forward. This step forward, however, gives a clear indication of how we ought not to understand earth, but adds little positively to our understanding of earth, except that whatever "earth" refers to is an ontological rather than an ontic determination of beings. The one indication for further analysis that we have been given is that, given the oddness of both Aristotle's and Heidegger's claim that earth (φύσις) is essentially in motion, there is reason, in interpreting Heidegger, that we should continue with our investigation into Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of φύσις.

Let us now, then, return to Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's term φύσις. As we have already seen in responding to Young's interpretation of earth, φύσις is not to be understood as beings or the totality of beings, but rather as the ontological ground from which beings emerge into their being. Heidegger makes this understanding of φύσις as a ground clear in his interpretation of Aristotle. "From the outset φύσις is taken as cause (αίτιον - αίτία) in the sense of the origin. ... αίτιον...means in the present context: that which is responsible for the fact that something is."²³

It is now clear that whatever φύσις is, it is a cause. However, here Heidegger is using the term "cause" loosely. In fact, as we will see in Chapter 3, it is precisely this

²³ Heidegger 1998b: 188.

mistake that guides Nietzsche's interpretation (and Nietzsche was not alone) astray and which leads us to the existential crisis in which we find ourselves today as a result of what I will call there "Nietzsche's challenge."

In *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger makes an effort to distinguish between αἴτιον understood in the ancient Greek sense, which he calls "occasioning," and αἴτιον understood in the modern sense as "cause." To clarify the difference, we will look at the traditional interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine and compare it with Heidegger's interpretation. From this comparison, we will emerge with a firm grasp of Heidegger's interpretation of φύσις and, consequently, of his term "earth."

In the traditional interpretation of Aristotelian causality, the four causes are as follows:

(1) *Material cause.* The material cause is the material out of which a thing is made. For example, the material cause of our hammer is, perhaps, some kind of steel (or steel and wood, if you prefer hammers with wooden handles). The wood and the steel are, further, made out of more basic material and that material is made out of even more basic material, until we reach the atomic materials out of which these materials are composed. The same process can be applied with equal success to living beings. A human being is made up of flesh, bone, and assorted other organic (and sometimes synthetic) materials. Bone itself is made out of more basic materials and these materials, ultimately, out of basic materials as well. In the later stages of metaphysics, some will

deny that this claim is merely true of the human body and argue that even consciousness is merely a physical phenomenon that is usually misdescribed.²⁴

The basic material out of which the phenomenal material is composed has a particular kind of ontological primacy over the phenomenal material itself. Namely, the basic material is understood as *basic*. It is simple and persists throughout all change. While the wood of the hammer or the flesh of the human being may be destroyed through the heat of an intense fire, the atomic material that composed those materials continues to exist – only in an altered form. That which persists (continues to exist) through all change is constantly present and is, consequently, more real than that which sometimes exists and sometimes does not exist. Some views go so far as to say that only the basic, here understood as atomic, materials are real. There are no hammers or human bodies, there are merely atomic particles arranged hammer-wise or human-body-wise.

Material is, thus, understood as a cause because the material is one of the things that make the hammer be a hammer. If there were no wood or steel, then this hammer could not be the hammer that it is. The wood and the steel that allows the hammer to be *this* hammer. A hammer can be made out of other materials (e.g. stone), but it must be made out of some material that is capable of hammering; e.g. one cannot make a hammer out of warm water or gooey marshmallow.

(2) *Formal cause*. The formal cause of the hammer is the pattern into which the material that makes up the hammer is formed. I.e. because the matter is distributed in a

²⁴ Here I am thinking of the material eliminativist view of consciousness that is held by thinkers like the Churchlands. But this claim would serve equally well to include the material reductionists of consciousness, e.g., Armstrong.

way appropriate to being-a-hammer, it has the form of a hammer. Hammers can, of course, take various forms. So, for simplicity, let's consider a standard hammer that might be found in just about any tool set in any garage. Such a hammer is approximately one foot long, has a long slender, but sturdy, handle. The base of the handle is formed so as to fit comfortably in its user's hand. The handle is classically made of wood, but more modern hammers often use other materials (steel, graphite, etc.) that simulate or exceed the strength of the classic wooden handle. At the top of the hammer is the head of the hammer. The head of the hammer is made of a hard metal (e.g. steel). The head has a blunt side that is used for the act of smashing, e.g., nails into wood. The side of the head opposite the blunt side may have a two-pronged fork that is used for pulling nails from, e.g., wood.

Without having this form, an object would not appear to us as a (standard) hammer. The form is equally important in causing this hammer to be a hammer insofar as this is the form that allows the hammer to perform its function as a hammer. The form, of course, is not enough to make the hammer a hammer. We can easily imagine a wax hammer that is masterfully made to look like a real hammer. The material must be some material that allows the hammer to serve as a hammer. The wax hammer is not really a hammer, it is merely a replica of a hammer. Thus, the material and form are required for a hammer to be a hammer; i.e. for a thing to be what it is, it must both have the right form and material amongst its causes.

(3) *Final cause.* The final cause is the end towards which the production of a being aims. Here there are two possibilities. The end ($\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$) towards which the

production of a being aims can either be determined by a principle (ἀρχή) internal to or external to the being.

Those beings that have their principle internal to themselves are called natural beings (φύσει ὄντα). Plants, animals, and human beings are natural beings. A tree does not stand in need of making. If the seed of a tree is planted and the right soil and weather conditions prevail, then a good seed will develop into a tree itself. There are no properties of the tree that are essentially determined by any principle external to itself. A tree is understood as having a principle for change (one kind of motion) in itself. The tree grows, bears acorns, loses and then grows back its leaves according to the seasons.

The acorn tree does not rely on the nature of wood for its being. The tree is not *of wood*; the tree *is wood*. That is to say that a tree cannot be a wooden being, because a wooden being is something which relies on the nature of wood for its nature, but not vice versa (i.e. the wood does not rely on the nature of, e.g., hammer handles for its nature). A dresser is not wood, but wooden. It relies on the nature of wood for its being.

Dogs, cats, sheep, kangaroos, and human beings are all like this. All such beings are, thus, natural beings and rely on nothing else for their nature than the principle internal to them. Human beings, like trees, do depend on nutrition and various other conditions for their physical development. But this should not be misunderstood as indicating that the principle of their nature is external to them. If it were not in the nature of human bodies to grow in such and such ways, given appropriate nutrition, then one could offer all of the nutrition that one wanted and human bodies would not develop (or be sustained). Although we do sometimes say that a heavy human being is fleshy, we do

not mean that he is a human being made of flesh, rather than of another material appropriate for the construction of human beings; i.e. we do not mean that he (as body) is *of flesh* rather than that he (as body) *is flesh*. We simply mean that he has a greater amount of flesh than the typical human being.

Those beings that have their principle external to themselves are called produced beings or artifacts (τέχνη ὄντα). Artifacts, on the other hand, rely on principles external to themselves for their being. The hammer that we have discussed relies on the nature of the wood used for its handle and on the steel used for its head. If these substances were not by nature hard and flexible (i.e. not brittle), then the hammer made of these things could not be a hammer.

A hammer is *of wood* and *of steel*. It is not wood and it is not steel. Rather, it is made *of wood* and *of steel*, which have been selected as materials according to their nature (here esp. because they are hard and flexible), that, once formed according to the look of a hammer, allows this being, the hammer, to fulfill the nature of hammers (i.e. hammering)

Material arranged in some particular way or another is not enough to make the being a hammer. Rather, the hammer must have a τέλος, an end. If there is nothing like hammering, then nothing, no matter what it is made of and no matter what form it has, can be a hammer. Although I am avoiding, for the time being, discussing making persons into doctors, and lawyers, and such, it might be helpful to make an analogy here. It would have been completely impossible, no matter what we trained him to do, to make a person into an internet message board operator in ancient Greece. There simply was no

role that a person could have played such that he would have been an internet message board operator. In much the same way, if there were no intelligible space for hammers, or baseball bats, then nothing could be a hammer or a baseball bat.

(4) *Efficient cause*. The efficient cause is that which grants a being its nature. In the case of our hammer, the efficient cause of the hammer is the person who made the hammer. Given modern manufacturing, perhaps it was an automated machine, rather than a person, that produced the hammer. Some might argue, if the hammer is produced by a machine, that we must go back to the intentional agent that intended to have a hammer made and programmed or designed the machine that made the hammer. However we might want to explain the maker of the hammer, it is the cause of the material's being given the form that it has such that it gains its nature as a hammer.

Plants, animals, human beings, and other natural beings are no less reliant on an efficient cause. There must be some being (or beings) responsible for their being what they are. A child is what she is because of her parents. Her parents are her efficient cause. It is because they are causally responsible for her coming into existence as a human being that she is of the material, form, and has the end of being a human being.

It is efficient cause that has become the standard for causality as such. This is in fact sufficiently true that when we speak of causes in philosophy (or even in common discourse), what we are asking for is that being, those beings, that condition, or those conditions that brought about the existence of a thing and its being the way that it in fact is. "The *causa efficiens*, but one among the four causes, sets the standard for all causality. This goes so far that we no longer even count *causa finalis*, telic finality, as

causality.”²⁵ Two of the other three kinds of causes have been appropriated by philosophical thinkers as the chief cause, but always only as understood within the purview of efficient causality. However, with the dominance of efficient causality, “we no longer even count the *causa finalis* [final cause], telic finality, as causality.”²⁶

Where material cause is understood as the chief cause, thinkers understand material as having powers to make things happen. These powers, when actualized and effected, produce some effect. In short, what happens with this understanding of causality is that material is in fact the chief cause, but it is a cause only in terms of the production of a result; i.e. material is not genuinely understood as a material cause. Here material is simply understood as that which is the only efficient cause.

Where formal cause is understood as the chief cause, thinkers understand forms as bringing stuff under concepts. Such concepts need not be object concepts, but may also be value or functional concepts. It is concepts, these forms imposed on things, which makes things what they are. For the pure idealist, of course, there is nothing beyond ideas. But even there, the ideas are understood as being the ideas they are only because they have been given some form or brought under some concept. Again, we see that here the forms are understood only as an efficient cause of things being what they are.

The reason why efficient cause comes to be the standard for all causality is that it is the causality determined by beings, not Being. The focus of metaphysics is on the guiding-question which asks what beings are, not about the meaning of Being. Rather

²⁵ Heidegger 1977a: 7.

²⁶ Ibid.

than search for the meaning of Being and of beings as a whole, what is sought after is the explanation of the beingness of beings. When we ask why a being is, the answer that we seek is either some reason (or cause) in the being itself or in another being that is prior to that being (either temporally or logically). For example, in the causal story that we find in Christian theological metaphysics (e.g. Descartes, Aquinas), everything is either self-caused or caused by something else. Here “cause” is thought in terms of efficient cause. But (on this view) the only thing that is self-caused is the Judeo-Christian theological god. Thus, all causal chains point back to a prior or higher being, except for the self-caused cause (god).

It is precisely where this god (and anything that plays the role of highest, self-caused cause) is denied that we find the most famous rejection of the reality of causation altogether. As we all know, Hume argued against the view that there is any necessary causal connection between things or event in the ‘world.’ Hume’s attack is usually viewed as a success. To briefly review Hume’s argument (or to summarize it for those who don’t know his argument): All knowledge that we have of things is of one of two kinds: (a) relations of ideas or (b) matters of fact.

By knowledge of “relations of ideas” Hume means analytic a priori knowledge. A priori knowledge is knowledge such that, while experience may inform us about the contents of the knowledge, the knowledge itself does not rely on experience for its justification. For a proposition to be analytic is for it to be non-ampliative and for its negation to entail a contradiction. The classic example is that it is analytic that *all bachelors are unmarried*. The concept *unmarried* is already contained in the concept

bachelor. The justification for the claim that *all bachelors are unmarried* is learned, like most (if not all) concepts through experience. But once we've acquired an understanding of the meaning of the concept, then there is no need to go out into the world to check each and every bachelor to see whether or not he is in fact unmarried. The justification for the claim is not based in experience, but, here, rather in the concept itself. And, if someone were to claim that there is some bachelor that is married, we would have no reason to check the facts to see whether or not his claim is true – it is false. Given the meaning of the concept *bachelor*, his statement that there is a married bachelor is self-contradictory.

By knowledge of “matters of fact” Hume means synthetic a posteriori knowledge. The justification for a posteriori knowledge is grounded squarely in experience. Such knowledge is ampliative and its negation does not entail a contradiction. For example, suppose that Annelein tells you that she is a vegetarian. The claim that *Annelein is a vegetarian* is known a posteriori synthetic, if it is known at all. The concept of Annelein contains nothing about her being or not being a vegetarian. In fact, it could be that she wasn't a vegetarian at some point, then saw one of the many grizzly vegetarian propaganda films and, consequently, she became a vegetarian. Or, more to the point, you, my reader, have no idea whether or not it is true that Annelein is a vegetarian. There is no contradiction in saying that it's true nor in its negation. In fact, as it turns out, last I heard, she was not a vegetarian.

With these distinctions in hand, Hume offered his master argument against the justification of claims based on causality:

(1) If claims about causation are justified, then the grounds of their justification must be found in induction.

Claims about causation can be carved up in several ways, but relevantly here is: there are reflective and predictive claims about causation. A reflective claim about causation would be one in which we look back on a sequence of events or a simultaneity of events and then claim that one event A was the cause of another event B, B being the effect of A. A predictive claim about causality would be a claim such that because some event C has occurred and C's have previously been followed by events of the type G that we ought to infer that a G will follow C.

Both kinds of claim about causality reduce to this: what it is for the causal-event to be related to the effect-event is for the causal-event to necessitate or to have necessitated the effect-event. How do we justify such connections among event types? We justify them through experience. For example, how is it that you know that you will die some day? Or, to avoid any silly complaints, how do you know that you will not live to be one million years old? Well, there have been billions of people who have lived and none of them has lived to the age of one million. In short, you employ an inductive inference: No persons up to this point have lived to be one million. You are a person. So, you won't live to be one million years old. In short, induction is, according to Hume, the ground of causation.

(2) Induction is not justified.

According to Hume's distinction, the truth of claims about induction must be grounded either in relations of ideas or in matters of fact.

Induction is not justified by relations of ideas. If you drop a crystal cup, assuming normal gravity and such, two stories onto a concrete sidewalk, the crystal cup will break. In all similar events of the cause-event type (crystal cups being dropped from such a height onto a hard surface), we've seen the effect-event type follow (the crystal cups breaking). But it is clear that the negation of this claim does not itself entail a contradiction. We could imagine a world in which dropping crystal cups two stories onto a concrete sidewalk does no damage to the cups at all – perhaps they even break the sidewalk! Whatever the justification of this inductive inference (or any such inductive inferences), it is not determined through a relation of ideas; i.e. it is not justified analytic a priori.

This can be seen just as easily in terms of simultaneous causation as it is in sequential causation. Imagine that we have someone, let's call him Paul, who has a clear concept of *fire*. Paul is completely aware that fire is just molecules in a highly agitated state of motion. But, knowing this, Paul has never encountered fire before now. Paul, as it happens, comes across a fire and is surprised to discover that fire is *hot*. There is nothing contained in the (scientific) concept of fire such that it covertly contains the concept *hot*. In fact, there is nothing that requires that the next time that Paul encounters fire that that fire will be hot rather than cold or lukewarm. There is nothing about the (scientific) concept of fire such that there is a contradiction were we to say that fire is (always or just sometimes) cold. Experience tells us that fire is hot, but there is no a priori analytic justification.

So, if there is to be any justification for causal claims, then it will have to lie in the realm of matters of fact. But the problem with justifying induction in terms of matters of fact ought to be obvious. Relations of ideas do not ground induction. Induction can at best get us probability. But even then, the further consideration must be taken into account: what justifies us in thinking that induction will win us probability? (i) In past instances of using induction, we have found that the results of good inductive inferences are more probable than not. (ii) In *this* inductive proof of that the results of induction will be more probable than not, the results will be more probable than not. (iii) Therefore, it is more probable than not that the results of induction are more probable than not. In other words, the proof of the success of induction is itself an inductive inference – i.e. here the justification is unacceptably circular.

(3) *Thus, it follows, that claims about causation are not justified at all.*

Little has to be said here: if claims about causation are neither justified a priori analytic nor a posteriori synthetic, then they are not justified at all. The only way to deal with the obvious demand that we experience something like causality, Hume was forced to reduce causality to no more than constant conjunction (which is philosophically useless for prediction or explanation) and to give a psychological explanation of why it is that we think that there is something like a necessary connection amongst things that are causally related to one another.

Because Hume only saw the two possibilities: *analytic a priori* and *synthetic a posteriori*, he missed, according to Kant, the relevant type of knowledge for causality – namely the *synthetic a priori*. Hume is correct that there is no analytic a posteriori –

nothing that is true in terms of the meanings of the concepts alone can possibly be such that its justification lies in experience – but he was, according to Kant, mistaken in thinking that there can be no a priori synthetic knowledge.

In discussing relations of ideas, I was careful to note that analytic a priori knowledge was knowledge such that the meaning of the predicate concept was already contained in the meaning of the subject concept. Furthermore, that the negation of such a statement was a contradiction. But I also noted that to be a priori, a claim simply needs to be such that its justification does not lie in experience. Hume assumed that the only claims that qualified as a priori were analytic claims. But Kant famously argued that there can be, and actually is, a priori synthetic knowledge and that, unlike analytic claims, a priori synthetic claims are ampliative (i.e. they add to our knowledge).

To show that there is a priori synthetic knowledge, Kant made use of a transcendental argument of the following form: If there is thought and experience of the kind f , then v , the conditions of the possibility of f , are necessary. There is thought and experience of the kind f . Thus, v is necessary. Because we have thought and experience the world as containing causal necessity, the conditions of the possibility of thought and experience of the world as containing causal necessity must be possible. Kant's argument does not refute Hume by showing that Hume's reasoning was wrong. Rather, Kant's argument reintroduces a being that plays precisely the role that the Judeo-Christian god had played for Descartes and his predecessors: namely the cognizing subject.

With Kant we find that the world only has order, including necessity, because we impose order and necessity on the world through the application of concepts. These concepts are to be understood as rules. The agent has, in effect, become the efficient cause of beings. Beings only are because the sensible has become the object(s) of experience through the application of concepts by the cognizing subject. Causal necessity is only empirically real (i.e. only real as experienced), but is transcendently ideal (i.e. the world does not contain causal necessity – or dogs, hot dogs, hot rods, iron rods, or any other phenomenal entity – as it is in itself; i.e. prior to the application of concepts). As such, Kant does not essentially disagree with Hume, on the transcendental level. His disagreement with Hume lies purely in the empirical realm (the realm of the world as experienced). This disagreement is, of course, quite important and interesting, but a discussion of this disagreement is beyond the scope of this paper.

The standard interpretation of Aristotelian causality and its successors offers us little in the way of clarification as to the relationship between movedness (κίνησις). But “Aristotle defines φύσις as ἀρχή κινήσεως.”²⁷ Thus, a different interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of αἴτιον becomes necessary. To keep his reader from confusing his interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of αἴτιον with the standard interpretation, Heidegger translates αἴτιον not with the word “cause” but with the word “*occasioning*.”

“αἴτιον ... means ... that which is responsible for the fact that a being is *what* it is.”²⁸ “Cause as the origin [*Ur-sache*] [i.e. αἴτιον, occasioning] must be understood here literally as the originary [*Ur-tümliche*], that which constitutes the thingness of a thing.”²⁹

²⁷ Heidegger 1998b: 190.

²⁸ Ibid.: 188.

²⁹ Ibid.

In looking at the occasionings, we are not looking at the causes of a being's being the being that it is, rather we are looking at what is responsible for its being the way that it is; to that which a being is indebted for its being. This need not imply an efficient cause in any sense. For example, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is indebted to language for its being, but language is not an efficient cause of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Without language, there could be nothing like a novel. It is in fact indebted to language for its being. But language alone is insufficient for the existence of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. The Russian language could have existed and Dostoyevsky could have failed to write *Crime and Punishment* for a multitude of reasons. So, let's look again at Aristotle's concept of αἴτιον, this times understood as the four ways of occasioning.

(1) "Υλη is the matter to which a being is indebted for its being. But "matter" ought not to be thought first and foremost as *physical* matter. Rather, "matter" used in the sense of ὕλη should be understood as the appropriate orderable or as that which is appropriate for something. "Aristotle characterizes ὕλη as τὸ δυνάμει. Δύναμις means the capacity, or better, the appropriateness for..."³⁰ or, as Heidegger calls it elsewhere, the "appropriate orderable."³¹ ὕλη, "matter," on Aristotle's view is not a substance which exists independently of any μορφή, but essentially relies on μορφή for its being.

The appropriate orderable may take the form of physical matter, e.g. silver. "Silver is that out of which the chalice is made. As this matter (*hyle*), it is co-responsible

³⁰ Ibid.: 214.

³¹ Ibid.

for the chalice. The chalice is indebted to, i.e., owes thanks to, the silver for that out of which it consists.”³² The vein of silver in the mountain, which is then mined, refined, and prepared is one of the occasionings of the silver chalice. Absent the silver, a chalice could still be produced, but it would not be this (or any) *silver* chalice. Thus, the silver chalice owes a debt to the silver from which it was cast.

It is for this reason that Antiphon says that only the atomic elements truly are in accordance with φύσις. Aristotle’s position becomes clear in his presentation of and response to Antiphon. “[Antiphon] says: only earth, water, air, and fire truly *are* in accordance with φύσις.”³³ Antiphon specifically chooses the fundamental elements as that which is truly in accordance with φύσις because these elements, Antiphon believed, were those elements that we constantly present i.e. stable and unchanging, throughout any and all change. Now we know that these elements themselves are not unchanging, but rather are composed of more fundamental things such as neutrons, electrons, and protons. But the same reasoning for proclaiming that these are those things that are truly in accordance with φύσις (the real “physical” stuff) remains unchanged.

Those things that are formed from the atomic elements are, consequently, taken to be “less real.” Whereas the atomic elements, e.g. the silver of the chalice (or, more precisely, the subatomic particles of which the silver is composed), are constantly present throughout change, the chalice is not. The chalice may be melted down and turned into a bowl or into several necklaces. The silver itself may be chemically broken down into the

³² Heidegger 1977a: 7.

³³ Heidegger 1998b: 204.

various more basic materials of which it is composed. But the most basic particles of which the silver is composed cannot be broken down any further, they remain throughout change.

Heidegger notes that insofar as it has been decided that that which is constantly present is the most real, what we find is that the decision also is a decision such that that which is “formed” out of these atomic components has less being than that which is constantly present. The inconstantly present in beings, their “form,” “has the character of articulating, impressing, fitting, and forming, in short, the character of $\rho\upsilon\theta\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$. Things of this sort change, are unstable, are without stability.”³⁴ Stability, constant presence rather than the instability of sometimes being present and sometimes not, determines that which truly is as opposed to that which is merely in beings as fleeting appearance. With the decision in favour of the constantly present as a background assumption, the fact that the underlying substance is that which is most real is proven by the fact that, while a silver chalice might be destroyed, the basic material out of which the chalice is made remains throughout all other change.

Antiphon identifies “the nature of substance of a natural object with the immediate constituent of it which taken by itself is without arrangement, e.g. the wood is the nature of the bed, and the bronze the nature of the statue.”³⁵

Antiphon’s generalized claim is that the nature of each object, i.e. what it really is, ought to be identified with the material of which it is made and that material ought to be

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Arist., *Phys.* 2, 193^a1 10-12.

recognized as being the material that it is independently of its form. “The decisive factor is...that beings proper are present of and by themselves and for this reason are encountered as what is always already present – ὑποκείμενον πρῶτον.”³⁶ I.e. a thing is essentially just the constantly present material of which it is composed and its form is a purely accidental feature of the thing. “Non-beings, on the other hand, are sometimes present, sometimes absent, because they are present *only* on the basis of something already present; that is, *along with* it they make their appearance or remain absent.”³⁷ The bed is really just wood (more properly speaking, the most basic particles out of which the wood is composed) that happens to be arranged bed-wise. The modern version of Antiphon’s claim simply replaces “elements” with “simples” or “atoms” or whatever else is taken to be the basic material of which everything in the universe is composed.

The constantly present atomic material remains whether or not there is an agent or a practice or a viewer or anything else. In a universe completely devoid of intelligence, as our universe once was and our scientists tell us will again some day be, the constantly present material remains. There may well be no silver chalices, but the particles that once made up things like silver chalices, oak trees, dogs, and human bodies will remain. They will not be arranged silver-chalice-wise (etc.), since such arrangements depend on our arranging them in these ways in cognition.

The mesoscopic and macroscopic objects that appear to us are merely phenomenal objects with phenomenal properties. All of these properties are inconstant,

³⁶ Heidegger 1998b: 206.

³⁷ Ibid.

hence, accidental and lacking in being and, if the material were arranged differently, these properties would cease to appear, but the atoms (or subatomic particles) would nevertheless remain. Even if we grant that we should grant some reality to these mesoscopic and macroscopic objects (as most of us would), we nevertheless ought to admit that the material out of which they are made has ontological priority, if constancy of presence is determinative for ontological primacy.

While Aristotle suggests that Antiphon's analysis is correct in one manner of speaking, Heidegger claims that "despite appearances to the contrary, the aforementioned theory of Antiphon is rejected with the sharpest kind of refutation."³⁸ Antiphon's view is one that gives the material ontological primacy. That which is most real is formable matter and those forms that matter has, is, or can be given are ontologically derivative. I.e. the determinable is what is most real and its determination as such and such a thing is a purely accidental property of the thing. One might think that in Aristotle's hylomorphic view, that things are formed matter, that Antiphon is right in claiming that the formable matter (the determinable) is ontologically prior in one sense, but that the form (determination) is ontologically prior in another way of speaking. I.e. if we are looking at the wooden bed as a substance, then the wood has ontological priority and, thus, Antiphon's claim is confirmed. But, if we want to look at the wooden bed as a bed, then it is the form that has ontological priority. But this is not, according to Heidegger's interpretation, Aristotle's view.

³⁸ Ibid.: 209.

If we grant Heidegger the definition of ὕλη as “the appropriateness for...,” then it takes little argument to show that ὕλη relies on μορφή. For any material to be appropriate for x , it is necessary that there be some x for which it is appropriate. For example, for wood to be appropriate material for a bed frame, there must be some form, bed frame, for which the wood is appropriate. It would be a nonsensical question, given no relevant context, if I were to point out an object and ask “is this one appropriate?” One wouldn’t even know how to answer the question.

If Aristotle’s view is that the nature of φύσις is fully determined by ὕλη or μορφή, then “φύσις ...is not a being but a manner of *being*.”³⁹ This constitutes a complete rejection of Antiphon’s view. Φύσις is not a being, then it is neither the stable and constantly present physical material out of which a thing is made, as Antiphon had claimed, nor is it the some times present and sometimes absent unstable things which naturalism tells us supervene on the constantly present material. If Aristotle’s view is correct, the Antiphon’s argument rests on a false dilemma: either φύσις is the constantly present or it is that which is sometimes present and sometimes absent which supervenes on the constantly present. Neither is the case.

Hence, φύσις is not the being which appears as a result of hylomorphism, but the manners of its being, namely ὕλη and μορφή “in their inherent togetherness.”⁴⁰ Because appropriateness is only appropriateness for some way of being, on Aristotle’s view of

³⁹ Ibid.: 215.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

φύσις, μορφή / has a priority over ὕλη. To see why, let's turn to the second form of occasioning.

(2) To understand Aristotle's word for 'form,' μορφή, we first have to understand ἰδέα and ἰδέα only through an understanding of εἶδος. According to Heidegger, we should understand Aristotle's word εἶδος as the appearance of a thing "and of a being in general, but 'appearance' in the sense of the aspect, the 'looks.'"⁴¹ A being that is viewed shows up as something or another. For example, when I am lecturing, the wooden thing in front of me shows up to me and to the audience as a lectern. But, if I were to happen to bring the lectern to a bonfire with me and happened to need more wood for the fire, the same thing might show up to me as firewood rather than as a lectern. I.e. things show up to us according to some aspect or another.

The εἶδος relies on a previous self-showing of an entity, this is what Aristotle calls the ἰδέα. The ἰδέα of a being is the being not as appearance, but as that which is sightable. For anything to appear in some one or another of its aspects, it must be sightable. The ἰδέα is not a determination, but the 'look' of a being such that it is open to us to take it as some determinate being or another. I have used single quotes on 'look' because the 'look' ought not to be thought of as exclusively visual. For example, the first song on a new album that I recently bought is a rather dull and uninteresting piece that is just a repetitive metallic clanging of a hammer on an anvil. After having heard that song, it would hardly be surprising if I were to have said "well, it looks like this will be a boring album." Furthermore, the 'look' of a thing need not be understood as being about

⁴¹ Ibid.: 210.

‘looking’ as a mere beholding of the being sighted. Often times beings ‘look’ useful, promising, yummy, and all sorts of other ways without this being taken up in contemplation, but rather simply taken over practically; i.e. when something shows up to us as useful, often times we simply take it up and use it without noticing it as an object at all.

In the *ἰδέα*, something, some *ὕλη*, appears to us, but in seeing it, we address it in some way, that is we take it as something or other. The *εἶδος* is the taking of something *as* something. We can now make sense of Aristotle’s word *μορφή* (form). Heidegger tells us that “*μορφή* is “appearance,” more precisely, the act of standing in and placing itself into the appearance; in general, *μορφή* means: placing into appearance.”⁴² *Μορφή* then is something’s offering itself as sightable (*ἰδέα*) and appearing in some aspect of its being sighted (*εἶδος*); i.e. it is something’s appearing *as* something. When we say that we experience a hammer *as a hammer*, the non-italicized use of the word “hammer” refers to the being as *ὕλη* and the italicized use of “hammer” refers to the being as *μορφή*.

The *εἶδος* of a thing is not (merely) a set of its objective properties, but its physiognomy. Merleau-Ponty explicitly mentions the *εἶδος* of a circle: “The Gestalt of a circle is not its mathematical law but its physiognomy.”⁴³ The importance of the outward look as physiognomy is made clear by cases of visual agnosia. Visual agnosics are

⁴² Ibid.: 211.

⁴³ Merleau-Ponty 2002: 70.

incapable of seeing the εἶδη of everyday objects. Oliver Sacks' *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* is perhaps the most famous essay on visual agnosia.⁴⁴

While observing his visual agnostic patient, Dr. Sacks made this observation: “He failed to see the whole, seeing only details, which he spotted like blips on a radar screen. He never entered into a relation with the picture as a whole – never faced, so to speak, *its* physiognomy.”⁴⁵ If the εἶδη of things did not show themselves to us, then nothing would presence, i.e. show up as something, and we would all be in the world as blind to things as are visual agnostics.

Thus, ultimately, the physiognomy of three-dimensional things is synaesthetic. That is to say that in things that we perceive with multiple senses, their εἶδη are determined not by a single sense, but all relevant senses. If any sense were to be lacking, then we would be blind to the being of the thing at hand. Were the thing to lack an εἶδος altogether, we would be totally blind to its being. If we understand Kantian concepts as Melnick does, then it would be appropriate to note Kant's famous claim that “intuitions without concepts are blind.”⁴⁶ For some ὕλη to emerge for care⁴⁷ as something, it must have an εἶδος; it must have a physiognomy.

⁴⁴ The “Schneider case” in Merleau-Ponty 2002 is also an important case for our purposes. But this case will not be directly relevant until we move to the ontologico-existential discussion of Heidegger's “Essential Fourfold.”

⁴⁵ Sacks 1998: 10.

⁴⁶ Kant 1965: 93 (B75, A51).

⁴⁷ This may be in the form of circumspection (for things), solicitude (for other Daseins), or care as such (for Being).

Μορφή is a way of becoming present, “a mode of presencing, οὐσία.”⁴⁸ If one were to understand the relationship between this something *as* something according to a view like Antiphon’s, then one must take it that μορφή is merely an ontic determination of the basic material out of which a thing is made. That is to say that the material (ύλη), which is that which offers itself to be seen (ιδέα), would be all that is genuinely real, but that the aspect in which it appears (εἶδος) would merely be an accidental, hence ontic, property of the thing.

However, if ύλη does not become sightable as something, then it is completely lacking in presence. “Υλη is the appropriate orderable ... But only in being placed into the appearance is a being *what* and *how* it is in any given case.”⁴⁹ As the appropriate orderable ύλη only has being as being appropriately orderable for something or other. I.e. it makes no sense to say that “wood is appropriate for” without saying what it is that wood is appropriate for. Though can’t we say that quantum particles are material that never becomes sightable in some aspect or another? No. Even quantum particles appear as something, namely theoretical entities that are sightable in terms of what they do. The only meaning that they have is the meaning that becomes sightable in such theoretical investigations (i.e. for a kind of ‘looking’).

It is for this reason that Heidegger can say that “μορφή is not an *ontic* property present in matter, but a way of *being*. Second, “placing into appearance” is movedness, κίνησις, which “moment” is radically lacking in the concept of form.”⁵⁰ The first of

⁴⁸ Heidegger 1998b: 211.

⁴⁹ Ibid.: 214.

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 211.

these two claims indicates that μορφή should be understood ontologically, not ontically. Μορφή is not something contained in the being, but is something determinative of the being as the being that it is. It is only when something (ύλη) offers itself for a seeing (ιδέα) and appears in its aspect (εἶδος) that a thing *is*. In other words, ύλη cannot be properly said to be before it has taken on some μορφή or another. The second claim returns us to the oddity of Aristotle's, and Heidegger's, claim that only that which is in motion can rest. The kind of motion ought not to be thought of as Cartesian motion. It is this realization that first allows us to do away with the oddness of the claim that only that which is in motion can rest. Motion is the being-on-the-way-or-maintaining-itself-in-its-end of a being. This can be being-on-the-way in the Cartesian sense of a change of location in three-dimensional space. Motion can equally be being-on-the-way to coming to or maintaining-itself in its fullness. For example, a seed that has sprouted and is growing is being-on-the-way-or-maintaining-itself-in-its-end insofar as it is on the way to being a tree. The motion described is that something offers itself for a seeing (ιδέα) and appears in its aspect (εἶδος) as being-on-the-way towards its end (τέλος).

(3) To understand the teleological occasioning to which a being is indebted, we must first understand how Heidegger understands the Greek word τέλος. Τέλος “does not mean goal or purpose, but end.”⁵¹ The τέλος of a thing sets its limits and is determinative for what a thing is to be. Insofar as a being has a τέλος, a limit is set for its being, which determines whether or not that being appears as appropriate for (ύλη) that end (τέλος) in its sightable (ιδέα) aspect (εἶδος).

⁵¹ Heidegger 200b: 63.

When looking at τέλος as an occasioning of a being, “‘end’ does not have any negative sense, as if ‘end’ meant that something can go no further, that it breaks down and gives out. Instead ‘end’ means completion in the sense of coming to fulfillment.”⁵² In *Being and Time* Heidegger gives examples of different ways of coming to an end.

First Heidegger gives an example of the rain. The rain comes to an end in stopping. Insofar as the rain stops, it has come to an end. In this sense of end, what is meant is that something that has been present fails to be present any longer. The rain, in coming to an end is no-longer-present-at-hand.

The second example that Heidegger gives is that of a road. A road does not cease to be when it comes to its end. Rather, in stopping the road does not fail to be present, but it is only in coming to an end that the road is completed and fully present. I.e. the road is finished. The road may come to an end prematurely, if its construction has not been completed, but in this sense, the road is at an end in the sense of being unfinished. In this sense, the road is not-yet present as the road that it is to be.

Bread also comes to an end. It comes to an end when we’ve eaten it or it’s gone bad and it is no longer available for eating and granting nourishment to those who would eat it.

Heidegger also offers an example of the end of fruit (as an analogy to the end of Dasein). If we have an unripe piece of fruit, its end is ripeness. The end of the fruit is not a stopping being fruit, nor is it something merely outstanding as a “not-yet.” Rather,

⁵² Ibid.

the end of the fruit is already contained in the unripe fruit. It can only be understood as an unripe fruit, if it is understood as being-on-the-way to being ripe fruit.

Finishedness, however, is insufficient for fulfillment. “Ending as ‘getting finished’ does not include fulfilling. ... Fulfilling is a mode of ‘finishedness,’ and is founded upon it.”⁵³ But only beings which are present-at-hand or ready-to-hand can come to an end in the sense of finishedness.

The end of human beings⁵⁴ is determined by a very specific way of relating to Being that we will investigate in Chapter 4. This relationship to Being, determined by Being-towards-death, is not one which comes to a completion in the sense of stopping nor is it an end in the sense of coming to have its not-yet become present (as the unripe fruit comes to its completion by having its not-yet of ripeness present). Rather, the end of human beings is determined by a particular way of being. It is in becoming owned over to Being that human beings come to their end.

“Limit and end are where that whereby beings first begin to *be*. This is the key to understanding the highest term that Aristotle used for Being: *entelechia*, something’s holding-(or maintaining)-itself-in-its-completion.” It is only where the end (τέλος) determines what is sightable (ἰδέα) in its aspect (εἶδος) that that which is appropriate to such an end (ύλη) as one of its possibilities comes to be.

Heidegger notes that in Aristotle’s *Physics B*, book I, 192 b13-15 “in place of αἴτιον and αἰτία we explicitly find the word ἀρχή.”⁵⁵ A thing does not merely owe

⁵³ Heidegger 1962: 289.

⁵⁴ Understood as “mortals.” See Ch. 5.

⁵⁵ Heidegger 1998b: 189.

thanks to that from whence it originated – that would be, again, understanding αἴτιον merely in the sense of technological production – rather it owes thanks to the ordering that holds sway and maintains the boundaries and limits of what it is for a being to be what it is. The ἀρχή plays at least two roles in Greek thought. Ἀρχή “means that from which something has its origin and beginning, likewise keeps rein *over*, i.e., restrains and therefore dominates, something else that emerges from it.”⁵⁶ Firstly, the ἀρχή is the source, the origin from which a being comes to be what it is and how it is. This is the sense that leads us to often call the ἀρχή the “first principle.” Secondly, ἀρχή is an “ordering” of a being. This is the sense that leads us to often call the ἀρχή the “ordering principle.” Ἀρχή sets the limits of a being’s being.

It is because the τέλος of a being is its ἀρχή that Heidegger says that the future has a kind of ontological primacy over the other two temporal ecstasies. This is because Heidegger thinks of the τέλος as that towards which a being aims as its end. This being towards its end is future-directed in the sense that it is a being’s being towards becoming or maintaining itself in some way of being. The seed, for example, is in its nature on the way to being a tree. And a tree is on its way towards maintaining itself as a tree. Here we see the mysterious union of motion and rest. Insofar as a thing has come to rest in its limit and end, it is at rest. But it can only be at rest as such insofar as it is also on its way to maintaining itself in its end; i.e. insofar as it is in motion. Thus, a being’s τέλος is its ἀρχή insofar as it both allows the being to first emerge as the being that it is and insofar as it determines the limits of that being.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

(4) Heidegger says that “the Aristotelian doctrine neither knows the cause that is named by [efficient cause] nor uses a Greek word that would correspond to it.”⁵⁷ Rather, the fourth occasioning is a gathering together of the other ways of being responsible, of the other occasionings. According to Heidegger, to understand the fourth way of occasioning, we must understand *legein* (λέγειν), *logos* (λόγος), and their root in *apophanesthai* (ἀποφαίνεσθαι). “*Legein* is rooted in *apophanesthai*, to bring into appearance.”⁵⁸ Ἀποφαίνεσθαι is a letting be seen, a bringing forth into appearance.⁵⁹ But what about λόγος?

Famously, Aristotle defined the essence of the human being as the ζῷον λόγον ἔχον. The usual translation of the Greek is “the rational animal.” But according to Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle, and ancient Greek more generally, the word λόγος does not mean “reason” or “language.” Rather, “λόγος belongs to λέγειν, which means and is the same as the German word *lessen*, ‘to collect’ or ‘to gather.’”⁶⁰

When take into account Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle up until this point, this translation ought not to strike us as odd at all. Man is the animal that gathers together the appropriate (ύλη) to its form or limit (μορφή) according to its end (τέλος); that gathers together beings (something) with their being (*as* something). But this definition now allows us to take another look at the difference between φύσει ὄντα (natural beings) and τέχνη ὄντα (artifacts).

⁵⁷ Heidegger 1977a: 8.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Heidegger 1998b: 213.

Natural beings are beings that are self-emergent. That is to say that natural beings gather themselves, in making themselves sightable in an aspect, according to their ends. It is not something other than the tree that gathers together its ύλη from its ιδέα into the εἶδος according to the μορφή which is determined by its τέλος. It is in the nature of a seed to grow into a tree and to maintain itself in the limits of what it is to be a tree. If the tree is a fruit-bearing tree, then, according to its φύσις, it will blossom and bear fruit. Animals according to their nature will develop and come to be what they are in the same way.

It is here, in the unity of the four ways of occasioning that we first finally encounter φύσις; i.e. earth. Earth is the self-emergent. We can finally make clear sense of what Heidegger means when he says that “*phusis* ... says what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance – in short, the emerging abiding sway.”⁶¹

Earth is not those beings with which we share our world, as Young claimed. Rather, earth is nature understood as the emerging abiding sway of that which comes into appearance of its own accord; that which occasions itself.

Much of the discussion of causality and occasioning has been primarily guided by considerations about τέχνη ὄντα (artifacts). Artifacts are not to be understood as objects produced by the actions or will of an agent. Rather, τέχνη relies on φύσις. I.e. τέχνη relies on materials, which are what they are only according to their nature. What is

⁶¹ Heidegger 2000b: 15.

distinctive about τέχνη is not that it is human will that imposes meaning, function, or form on physical matter that is already present, but rather that what gathers together the ways of occasioning is not the very being as the being that it is that emerges into appearance. Rather, in τέχνη a space is opened for a being (either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand), determining a τέλος, and we discover that which is sightable as appropriate for that τέλος and bring it to a stand in the limits delimited by that τέλος.

As we have said, nature is the self-emergent. This is attested in *Being and Time* as well.⁶² Heidegger says that in use of something for something “there is also a reference or assignment to ‘materials’.”⁶³ A shoe is a nice example. A shoe relies on the leather, thread, metals used, and such in their creation. The leather, e.g., refers back to cattle. Human beings can raise cattle or the cattle can be wild. In the later case, the cattle are obviously self-emergent, i.e. natural. In the former case, we might think that the cattle are produced rather than natural beings. But even cattle that are raised still are self-emergent in the sense that we have not drawn the cattle, as material (in the sense of ὕλη) to some end and limit that is appropriate to cattle. Rather, we can only raise cattle because they already contain their end and limit in themselves. In natural beings, we find nature (φύσις).

As preparation for our analyses of ownedness and releasement to things in Chapter 4 (*Mortals*), as well as to help further clarify the essence of φύσις, we will now briefly look at τέχνη in the sense of the essence of technology. From what we have

⁶² Heidegger 1962: 99-101.

⁶³ *Ibid.*: 100.

already discussed in this chapter, I expect that it should be obvious to my reader that by τέχνη, in its essence, Heidegger does not mean watches, computers, iPhones, televisions, CGI, or the totality of technological beings taken as a whole. As with the determination of φύσις, τέχνη is not an ontic category, but an ontological one. I.e. τέχνη is not about the features or properties of beings, either particularly or generally, but is about a way of being that determines these beings as the beings that they are. As Heidegger states it: “Technology is not equivalent to the essence of technology. ... [T]he essence of technology is by no means anything technological.”⁶⁴

If the essence of technology is nothing technological, then what is it? As we have seen in looking at the four occasionings, τέχνη, like φύσις is a way of revealing a being as present; i.e. it allows beings to emerge into presence, into being something *as* something. Heidegger quotes Plato’s *Symposium*, of course in Heidegger’s own translation, in making just this point: “Every occasion for whatever passes over and goes forward into presencing from that which is not presencing is *poiēsis* [ποίησις], is bringing-forth.”⁶⁵ That is to say, wherever there is occasioning, there is ποιήσις, i.e. bringing something into presence as something. Φύσις and τέχνη are kinds of occasioning. Thus, φύσις and τέχνη are ways of ποιήσις, ways of beings emerging into presence as the beings that they are.

Whereas with φύσις φύσει ὄντα arise from out of themselves, τέχνη ὄντα have their “bursting open belonging to bringing forth not in [themselves], but in another (*en*

⁶⁴ Heidegger 1977a: 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: 10.

allōi [ἐν ἄλλωι]), in the craftsman or artist.”⁶⁶ In either case, a being emerges as something. As a bringing-forth into appearance – either bringing itself forth or being brought forth by another – beings find themselves as the beings that they are as gathered into their appropriateness or inappropriateness for some end and within some limit.

Much like φύσις, τέχνη is a form of unconcealing the concealed; i.e. of revealing (ἀληθεύειν), of bringing beings into presence as the beings that they are. Ἀλήθεια, the Greek word for truth, indicates a negation of the Greek word λήθη, which means hiddenness. Thus, Heidegger claims, we should understand the Greek notion of truth not to be correctness. Rather, ἀλήθεια means unhiddenness; i.e. revealedness. Thus, the true is understood as that which has been revealed. The unhidden is indebted to the four ways of occasioning for their being. While φύσις determines a thing in its nature, in what it necessarily is as the being that it is, “τέχνη as a mode of ἀληθεύειν ... reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another.”⁶⁷ That is, τέχνη reveals things in their possibilities that are made available to them, based on their nature (φύσις).

It is in the confrontation between φύσις, as the necessity of a being’s being what it is as determined by its τέλος, and the horizon of possibilities opened up for us in τέχνη as a way of revealing that which does not reveal itself as such, but only reveals things in their possibilities, that we find the source of the strife between earth and sky.

⁶⁶ Ibid.: 11.

⁶⁷ Ibid.: 13.

The danger that, according to Heidegger, assails us from the essence of modern technology arises from this strife between earth and sky in which nature, understood as φύσις, is covered over in favour of the representational domination of nature by the will of modern man. Τέχνη in the sense of modern technology is not a gathering of the four occasionings, but is rather a producing and storing of beings in their possibilities for future use. While Heidegger does have some concerns about technological things, e.g. the mechanized agriculture industry, his primary concern is what he takes to be the understanding of things that reveals them as mere objects for human domination.

To be brief (we will return to this discussion in a less abbreviated fashion in Chapter 4), it is specifically with the Christian appropriation of Platonism that we come to have the understanding of god as the creator god and beings as the created. That which is real is that which has been created. But when this god comes to be rejected (either explicitly or implicitly), the structure of our understanding of beings as the created is not itself rejected. Rather, we replace this god as the creator of beings, in the sense of imposing concepts on beings in human cognition. Only that which conforms to the general categories of experience can be. I.e. it is cognition, through the imposition of the necessary categories of experience that beings are created. Finally, Nietzsche rejects necessary concepts of experience and replaces them with the will to power. The human cognition, for Nietzsche, is not constrained by necessary categories for experience, rather, it is human willing that produces the categories for experience which are not necessary for experience as such, but only necessary for a particular kind of life which is itself not necessary.

It is with Nietzsche that φύσις is completely covered over and that the will of man comes to have total domination over the earth. Beings are no longer understood to have a nature as such, a τέλος towards which they strive, but it is human cognition that orders things not according to the necessity of their nature, but according to the will of the human being as the representer of all that is. To understand this possibility and the change in understanding of Being (or, rather, the forgottenness of Being), we must now turn to the second member of the fourfold, sky or world.

CHAPTER 3

SKY

The sky is the horizon of possibilities of Being and for beings as a whole as disclosed by our understanding of Being. The relevance of things is determined not, in the first instance, by any facts about things understood as objects, but rather about their interrelatedness in relevance relations. It is in the structure, in *Being and Time*, that Heidegger calls *significance* that relevance relations come to be articulated in their meaningfulness. As such, the sky is the originary temporal horizon of the being of beings. We have already seen in the previous chapter how the horizon that determines beings and the beings thus determined are the same (i.e. essentially belong together). The two are essentially in strife; the horizon determines what and how beings can be, but the freeing of new beings codetermined the limits of the horizons that determine what and how beings are.

Similarly to his presentation of each of the other three members of the fourfold in *Building Dwelling Thinking*, Heidegger gives a brief poetic description of ‘sky’:

The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year’s seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and the blue depth of the ether.⁶⁸

Hence, sky encompasses: (1) the vaulting path of the sun, (2) the course of the changing moon, (3) the wandering glitter of the stars, (4) the year’s seasons and their

⁶⁸ Heidegger 1971b: 147.

changes, (5) the light and the dusk of day, (6) the gloom and glow of night, (7) the clemency and inclemency of the weather, (8) the drifting clouds and (9) the blue depth of ether. It would be easy to think that these just happened to be the images that struck Heidegger as the most poetic images about the sky that he could think of while writing *Building Dwelling Thinking* and that, had he given another poetical presentation of sky at another time that he might have more or less aspects and that this passage, and thus the number of aspects to Heidegger's sky that I have chosen here, is arbitrary. However, in *The Thing* Heidegger gives a nearly identical poetical presentation of sky and includes, with minor changes in the wording, just these nine aspects and these in precisely the same order that he presents them in *Building Dwelling Thinking*.⁶⁹

Rather than simply jump into discussing Heidegger's sky as such, as is the burden of those of us doing academic work, let's look first at the interpretation of the Heideggerian sky according to the best-known interpretation of the essential fourfold, i.e. Young's:

And "sky" embraces, as well as the literal sky, that which is thought of as belonging to or coming from it – the predictable rhythms of the planetary motions, of seasons, of day and night, as well as the unpredictable motions of the weather.⁷⁰

Young's interpretation is at best confused and at worst simply false. The literal sky is a being. Hence, the literal sky, as a being, is part of what we called *earth* in the previous chapter. It is rather the horizontal aspect of being and beings, which we have already provisionally discussed in the previous chapter primarily in relation to φύσις,

⁶⁹ Ibid.: 176.

⁷⁰ Young 2006: 374.

that Heidegger calls “sky.” If Young means no more by “embraces” that the literal sky, etc., falls within a horizon, then his explanation is true, but not especially enlightening. If he means that Heideggerian sky, thought of as something like a logical (or even commonsense) set, includes the literal sky, etc., as members and that Heideggerian sky is determined by the members of this set, then his description is obviously false.

When Heidegger began thinking about the essential fourfold, he used slightly different idioms than he did later on. In *The Origin of the Work or Art*, *Mindfulness*, and *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, the strife-pair were referred to as “earth and *world*” rather than “earth and *sky*.” The pair in confrontation was referred to as “*god* and *human beings*” rather than “*gods* and *mortals*.” An explanation of the reason for the change in idioms for the pair in confrontation will have to wait until the next two chapters, but the reason for the change in idioms for the striving pair can be dealt with rather succinctly.

Even in *Being and Time*, Heidegger had multiple – and, judging by the scholarship, often confusing – uses of the word *world*. We have already seen two of them in the last chapter. The first being the sense that we called ‘world.’ ‘World’ referred to the totality of beings that could be present-at-hand. But there are three other ways that Heidegger uses the word “world” in *Being and Time*.

“‘World’ functions as an ontological term, and signifies the Being of those beings which we have just mentioned [those beings which can be present-at-hand].”⁷¹ This sense of the word “world,” which we might call the ontological categorial conception of

⁷¹ Heidegger 1962: 93

world, refers to the being of beings. In short, the ontological categorial conception of world refers to beings according to their unhiddenness (*ἀλήθεια*); to beings as appearing as either *φύσει ὄντα* or as *τέχνη ὄντα*. Somewhat frustratingly, Heidegger also indicates this sense of “world” by the use of single quotation marks (i.e. ‘world’). The reason for this is, however, simply, as we have seen in chapter 1, it makes little to no sense to speak of beings independently of their being as either *φύσει ὄντα* or as *τέχνη ὄντα*. In discussions of metaphysics, however, a distinction between the two would be useful.

The ontological categorial conception of world already indicates a third further conception of world, namely the ontic existentiell conception of world. “‘World’ can be understood in another ontical sense ... as that ‘*wherein*’ a factual Dasein as such can be said to ‘live’.”⁷² Heidegger gives two examples in passing: the public world and the domestic world. These examples are useful, but possibly misleading. The danger is to think that here Heidegger is thinking only of the kinds of world directly related to worlds that are restricted to human social domains. In one sense, this would be a correct assumption to make. But in another sense, this would be a mistake. The worlds that Heidegger is thinking of here are worlds like the public world, the world of sports, the world of mathematics understood as the world in which mathematicians are involved in dealing with mathematics, etc. But it also includes the world of nature insofar as we are involved with nature (studying it, enjoying it, etc.). Any world in which we are involved, in the sense of our having an interested (which Heidegger argues disinterest as a

⁷² Ibid.

degenerate mode) involvement in dealing with the ‘world’ determined by the world is included.

Thus, the ontic existentiell conception of world includes both what Heidegger calls “locations” which open “spaces” in which beings can emerge into unhiddenness (*ἀλήθεια*, truth). These ontic existentiell worlds are locations in which space can be made for beings to emerge into their being. For example, take the world of sports. It is only because there is a world of sports (i.e. a location) that there can be basketballs, shooting guards, three pointers, or heated rivalries over league titles of the sort that we see between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Boston Celtics. The location of sports – more specifically NBA basketball – opens an intelligible space in which all of these things have meaning; i.e. in which things like the Lakers-Celtics rivalry makes sense.

Of course, it’s easy to see how such worlds are historical. In medieval times, the National Basketball Association (and basketball more generally) did not exist. There was no space open for basketballs, shooting guards, three pointers, or rivalries over basketball league titles like the Lakers-Celtics rivalry. And now there is no Spanish Inquisition. Hence, non-Catholics in Spain (or in the United States, for that matter) need not hide their religious practices or lack thereof. No space is any longer open for this specific kind of oppression (though there are plenty of other kinds of oppression still available). Changes in the locations available to us and changes in our understandings of locations available to us (e.g. the introduction of the three-point line in the NBA) also change our understanding of the spaces that the locations open, thus, changing the possibilities for beings.

The ontic existentiell conception of world is also determined by temporality. It is only on a determination or seeking for what matters to us (futural) that locations (past) are grounded, such that spaces are opened (present). I.e. it is only because the Catholic understanding of Being determined that the salvation of the soul mattered to us that something like the Spanish Inquisition became possible (i.e. a location was grounded) and that (by the location's opening of a space) the various beings involved with the Spanish Inquisition could come to have the meaning that they did.

Although the ontic existentiell conception of world, which, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger simply calls world (without quotation marks), will be important in the present discussion of sky, we can already see that it *cannot* be the sense of "world" that Heidegger means when he uses the word as the equivalent of sky. The reason that we can see that this is so is that each member of the fourfold is an *ontological* structure and the ontic existentiell conception of world is, obviously, *ontic*. Thus, we must turn to Heidegger's final use of the word "world" in *Being and Time*.

"Finally, 'world' designates the ontologico-existential concept of *worldhood*. Worldhood itself may have as its modes whatever structural wholes any special 'worlds' may have at the time; but it embraces in itself the *a priori* character of worldhood in general."⁷³ The final sense of world indicates the structure of worldhood in general. That is to say that it indicates the structure that determines the possible structures available for any possible world (i.e. location). Though Heidegger clearly means "world" in the sense of worldhood when he says "sky," he primarily discusses possible

⁷³ Ibid.

orientations that we can have towards our worlds as either guided by the beings and their being opened by worlds or towards Being itself. The former is the orientation of metaphysical thinking and of the unowned understanding of the One.⁷⁴ We will follow Heidegger in this focus, but will return, in Chapter 3, to an analysis of worldhood, understood as the “house” of the gods.

Heidegger’s change in idiom from “world” (in the sense of worldhood) and “sky” clearly was meant to help his German readers see a deep connection between this aspect of the fourfold (worldhood or sky) and god(s), which is lost in its translation into English. In German, the word for sky is *Himmel*. *Himmel* has a double meaning; i.e. *Himmel* means both *sky* and *heaven(s)*. Though this double meaning survives in our word “heavens,” the translators of Heidegger’s work may have deliberately avoided this translation for fear that we would think not of the sky, of a horizon, but rather of something like a world detached from our own in which supersensuous things or beings dwell forever detached from us. That is a legitimate concern, however, a simple footnote, one would think, would both alleviate this problem and allow Heidegger’s English-but-not-German-speaking readers see the connection between this aspect of the fourfold and the aspect that he calls “gods.”

Whatever his reason for changing idioms, it is clear that we can look both at Heidegger’s discussions of world – either in the ontological existential sense or in the later sense presented in *Mindfulness*, *Contributions to Philosophy*, and *On the Origin of the Work of Art* – and his discussions of sky, giving preference to his discussions of sky

⁷⁴ For a discussion of the One, see Ch. 5.

where there are inconsistencies, to discover precisely what Heidegger's rather complex-looking understanding of sky is.

(1) *The Vaulting Path of the Sun.*

The Sun has been, at least since the time of Plato, synonymous with that which grants the yoke under which beings have their being. Since the rise of Platonism, the sun has referred to the highest being, the uncaused cause, the self-created creator. Heidegger's word for what Plato, but not Platonism, calls the "sun" is "god." As we will see in the next chapter, gods are the mysteriousness that beckons us to further elaborate, develop, investigate, and try to answer the question of who we are and, more generally in relation to beings that are unlike us, "why?" As such, it is the mysteriousness that beckons us that determines which things, which questions, which answers, etc., are important, unimportant, relevant, irrelevant, possible, or impossible. It is questions or outstanding needs that, thus, ground locations. This is why the sun is thought of as the source of all light that illuminates things and makes them visible.

Heidegger claims that Being, the metaphorical sun, has never really been thought in the history of western philosophy. Even with Plato, whose metaphor Heidegger is employing here, did not clearly or directly, if at all, think of Being as such. Heidegger's use of the *vaulting path* of the sun indicates precisely what it is that Heidegger thinks is missing from the traditional metaphysical analysis of Being – namely that it is not understood as temporal and historical in the appropriate way. As we saw in the previous

chapter, a decision was made in favour of the constantly present, of the atemporal, as determining that which really is.

Traditional metaphysical thought, especially since the time of Descartes, begins with and has been dominated by the investigation of the beingness of beings, guided by the determination of the decision in favor of constant presence.⁷⁵ The question is not one in which the yoke or the source of illumination for (i.e. grounds of) the yoke or the metaphorical sun itself is thought first, as the origin of the beingness of beings. I.e. Descartes does not begin by looking at the locations that make the spaces in which beings may emerge as beings, or the ground of locations as such. Rather what the metaphysician begins with are beings. Descartes begins by looking at the properties of beings. The least stable properties, those that are sometimes present and sometimes not, become “secondary properties.” “Secondary properties” are then consigned to the realm of the merely phenomenal and unreal. Only the general properties that are constantly present in all beings – height, width, breadth, solidity,⁷⁶ and, thus, occupying some spatio-temporal location – are taken to be real. But what is specifically notable about Descartes’ position is that it is the projection of nature as that which is quantifiable that is the starting point for modern metaphysics. The kind of quantifiability may be physical, but it need not be. Anything that can be quantified in terms of its effects may be included amongst the real.

⁷⁵ Charles Guignon is wrong to think that the primary problem with Western metaphysics, according to Heidegger, is that it begins with epistemological worries. The epistemological problems, rather, are a consequence of beginning by questioning Beings and, consequently, interpreting Being as such from the perspective of beings.

⁷⁶ Solidity is not always listed amongst the primary qualities.

Possible room is, thus, made for ideas, concepts, and other abstract beings, along with immaterial beings like the soul.

From the perspective of beings that have now become understood as objects of representation – i.e. beginning with the quantifiable – an attempt is made to reconstruct spaces and locations beginning with nothing but the beings, understood as objects of representation, opened up by the spaces themselves. This is true whether the beginning is taken to be “objective,” as is done in realism, or as “subjective,” as is done in idealism. In either case, what one begins with is beings (the “quantifiable”) or a being (the “subject that represents objects in their quantifiability”). From this perspective, Being must be reconstructed beginning with these beings as the grounds of the locations and spaces opened by the location. Once the beingness of these beings is determined in terms of quantifiability, the only thing left to discover is Being as such. But Being as such is either entirely passed over or is misunderstood in terms of the understanding of the beingness of beings as the quantifiable (in representation).

According to the top-down-holism that we find in Heidegger, it is the response to a questioning or a need (i.e. in response to a “god”) that grounds a location and articulates the meaning of the beings in any particular space. But each such meaningful space arises only within the understanding of Being opened up by the most originary “god,” the god which discloses Being as such. Our understanding of Being first opens up the possibilities for being involved with things in different ways, involvements that consequently open up other locations that may be further elaborated or opened up

through questioning and, consequently, of articulating beings in their meaningful spaces.⁷⁷

As we have noted, Heidegger does not merely say “the sun,” but specifically says “the *vaulting path* of the sun.” What this indicates is that whatever Heidegger means by the ‘sun’ here is not something atemporal, not a fixed understanding, but one that has its temporality and history. It arises, as does the sun in the morning, following a preceding night. It moves towards a pinnacle, towards the height of its illuminating power, which metaphorically we might call “high noon.” Then, as the sun does each day, our openness to the understanding of Being declines and becomes dimmer and more distorted as night approaches. Finally, it ultimately reaches its end in night.

According to Heidegger, the dawn of Western metaphysics begins long before Descartes severed as the transition from classical Western metaphysics to modern Western metaphysics with the thought of the early Greek thinkers Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. While getting clear about Heidegger’s interpretation of any of these thinkers is beyond the scope of this essay, one can nevertheless, even at a superficial level, see the seeds of the most important thoughts guiding subsequent Western metaphysics in these three thinkers. In Anaximander we see the unbounded or unlimited *ἄπειρον*. The *ἄπειρον* could reasonably be interpreted as being that which has not yet been given limit in the sense of that which is without *εἶδος* or *τέλος*; i.e. that which is without end or limit. The *ἄπειρον*, which finds multiple successors, is that

⁷⁷ We will return, in Chapter 5, to address the question, “why can’t we simply reconstruct these meaningful locations and spaces beginning with beings understood as objects of representation?”

which needs to be given bounds, meaning, function, to be conceptualized. This can be understood as Antiphon's ὕλη or the traditional interpretation of Kant's unconceptualized manifold of sensation.

In Heraclitus, traditional interpretations tell us, we find the doctrine of the eternal flux. The phenomenal world appears to us as undergoing constant change. There is nothing, in experience, which is really constantly present throughout all change. As the traditional reading of the doctrine goes, one cannot step into the same river twice or, as one of his followers allegedly responded, one cannot even step into the same river once. Again, what can be taken from this is that the world that we experience is unreal – it lacks constant presence.⁷⁸

Finally, with Parmenides we find the claim that appears to be the opposite of Heraclitus, namely that nothing every really changes. But, if we accept the traditional metaphysical decision that only that which is constant throughout all change is, then these doctrines need not be in conflict at all. The doctrines of Heraclitus and Parmenides have been synthesized by successive metaphysics with that of Anaximander. Namely, there is a substance that is, in itself, indeterminate or indeterminable as such, which is then perceived by rational beings in the flux of experience. While our experiences are in constant flux, that which is true in experience is that which is constantly present; i.e. the general categories under which the rational agent has brought the mess of sensation. It is

⁷⁸ Heraclitus himself probably did not hold the doctrine attributed to him and likely may well have not accepted the determination of the constantly present as that that is most real. But this is a topic for another time.

the general categories of reason – or, later with Nietzsche, the willing of the will to power – that really is, as constantly present in all experience.

Heidegger finds the “dawn” of the Western understanding of Being with the early Greek thinkers and sees the “high noon” in the thought of Plato and Aristotle. Heidegger usually associates the decline into night with the Romans; i.e. with the translation of Greek thought into Latin. According to Heidegger, because Latin was not born of the experience of the need that the ancient Greeks experienced in response to the guiding-attunement of wonder that consequently spawned the thought of the early Greek thinkers, an experience that was wholly foreign to the Romans, the Greek was necessarily *mistranslated*.⁷⁹ That is to say that the experience that directed the Greeks to investigate not beings, but φύσις, the being of these beings is lacking in the history of the Romans and is, thus, covered over. Instead of an investigation of the being of beings, the Romans were directed towards an investigation of the general properties and the causes of beings. The Greek understanding of Being was further covered over by medieval theologizing of metaphysics.

If Being had not already been misunderstood as a “highest” eternal and atemporal being with the translation of the ancient Greek philosophy into Latin, then it certainly was with the theological interpretation of Western metaphysics with an eternal and unchanging god replacing the sun as the source of all meaningfulness and intelligibility. Thus, Being became completely misunderstood as *a being*. It is with the theological

⁷⁹ My knowledge of the Greek and Roman world is insufficient to allow me to assess Heidegger’s claim. My point here is not to validate Heidegger’s claim, but rather to demonstrate that this is in fact what Heidegger’s discussion of the vaulting path of the sun is meant to illustrate.

interpretation of the Greek understanding of Being, especially with its culmination in Cartesian philosophy, that the “sun” had definitely set and night had come upon our understanding of Being (or lack thereof). This is why Heidegger says that “the world’s night ... is defined by the god’s failure to appear, by the ‘default of God.’”⁸⁰

(2) *The Course of the Changing Moon.*

Once night has fallen, the sun no longer reigns in the sky. The sun, and the radiance that brightens the sky – opening an understanding of the grounds of the locations in which we dwell - is replaced by the moon. Heidegger tells us that “Sun and moon [are] inseparable – the star of the day *and* the star of the night.”⁸¹ The symbols of the sun and the moon are appropriate for Heidegger’s discussion. The moon is not self-luminescent. The light that the moon casts on the earth is only the reflected light of the sun that has itself been obscured by the earth.

When the sun has set, the sun is no longer itself visible. Yet, its reflected light, the illumination granted by the hidden understanding of Being nevertheless shines forth. I.e. beings still appear, but they do not ‘shine forth’ in their being. They remain understood, yet misunderstood. Whereas the sun is to be understood as an understanding of Being, as the source of all intelligibility and meaningfulness of locations, spaces, and the beings opened by those spaces, the moon is merely a being, which occupies the highest point on the horizon of the midnight sky, which itself is illuminated by the sun.

⁸⁰ Heidegger 1971b: 89.

⁸¹ Heidegger 1996: 149

At the conclusion of our discussion of the vaulting path of the sun, we saw that our understanding of Being underwent a change from an understanding of *Being* to an understanding of Being as being *a being*. For example, we find that with theological Christianity that the real is that which is created by a god that is itself self-created. With modern metaphysics we find that that which is real is that which is calculable, quantifiable. In short, in the nighttime, it is the moon, not the sun, that illuminates the beings on the earth beneath the night sky, however dimly.

The guiding question of Western metaphysics began with an investigation into Being by investigating the being of beings and ended with us forgetting Being as such. With the attempt to find the meaning of each being, what was discovered was that no finite beings contain the whole of their meaning in themselves. In order to account for this lack in their being, what was required was to posit a “higher” being which would account for the being of the ‘lower’ being. In order to avoid the difficulty of an infinite chain, a “highest” being, which itself did not rely on any being beyond itself for its being had to be posited. This ‘highest being’ has gone through many interpretations, from the theological god, to the rational agent, to the will as will to power. What this brief history of Western metaphysics is meant to demonstrate is that the investigation of Being did not start with, nor was there understanding of, the question of Being as such. Rather, Being was always interpreted from the perspective of beings; i.e. Being was understood as a being; i.e. determined by beingness.

In contrast to the sun understood as Being as such, the moon represents the nighttime of Being – the time (epoch) in which Being is (mis)understood as a being. In

the understanding of Being as grounded in a being (itself understood in its various modifications), beings are understood, however in a dim fashion. But their meaningfulness as determined by their groundedness in spaces opened by locations is passed over, as is our involvement in locations as proximally grounding locations. Beings, in the nighttime of Being, are understood merely in terms of beingness. Beings are understood as that which conforms to the Forms, the created, the representable, that which is willed by the will to power, etc. Whatever the particular modification of the understanding of Being as beingness demands. It is these historical modifications that make Heidegger not merely say “the moon,” but, rather, “the changing course of the moon.”

(3) *The Wandering Glitter of the Stars.*

Heidegger presents little in his writings, including his poetic works, in which he discusses the “glittering” of the stars or “glittering” more generally. There is, however, a telling passage in *What is Called Thinking?* in which he specifically relates the word “blink” etymologically to the words “gleam” and “glitter.” In naming the “glitter of the stars” immediately after the sun and the moon, we are left with at least two ways of understanding Heidegger’s talk of the “glitter of the stars.” The first is to equate the “stars” referred to here specifically with the sun and the moon, both of which we have already discussed. The other is to understand the stars as referring to stars other than the sun and the moon. Given that Heidegger does not specify which is meant, we will begin,

rather, by looking at the discussion of “glittering” as “blinking” from the *What is Called Thinking?* and see which possibility is more plausible.

In this passage, Heidegger is considering Nietzsche’s use of the imagery of the simultaneous blinking of the last man. In this context, Heidegger says that the word “*Blink* is related to Middle English *blenchen*, which means deceive, and to *blenken*, *blinken*, which means to gleam or glitter.”⁸² Here Heidegger, whether rightly or wrongly in stressing the importance of the etymology, indicates that there is a deep connection between the concepts of blinking, deception, and glittering. Things that glitter do not maintain a consistent glow. Rather, as glittering, they alternate between brightly shining and receding into darkness, often moving quickly between the two. What Heidegger’s discussion indicates is that he takes the blinking of the eyes of the last man to be the same as the blinking of, e.g., lights or – more to our purposes – stars that shine in the sky and recede into darkness.

But Heidegger does not simply say that to blink is to glitter. Rather, he says that it is also a kind of deception. Given what we have said about the sun and the moon previously, it is apparently unreasonable to think that the stars here referred to includes the sun. The sun indicates the truth of Being. However the moon and beings understood as grounding “domains” (locations understood from the perspective of metaphysics) seem to be plausibly be included. Heidegger says that the “day” of the essence of technology “is the world’s night, rearranged into merely technological day.”⁸³ The stars under

⁸² Heidegger 1968: 74-75.

⁸³ Heidegger 1971b: 115.

discussion are the beings that serve as measures determining what is and what is not in any given “domain.”

Heidegger explains the infinitive “to blink” as follows: “To blink—that means to play up and set up a glittering deception which is then agreed upon as true and valid—with the mutual tacit understanding not to question the setup.”⁸⁴ This adds several new aspects to Heidegger’s interpretation of “blinking.” To blink is not merely a deceptive glittering, but a deceptive glittering which is both “played up” and “set up” as well as “agreed upon as true and valid.”

In *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger explains that “setting up” in the relevant sense is a special kind of setting up, the setting up of a world.⁸⁵ Heidegger calls the setting up of a world *erecting* or *e-recting*. “To e-rect means: to open the right in the sense of a guiding measure, a form in which what belongs to the nature of being gives guidance.”⁸⁶ What is set up is a measure of what it is for beings to be. But this measure, in blinking, is not measure that discloses the being of beings, but rather that “deceives” in the sense that it somehow covers up or distorts its own grounds.

When Heidegger says “playing up” the measure erected in “blinking,” he means that the measure that determines the being of beings in their unseen spaces opened by locations is taken for granted. In fact, so much so that the fact that the decision of this measure rather than any other is a decision becomes forgotten and is no longer brought up for question.

⁸⁴ Heidegger 1968: 74.

⁸⁵ Recall that in *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger was still using the term *world* for the term that he later calls *sky*.

⁸⁶ Heidegger 1971b: 43.

That the erected and played up, thus forgotten, measure of the being of beings is “agreed upon as true and valid” should come as no surprise. Once the measure has been decided and forgotten, it becomes so obviously true as to require no proof. Anything that fails to conform to the measure does not serve as evidence that the measure is flawed, but rather shows that that which fails to conform to the measure cannot be. E.g. if we have agreed upon the physical as the measure, then, e.g., fear either must be something that exists as a physical being (as we see in material reductionism) or does not exist at all (as we see in material eliminativism). In the former case, the phenomenon that apparently does not conform to the measure does in fact conform to the measure and thus is. It was really, it turns out, just a question of getting clear about the nature of the phenomenon. In the latter case, the phenomenon that apparently does not conform to the measure does and does fail to conform to the measure. We were merely mistaken to think that there is anything like fear. The deeper agreement, which holds from the rise of Platonism to the material eliminativists of today, is the agreement that the constantly present is that which really is.

Thus, we find Heidegger’s completed definition of blinking:

Blinking: the mutual setup, agreed upon and in the end no longer in need of explicit agreement, of the objective and static surfaces and foreground facets of all things as alone valid and valuable—a setup with whose help man carries on and degrades everything.⁸⁷

The main additions here to what we have already seen is that in blinking the only thing which is taken as “valid and valuable” is “objective and static” (i.e. constantly present) “surfaces and foregrounds facets” (i.e. forgetting its own grounds, only the

⁸⁷ Heidegger 1968: 75.

features and properties that are opened up by the grounds, not the grounds themselves) “of all things” (i.e. of the totality of beings). In this way, the source, Being, is not merely distorted or forgotten, but completely covered over. We are completely abandoned by Being and the understanding of beings alone reigns - Being is not understood at all.

We can now see that our assumption that the moon was amongst the ‘stars’ considered is confirmed, but that our omission of the sun was a mistake. It is only the beings, lighted up by this or that understanding of Being, which allows us to set up a measure for that which is. But this measure, opened by a genuine relation to Being, allows for a deception insofar as that which is revealed by a genuine relation to Being (e.g. the ancient Greek investigation into φύσις) can in turn cover over its own grounding. With the forgottenness of Being and the understanding of Being which spawned this measure, the possibility arises for our interpretation of the measure to become completely incommensurable with the understanding of Being that spawned it; i.e. the measure as a(n) (mis)understanding of Being may undermine its own grounds and become, consequently, ungrounded. This is precisely what we see in Nietzsche’s interpretation of nihilism as the hidden logic of decline guiding Western thought since the rise of Platonism.

The reason why the “wandering stars” glitter is because now this understanding of Being (both genuine and of Being as a being), now that understanding of Being, rises to the stage of obviousness and is agreed upon without questioning its own grounds. But the stars only glitter on a background of darkness. The stars only glitter in the forgottenness of Being.

(4) *The Year's Seasons and Their Changes.*

“‘The year’ houses those times that we call the seasons.”⁸⁸ A “year,” as we may to understand it here can be a literal year. In this way, Young’s interpretation is not totally mistaken. With the seasons, there is a pattern that begins with Spring as a kind of symbolic rebirth in which nature is, in a sense, resurrected from her icy slumber. There are various activities and happenings that are appropriate to Spring, but not Summer, Fall, or Winter. Summer is the symbolic high-point of nature and, like in any season, there are activities and happenings that are appropriate to Summer, but not the other seasons. Fall is the decline towards nature’s Wintry death, there are activities and happenings that are appropriate to Fall, but not to the other seasons. Winter is nature’s icy death, there are activities and happenings appropriate to Winter, but not the other seasons. And it is only because there is an icy Winter that the world may be reborn in Spring.

But Heidegger is less interested in the literal seasons (i.e. in weather patterns) than he is in the patterns of the “Spring,” “Summer,” “Fall,” and “Winter” of our understanding of φύσει ὄντα. Whereas Heidegger’s discussion of the sun, the moon, the stars, and day and night specifically relate to Being as such, his discussion of the seasons relates to the time of things. “In the ‘mingled’ play of fiery brightness and frosty darkness which the seasons grant, things blossom and close up again.”⁸⁹ Heidegger says that the night of Being (the forgottenness of Being) “threatens a single endless winter.”⁹⁰ I.e. the dominance of the modern technological understanding of beings as the

⁸⁸ Heidegger 2000a: 36.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Heidegger 1971b: 115.

mathematically representable (whether in a realist or idealist sense) threatens to permanently cover over our understanding of φύσις as the emerging-abiding sway.

There are a multitude of things that have their “seasons.” Take a tree, for example. A tree sprouts new leaves and flowers with the arrival of the Spring. The leaves grow to their fullness and the flowers bear fruit in the Summer. In the Fall, the leaves and fruit begin to fall from the branches of the tree. When the Winter arrives, the branches are all bare. And the whole process begins again. The rise (Spring), pinnacle (Summer), decline and fall (Fall), and complete dissolution (Winter) of the Roman Empire is another example. The same kind of cycle can be seen in the rise and fall of the understanding of the world from the perspective of dogmatic Christianity.

Every one of these beings or “domains” is opened up by a location opened by an understanding of Being. Whether this understanding is understood on its own terms or is covered over is irrelevant. Each is opened up by a questioning or in response to a need. Once opened up, these locations bloom into spaces and bear the fruit of the beings appropriate to the location. As these beings become more and more obvious and recede into the banality of everydayness, the location itself, is covered over in favor of the beings thus opened. Through the various historical changes that we have indicated at in an extremely abbreviated fashion, these beings are transformed from beings into objects for representation. I.e. the winter of Being is upon us and beings no longer appear in their unhiddenness, but are covered over in the snow of their representation as objects.

The “year” is then, consequently, the time from the origin of an understanding of Being, and the locations, spaces, and beings thus opened, to the time at which they come

to become completely covered over and forgotten in such a way that their being covered over and forgotten is itself covered over and forgotten.

The symbolism here is clear. Whereas Heidegger's talk of the day and of the night point us towards our understanding or lack of understanding of Being itself, the seasons relate to those locations which arise, opening spaces, and which grow and blossom into beings beneath the sun of Being and which fall from the tree and become frozen or dead as the objects of representation in the wintertime of Being. In other words, whereas Heidegger's symbolism of day and night relate specifically to Being as such, the symbolism of the seasons relates to locations, spaces, and beings.

(5) *The Light and Dusk of Day.*

The light of day is an understanding of Being as such. This should not be misunderstood to mean that the light of day is *knowledge* of Being as such. Being as such is not something which can be fully grasped and which cannot be, on Heidegger's view, conceptually grasped. Rather, what is grasped is the ground of our understanding of Being as a mystery that our decision, our way of understanding Being, is a way of answering.

In the light of day, the source of our historically situated locations, the spaces that they open, and the beings that these spaces free for their being, in an understanding of Being as dependant on history and temporality is seen clearly. Beings show up as meaningfully articulated – as that which matters for some way of being or other – for some space in some location which is itself grounded in an understanding of Being as

such. That is, in trying to understand what a being is, we no longer investigate its properties or objective qualities, but rather we look at its being as meaningfully articulated in some space for some location as opened by an understanding of Being.

“But couldn’t we look at a being independently of the meaning that it has in any given ‘domain’? Don’t we do just that in science? For example, we can look at a hammer as independent from its function as an item used for nailing nails into, e.g., wooden surfaces. In so doing, we are able to investigate the hammer as merely a spatio-temporal mass of material that has such and such a height, width, breadth, chemical composition, and other such objective properties. So, again, isn’t this a way of looking at an object totally divorced from its meaning?”

The question is misleading, but taken strictly as a question about a hammer, the answer is straightforwardly “no.” The hammer *as a hammer* is just its usefulness and reliability for hammering. This usefulness refers to other beings, e.g. hammers and nails, with which it is useful. Beings do not have isolated meanings, but only meanings in spaces opened by locations. Nowhere in the investigation noted does this usefulness or the reliability for hammering that makes this a hammer arise.

If we do not take the question as being strictly about a hammer *as a hammer*, then the answer is unclear. In the first instance, what we have done is not separated this being from its meaning as a hammer. What we have done is merely bring out one source of this hammer’s reliability. The “causal properties” to which this hammer’s being as a hammer is indebted are only meaningful as “causal properties” for a being with the meaning of a hammer.

“But couldn’t we then imagine a case like this: Delia is completely ignorant of hammers. She has never seen a hammer, heard of a hammer, used any object as a hammer, or been in any way introduced to the concept of hammers. Delia then could investigate these very same properties. Haven’t we now got rid of any connection between these objective properties and the hammer’s being as a hammer?”

Yes, we have in fact divorced this being from its being (meaningfulness) as a hammer – for Delia’s investigation, anyway. But even then, if Delia is investigating the causal properties of the hammer, she is investigating the properties for hammering or she is not investigating the causal properties at all.

“Let’s say that she’s not investigating the causal properties. She’s just investigating the properties like the height, width, breadth, and chemical composition without any interest, concern, or recognition of the causal properties that we hammer users would be interested in. Haven’t we removed the meaningfulness of the hammer and got to the simple ground of what is?”

There has been an ontological changeover here. Actually, there was already an ontological change at the last stage of our discussion, but a complete changeover only happens now. In the last stage of our case, the hammer became not a hammer, but an object for investigation which included a hammer as part of its meaning. Here we have a complete changeover where the hammer’s being has been completely sloughed off for you and me. But for Delia the “hammer” never had the meaning of hammer at all. What we find is that a new kind of being has been freed – a being as an object of a location determined by a kind of thematic investigation. Seen merely in terms of its objective

properties, we are no longer discussing a hammer at all. But we are not, on that account, investigating a being that fails to have a meaning. What we have is a being that has its meaning and appropriateness in a particular kind of investigation, a particular kind of looking in order to know. But for this knowing to have meaning, it must matter to Delia (or whomever) in one way or another, there must be an involvement in a location that opens the space in which the hammer *as* “mere” object is meaningful. This meaningful location that matters to Delia nevertheless determines the range of what is meaningful and what is not and it determines the being of the beings understood within this space.

It is the understanding of this background understanding of Being that grounds meaningful locations that constitutes the light of day. We will look at this structure more in the following section on the gloom and glow of night. The dusk of day is, thus, obviously the decline of the understanding of Being in favor of a forgottenness of Being and in which we come to attend to beings, rather than their ground in Being. When Being becomes covered over because we become overwhelmed by our involvement in beings and forget Being as such, the ground of the meaningfulness of things (light) becomes obscured and we move closer towards the gloom of night.

(6) *The Gloom and Glow of Night.*

It seems odd to both discuss the “gloom” along with the “glow” of night. The former term seems to indicate an absence of light and the latter the presence of light. Because Heidegger says the *glow* of night, we know that he does not merely think of the night as the negation of the day. To glow is to illuminate, only in a less intense fashion

than does the light of day. Hence, the night itself has a light of its own kind. However, in the gloom of night, locations and spaces, and consequently beings, show themselves less fully. Whereas, in the light of day, we see things in the fullness of their shining colors, in the glow of night, we see them in muted colors or shades of grey, if they do not recede completely into the night's darkness. In the glow of night, shapes are often times unclear and difficult to make out and scenery is often completely covered over by the night's darkness.

Whereas, in the light of day (less metaphorically, in the light of an understanding of Being) locations, spaces, and beings can be seen in the fullness of their meaning and in their essential interconnectedness, in the glow of night they can only be seen in a very narrow spectrum and the darkness conceals the essential interconnectedness of the meaningful location in which the beings come to be meaningful as the beings that they are. The space of these beings is seldom completely covered over, but is seen only unclearly and in shades of grey. Night is gloomy because it is the time in which the sun is absent from the sky and the light of the moon fails to illuminate the locations and spaces that allow beings to shine forth as the beings that they are.

The gloom is an indicator of the flight of a "god" (sun); of our failure to retain an openness to an understanding of Being. This is why Heidegger says that "Night is the time of the sheltering of the *gods of the past* and of the concealment of the gods that are coming."⁹¹ Our current abandonment to beings is the result of the abandonment of

⁹¹ Heidegger 2000a: 133.

Being. In *What Are Poets For?* Heidegger calls this abandonment “the default of God.”⁹² We are left with the understanding of being determined by the essence of technology; i.e. we understand beings as the creations of a self-created creator. This originally took the form of the creator god and his creations. But, with the decline in the belief of this god, he was replaced by the representational power first of reason and later of the subject of the will as will to power willing the represented. Even when we move from the theological god as creator to the subject as representer, we nevertheless are left with a picture that passes over the understanding of Being, locations, spaces, and beings and which reverses the order of meaningfulness (beginning with a being, rather than Being). In such a view, a subject bestows the meaning of any given being the meaning that it has, given his interests and needs, and, consequently, a field of meaningfulness is constructed. But this reverses the actual order of meaningfulness. It is rather that we always already find a situation meaningful and find that beings are meaningfully charged in the situation at hand. In *Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger gives us two kinds of example.

The first kind of example is primarily auditory. Heidegger discusses hearing a motorcycle roaring by on the street. What we hear when we usually hear when we hear a motorcycle roaring by is not merely a loud set of sounds, but a *motorcycle roaring* by. As Heidegger says, “it is hard and unusual for us to describe the pure noise, because it is precisely *not* what we generally hear. We always hear *more* [than the mere noise].”⁹³ While Heidegger does not delve into the issue here, he could continue to describe the

⁹² Heidegger 1971b: 89.

⁹³ Heidegger 2000b: 36.

situation in which we not only hear the motorcycle roaring by, but also see it. In that case, what we experience is not an auditory phenomenon and a fully distinct visual phenomenon. What we normally hear is that very thing that we see. We could expand on this analysis to describe a being that we experience through all five senses at the same time. In such a case, what we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch would all be, in the first instance, experienced as one and the same thing. That is to say that our sensory experience is generally synaesthetic.

Each of these cases allows for a kind of breakdown. In the case of the motorcycle, we can imagine several cases in which the normal experience of hearing a motorcycle breaks down. Elizabeth has never heard a motorcycle (either in person, on tv, the radio, etc.) and has no idea what a motorcycle sounds like. Suddenly a motorcycle roars by behind her. Elizabeth is startled by the unfamiliar sound. But even then, Elizabeth does not hear it as a pure sound, rather, she hears it as a startling I-know-not-what. In trying to discover what this sound was, she may then begin to break down the sound into its pure components and deconstruct the experience moving closer and closer towards pure sounds.⁹⁴

Breakdowns in cases of the second type are actually quite common. Danielle has had *Breakfast at Tiffany's* on video tape for years, but as video tapes are going the way of the dodo, she decided to transfer the video to DVD using her own computer (since copying the movie to a blank DVD is cheaper than buying a new copy). After having

⁹⁴ Though I will not discuss it here, there is reason to doubt that we could ever fully deconstruct an experienced sound into pure sound. See the discussion of significance in Ch. 4 for an indication of why I think that such a deconstruction would fail on a Heideggerian account.

done so, Danielle sits down to watch the DVD. As she watches the movie, Danielle both sees and hears Audrey Hepburn – the person seen is the person heard. It is precisely through Audrey’s lips that Danielle heard the dialogue. While the transfer initially seems to have succeeded, somewhere along the way there was an error in copying over the audio. Once the movie gets to the point of the error, the audio becomes offset. Audrey’s lips move and then a few moments later, the sounds of her talk follow. Suddenly, Audrey’s words no longer come from the woman that Danielle sees on the television, but instead they come from the television itself. At this point, the synaesthetic experience that is so usual and expected in seeing a person speak breaks down for Danielle. It is in such a breakdown situation that one first deconstructs the holistic experience into different ‘senses’ and then, perhaps, into the “sensory information” granted by each sense.

If this seems odd, imagine putting someone who is totally ignorant of televisions (and similar kinds of devices) in front of a television. It is hard to imagine the person’s first reaction being that there is a person (or perhaps a spirit or similar entity) inside of the television that is speaking to them. Such a person might investigate the television or we might explain its workings to her. Only at such a time would it become clear to her that the television simply transmits sounds through speakers and visual information through the screen. Again, the experience begins as synaesthetic and only becomes an experience of information of the individual senses once the experience with which one is first met breaks down.

The other kind of example is an example of something that appears to us, but not merely in its sensory qualities – even understood as synaesthetic experience of the senses. The example that Heidegger uses is a piece of chalk.⁹⁵ The chalk has all of the synaesthetic qualities that one would associate with the senses. It has a particular visual appearance. It is white, long and cylindrical, of such and such a length, etc.⁹⁶ While the chalk emits no sound while it merely rests on desk, it makes a sound when dropped and a sound (anywhere from a soft scraping to a horrible screech) when used for writing on the chalkboard. The chalk is smooth, but somewhat powdery to the touch. The chalk has a particular (admittedly weak) smell. And, while I have never eaten chalk, I imagine that it has a particular chalky taste. But when the chalk appears to us as chalk, what we experience is not merely something that is the sum of the aforementioned qualities. Rather, the chalk also appears to us in its usability. The usability of the chalk for writing on the chalkboard is not something that is subsequently added on to an isolated object that we find in front of us when we are teaching our classes.

The chalk is the being that it is as chalk only insofar as it is something that appears as a being that is appropriate given the space opened by the location. Less poetically, the chalk appears as something for writing on the chalkboard only because the room appears to us as a classroom. The classroom is only a classroom insofar as it appears to us as a place for teaching and learning. In fact, when the situation is going smoothly, the chalk does not appear to us in any of its qualities (as non-synaesthetic

⁹⁵ Heidegger 2000b: 32-33.

⁹⁶ Heidegger's chalk is apparently grey, but I use white for the simple reason that the chalk that I am accustomed to using in class is white.

properties), but rather, we simply pick it up and write with it, when the flow of the class demands that we write on the board.

And, further, the location only appears as the location that it is on the background of a location which has opened a space for this location. As Todes says “the perceptual world (is) a field of fields-within-fields.”⁹⁷ However, as with Heidegger, we are not merely speaking about that which is perceived, but that which does not actually appear in our everyday way of experiencing beings and situations.

The classroom only appears to me as a place for teaching insofar as part of my way of being is being-a-teacher. (It would equally show up as a place for teaching, if I were a student, but then it would show up differently. Namely, it would show up to me as a place for teaching for the teacher and as a place for being taught for me, assuming that I am genuinely a student; i.e. actually involved in learning, rather than texting or reading the newspaper, etc.)

The classroom also shows up as a place for teaching in another way. Namely, even if I am neither being-a-teacher nor being-a-student, I am familiar with classrooms and that they are rooms for teaching, though they do not show up for me as a place for my teaching or learning, insofar as I am not involved with being-a-teacher or being-a-student.

This background of familiarity with local things like being-a-teacher and being-a-student is not fixed, but is historical. What it is to be a teacher in ancient Athens, Viking-era Oslo, medieval Christian Rome, tribal North America, and in modern American

⁹⁷ Todes 2001, esp. ch. 4. The quotation is from p. 103.

academia are all extremely different things. Each aims at producing a very different sort of person. Even being-a-teacher, being-a-student, and even familiarity with being-a-teacher and being-a-student only makes sense on a background familiarity with what it is to be a (good) person (in a factual, not a biological, sense).

What it is to be a good person is determined by an understanding of the end both of us as individuals and of us as a people. What it is to be a (good) person and what it would be for me to be a (good) person is further determined by a decision on the meaning of Being. It is only when we have discovered what the point of our time, when we have taken a stand on who we are as a people, that it is possible for us to discover the background which holds together (or may hold together, if our existence is fractured enough) the assorted ‘scenery’ and gives meaning to such things as developing (good) persons, being-teachers, being-students, and the like. Any decision about the meaning of Being, as we will investigate in Chapter 4, must be determined by the last god. This is why Heidegger says that “The default of God means that no god any longer gathers men and things unto himself, visibly and unequivocally, and by such gathering disposes the world’s history and man’s sojourn in it.”⁹⁸ We find no need, no deep distressing need, that forces us to take a stand on what it is to be – to answer the simply and open question “Why?”

But the night, as we have seen, while gloomy, is not without its glow and the default of god is not nothing. The glow of night means that beings still appear in some way in the reflected glow of the day of a god that has been, as objects. In this case,

⁹⁸ Heidegger 1971b: 89.

beings, though not in the fullness for which they did for the Greeks, appear to us in the afterglow of the understanding of Being as $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ that in its final stages is understood as the mathematically representable.

It is both because the glow of night is the afterglow of a god that has been and that, in its flight, opens the way for the possibility for the arrival of a new god, in the most distressful distress – the distress of a total lack of distress – that Heidegger calls the night the “holy night.”⁹⁹

(7) The Clemency and Inclemency of the Weather.

Heidegger also mentions the “weather.” He speaks both of the “clemency” and “inclemency” of the weather. Elsewhere, he uses the terms “favorable” and “unfavorable” in relation to the weather instead. Of course weather can be favorable or unfavorable, but to be so it must be favorable or unfavorable for something. Rain is perfectly favorable for crops while at the same time being quite unfavorable for a picnic. But, clearly, by mentioning favorable and unfavorable weather under the header of “sky,” in the context of the fourfold, Heidegger is not speaking of weather conditions of the sort that meteorologists concern themselves. The conditions must be favorable or unfavorable in some other way.

In speaking of favorable weather, Heidegger must be speaking of favorable weather for our understanding of Being. As we have already seen, following Plato, Heidegger sometimes uses the sun to indicate Being. Favorable weather would be clear

⁹⁹ Heidegger 2000a: 133.

or relatively clear skies that allow the sun to illuminate beings in their being. But the weather may be favorable or unfavorable during the time of night as well. The meaning of favorable weather during the nighttime must be different than favorable weather in the daytime.

Heidegger does not specifically give an example of what “favorable weather” would be like. It is, however, reasonable to assume that, in the light of day, that favorable weather is determined by an attunement that directs us to an understanding of Being as such. In the nighttime it is precisely the place at which Nietzsche leaves us that the weather has cleared. Once the “transcendent values” have been done away with and their horizon has been “wiped away,” what is left is a view of the world free of the transcendental space in which values previously found their grounds and justification. However, Nietzsche, on Heidegger’s reading, does not take the final step out of the foul weather that had obscured our investigation of Being and the meaningfulness of the world since ancient times, but rather accepts the will as will to power as the sole grounds for values and evaluation. With (Heidegger’s) Nietzsche, what we are left with is an explanation of Being merely in terms of a being, namely the subject as a subject of the will to power. It is only at the end stage of Western metaphysics, at the completion of nihilism and the domination of our (mis)understanding of Being according to the total machination of the essence of technology, of the being of beings as the represented object of a representer, has brought us to the point at which what is lacking is not a mere explanation of what the being of beings is, but rather what the meaning of Being is, then

the weather becomes favorable for a grounding question in which what is at stake is not merely what beingness is, but the truth (meaning) of Being itself.

If Heidegger still maintains his view from the period of *Being and Time* on this issue, then favorable weather likely becomes only possible in times of existential crisis or in holding onto an attunement opened up by an existential crisis. This existential crisis can be produced on an individual level (i.e. I may find myself in an existential crisis) or on the grander scale of the existential crisis of a people (e.g. in understandingly facing the distress opened to us at the end of Western metaphysics). The various kinds of existential crisis, of being attuned to fundamental disclosive attunements, that Heidegger explicitly names are existential anxiety, extreme boredom, deep wonder, and gaiety. In each, the meaningfulness of our world is changed (or put up for a decision for or against the meaning that our world has had up until the crisis struck us). In existential anxiety and boredom, the structure of meaningfulness of the world falls into deep meaninglessness. Nothing calls to us or draws us in any way whatsoever; i.e. the world shows up to us as meaningless, pointless. While, in existential anxiety, one does not suddenly fail to understand that chairs are used for sitting or that telephones are made for making telephone calls, one does not find any point in anything. Why would anyone ever make a call? After all, in the end, nothing really matters. In deep wonder, the spectacle of our world draws us to ask the question: why are there beings? Why are there beings rather than nothing? The world remains meaningful in wonder, but the meaningfulness of Being in general becomes covered over because our interests and thought becomes directed not at the meaning of Being (which at the inception of Western metaphysics

seems to need no grounds, it appears to be obvious), but at the beingness of beings, especially their causes. Finally, in existential gaiety, we come into an understanding confrontation with our gods, on the earth in its strife with the sky. More simply and straight forwardly put, in existential gaiety, we come to make ourselves at home amongst beings, understanding them as meaningful only as lighted up (granted meaningfulness) by Being itself. In existential gaiety we are guided by the grounding question that asks: what is the truth (meaning) of Being as such?

If Heidegger is consistent on this matter (and, given that both existential wonder and gaiety appear only in Heidegger's "late" period, it is reasonable to assume that he is), it follows that favorable weather only comes about for those who are attuned in very specific ways. But not all of the aforementioned fundamental attunements are the attunements of "favorable weather," at least not properly speaking. Existential wonder is "favorable" only in the sense that it opened up a new location for thought. In ancient times it was existential wonder that first turned the thought of Western man to the question of the beingness of beings. The difficulty in the history of Western metaphysics is, simply put, that the whole of our focus became directed towards this question. Instead of asking the question of Being, what Western metaphysics did was take the question of beingness as its sole guiding question. When the meaning of a being could not be found in the being itself, a higher being was posited. This being, if it itself could not be shown to contain its meaning in itself then required that another, yet higher being be posited to explain its being. This chain then only ended with a being which itself stood in need of no further explanation. It is only with the end of Western metaphysics, with the rather

desolate position of a world of mere “stuff” that is not meaningful in itself, but only meaningful as the represented object of a representing subject, in which (Heidegger’s) Nietzsche leaves us, that brings about favorable weather for the kind of thinkers that Heidegger calls in *As When on Holiday* (following Hölderlin’s language) “mariners.”

“Mariners” are those who have understood the desolation of the end of Western metaphysics as desolation. (The three thinkers that Heidegger names again and again in this capacity are Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Friedrich Hölderlin.) Heidegger tells us that “the mariners are without holidays.”¹⁰⁰ Why are mariners to be understood as being without holidays? First we need to think about the use of the term “mariners.” It is not accidental that Heidegger takes up Hölderlin’s word “mariners” in this context. Heidegger, following Hölderlin, was quite fond of using bodies of water symbolically. Mariners are not simply those who sail, but are specifically those who sail on the sea. But why is it important that these thinkers are those who are “out to sea”? Heidegger’s discussion of rivers (especially the river Ister) gives us a hint. In *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister”* Heidegger discusses rivers in depth and equates them at one point with demigods and at another time with poets. The identification of these three very different kinds of thing, rivers, demigods, and poets, is less surprising, when we think about the general structure of rivers.¹⁰¹

A river begins with a source. At the source the river is simply, calm, and though it begins with little, it nevertheless overflows from its very modest beginnings and travels

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.: 158.

¹⁰¹ Which, needless to say, does not hold for all actual rivers.

downstream. Tributaries join with the modest river, transforming it and, once enough tributaries have joined the river, turn it into a mighty river breaking the countryside into two opposing banks.

The “source” of the “river” should be understood as the historical source of our understanding of Being, the decision that we have made as to the meaning of Being as such. The historical source of our understanding of Being, as opened by the grounding attunement of deep wonder, is a decision in which Being was understood in terms of beingness, in particular as the created. The “tributaries” of the river are to be understood as the modifications (or “additions”) that have been made, either through accident or on purpose, to our understanding of Being, insofar as the modified understanding of Being is merely a modification of the understanding of Being that stands at the source as the historical ground of our understanding of Being.

As each tributary adds to the river, the river becomes mightier and it more powerfully cuts the landscape in two. It becomes more totalizing, drawing more and more beings under its scope - drawing more and more beings further from their being and transforming them continually more completely into objects of representation.

Once the river lets out to the sea, we find that there is no land; i.e. there is no ground. With a lack of ground, building, hence understandingly dwelling in an open location, becomes impossible. One is simply drawn along by currents and ill winds all without a determinate direction. Beings fail to have their meaning as allowed in the free space opened for them by a meaningful location that is understood. Beings have, instead, become objects and are no longer the meaningfully charged beings that have their place

in that space. The sea serves as a symbol for the ground that has undermined itself in just the way that Nietzsche argued that the ground of beings in a highest being had.¹⁰² The understanding of Being as grounded in a being, determined by the essence of technology, that has, thus, come to dominate all beings and transformed them into objects of representation and is itself without ground, is the sea in which Heidegger's mariners are lost. But mariners, understood as the most thoughtful ones, are those in need of favorable weather.

What does it mean for the mariner (here called "poet") to stand in favorable weather? Heidegger tells us. "The poet now stands in favorable weather, so that he remains familiar with what is already present in everything finite, that is, with the 'infinite.'"¹⁰³ Favorable weather is tied to a certain kind of familiarity. Namely, it is tied to a familiarity with the "infinite." Here it is clear that by the "infinite," Heidegger is referring to the measure of things opened up by our understanding of Being that is the background for all things that emerge into presence as beings. It is this Being, understood according to this measure, after all, that is always and constantly present in all "finite" things opened according to this understanding of Being. If one looks back to our discussion of chalk, classrooms, being-a-teacher, being-a-student, being a (good) person, and Being in general, one can see that what is present in all of these is an understanding of Being in general that offers a measure of what it is to be a (good) human being. This grounds a location that opens spaces for such locations as the world of education. The

¹⁰² In *The Gay Science*, §124 *The Horizon of the Infinite*, Nietzsche himself uses the imagery of the sea to symbolize a complete lack of ground.

¹⁰³ Heidegger 2000a: 91.

location (world of education) opens a space in which such things as chalk and classrooms are familiar to us. Those things that arise as accidents of a situation (and the situations themselves) are merely “contingent” in the sense of only arising for us given involvements that are determined by the decision that has been made of what it is to be (and for us to be).

While there are many ways in which the weather may be unfavorable for the mariner (e.g. a way of understanding Being that wholly dominates how he interprets things and which obscures its own ground), favorable weather allows the mariner to leave the symbolic sea and return not to the ground as such, but to follow the river back up to its source. This is why Heidegger says that the more thoughtful ones (the rivers as symbols for poets) like to remain near the source and almost seem to flow backwards.¹⁰⁴ The poets, the more thoughtful ones, are attuned to the source understandingly. But they do not merely think the source, but also think away from the source. Hölderlin says that the ‘source’ is in the east (ancient Greece) and, thus, the source is in that which is foreign to the Germans (rather, of Western man at the end of the history of western metaphysics). But in thinking away from the source, the poet thinks to that place wherein he is or, rather, may become at home; his historical location granted by his understanding of Being.

What the poet is able to do, when properly attuned and (relatively) free of the dominance of the way that Being has been framed as beingness, is to both understand the beings which have become familiar to us as unfamiliar in the sense that they are, in their

¹⁰⁴ Heidegger 1996: 143.

origin, determined by an understanding of Being wherein we are no longer at home (i.e. it fails to have significance for us) and to also think of the question “how may we make ourselves at home?” (i.e. What is the meaning of Being? How may we find Being meaningful?).¹⁰⁵

(8) *The Drifting Clouds.*

Heidegger calls the cloud “a hill of the heavens.”¹⁰⁶ A hill is a mound of earth. As we have seen in the last chapter, earth is φύσις, that which brings itself into emergence and maintains itself in that appearance within its limit and end. But we are not told that the cloud is merely earth, i.e. that it is the self-emergent within the emerging-abiding sway in some indeterminate manner. Rather we are told that the cloud, as earth, is the “hill of the heavens.” What could possibly serve as the earth of the heavens? The answer does not immediately present itself. We will have to see what else Heidegger has to say about the cloud, if we are to discover precisely what the earth of the heavens might be.

The “cloud hovers between the peaks of the Alps, and covers the mountain ravines, down into whose unlit depths plunges the brightening ray of light.”¹⁰⁷ We should begin with the most obvious symbol here: the ravine. A ravine is an abyss. While actual ravines, obviously, have ground at the bottom, Heidegger is trying to draw our

¹⁰⁵ In Chapter 5 we will return to this discussion in a more technical fashion. There we will analyze attunement and the possibilities of our attunement, or lack thereof, in relation to the last god.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger 2000a: 37.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

attention to his conception of the abyssal nature of an ungrounded understanding of Being.

The word for abyss – *Abgrund* – originally means the soil and ground towards which, because it is undermost, a thing tends downward. But...we shall think of the *Ab-* as the complete absence of the ground. The ground is the soil in which to strike root and to stand. The age for which the ground fails to come, hangs in an abyss.¹⁰⁸

To avoid confusion, we use Heidegger's second use of the word "abyss," understood as the complete absence of ground, we will use the word *ab-ground*. The ravine is an ab-ground. As an ab-ground, it becomes clear that the cloud only appears when our understanding of Being, or perhaps of a location, is not grounded. Beings are given a proximal ground when they are understood as having the being that they have in virtue of a space opened for them by a location. But locations themselves are in need of grounding.

Locations, however, are not beings. They are not φύσει ὄντα, they are not beings at all. They are, in fact, worlds and, consequently, are horizons opened beneath the sky. As worlds, locations are in fact the skies or heavens for the beings that are freed for the spaces opened up by the locations. Thus, locations are "of the heavens."

Locations, however, are worlds in the ontological existentiell sense. They are not beings, but they have a kind of φύσις of their own. Locations emerge into appearance not because we will them, but because we are called to them in response to whatever historical interests or needs spawned them. In this sense, the historical interest or need gives an end that opens up a space for those beings that can address this historical interest

¹⁰⁸ Heidegger 1971b: 90.

or need. We do not simply decide what satisfies such interests or needs, rather once the interest or need has gripped us, there are some possible beings or ways of being that will satisfy these interests or meet these needs, and some that simply will not. Thus, locations do not emerge through mere human decision, but emerge into appearance according to their own nature and ἀρχή. Thus, we find that locations are both of the heavens (sky) and of the earth (φύσις). Locations are the “clouds,” the “hills of the heavens.”

Heidegger does not merely say *clouds*, but the *drifting* clouds. The reason that the clouds are drifting should, by now, be obvious. Locations are ultimately grounded in a decision on Being, on openness to and an understanding of Being. But in the nighttime of Being, when Being is forgotten and is not openly understood, locations lack a ground. In lacking a ground, in standing above an ab-ground, locations, misunderstood as “domains,” drift with the shifting forces of the “weather.” I.e. locations become understood merely instrumentally and shift with the interests that drive them.

But Heidegger also says that “the cloud points upward toward gaiety.”¹⁰⁹ The cloud (location) indicates an understanding of being-some-way and that way of being itself points back to an understanding of Being as such. If we are attuned to the silvery glow that lines the clouds, then we are pointed towards the source of light that illuminates the outline of the cloud. That is, insofar as the nature and meaningfulness of the location becomes apparent to us, we are directed towards the source of this illumination. We may

¹⁰⁹ Heidegger 2000a: 37.

then seek the ground that grounds the yet ungrounded (because its grounds have been covered over and forgotten, if they were ever explicitly understood at all) location.

However, clouds may also serve to obscure our ability to see the sun. While a cloud, in the sunlight, glows, it also casts a shadow. In this shadow, what is seen as highest is not that which illuminates the glowing cloud, but rather the glowing cloud itself. In being involved in spaces opened by locations, it is often difficult to see beyond the cloud (location) to see the sun (understanding of Being as such) that opens the space for this localized field of meaning.

(9) *The Blue Depth of Ether.*

Finally, under the heading of “sky,” Heidegger names the “blue depth of the ether.”¹¹⁰ What is aether? “Aether” is the name for the father of light and the all-enlivening, lightening air. Aether plays this dual role. It is both the name for the “father of light,” the “high one,” the highest of gods and the grounded horizon of our understanding of Being in general, hence the locations open to us, the spaces that locations make possible, and the beings that are freed for spaces, that is opened by the “high one.” We will investigate gods, including father Aether, in the next chapter. So, for now, we will briefly look at aether as the grounded horizon of our understanding of Being in general.

Heidegger calls the coming to presence and remaining in the presence of the light of an openness to and understanding of Being, especially the light of day, the “holy.”

¹¹⁰ Heidegger 1971b: 147.

The “holy” names the meaningful yoke within which all locations are grounded and, thus, those spaces and beings for which they serve as grounds are grounded, and not merely proximally so. If the light of day is the holy, then the dusk of day ought to be understood as the ‘darkening’ of the holy. The darkening of the holy would only occur when the god’s presence begins to lose its sway and the onset of the world’s night has begun.

Heidegger also calls the “element” of the holy “ether” or “æther” (Αἰθήρ). “The ether ... in which alone the gods are gods, is their godhead. The element of this ether, that within which even the godhead itself is still present, is the holy.”¹¹¹ Heidegger, in a sense, understands “aether” both classically and metaphorically. Aether is the unchanging “medium” through which all change of the “elements” is made possible. In the 19th century, when Hölderlin wrote the poetry that Heidegger has in his idiomatic way assimilated, ether was in particular taken to be the medium through which light travels. In a sense to be explained shortly, Heidegger takes up both the more general and the more specific use of the term “aether.”

Let’s take the latter use, of aether as the medium in which light travels. Heidegger, of course, is not particularly interested in reproducing an antiquated or developing a new wave or particle theory of light. Light, in Heidegger’s metaphorical use, is used much in the way that we use the term when we talk about “enlightenment.” Often times when we talk about someone’s either coming to have a piece of knowledge or coming to understand something even in a non-thematic way, we say that she has become enlightened about whatever it is that she has come to know or understand. But

¹¹¹ Heidegger 1971b: 92.

what we become enlightened about is not beings, understood as objects of knowledge, but rather about the space in which worlds may be opened as meaningful and the ground that can ground these locations.¹¹²

Whatever the medium of “aether” is carries the “reflected light” from the “sun” to the “moon.” Thus, it becomes clear that whatever “aether” is, it grants things and beings their emergence into appearance and meaning. But given that Heidegger doesn’t think of the Being as a being that precedes a pre-thematic understanding of the being of beings (or as a being at all), perhaps it isn’t quite right to call “aether” a medium in the classic sense of the word. This might at first seem like a reasonable response, however, something can be a medium only as a passage, whether actual or potentially so. Aether, as the passage of understanding, is that which first allows that which comes to be and passes to be as a coming to be, as a having not been, as a passing away, and so on. In this way, ether is most completely a medium, though there is nothing that exists prior to its passage through the medium of ether nor is there anything that exists after everything has passed through the ether.

At this point it becomes clear that the seemingly more specific use of “aether” as that through which light passes is on Heidegger’s interpretation actually the more general use of “ether.” Time, history, and various other non-entities, along with beings as such and as a whole, pass through the ether, understood as the medium of light. The more general seeming use is actually the more specific use of “aether” and merely indicates that aether is that through which beings as a whole come to pass into being. Aether

¹¹² As we will see in Chapter 5, this ground is the ungrounded ground.

names the “all-enlivening, lightening air.” The aether, as the all-enlivening, lightening air, determines the godhead (i.e. godhood) of the gods. It determines the end of locations. It is within the aether that the gods “dwell.” “The ether, however, in which alone the gods are gods, is their godhead.”¹¹³ As the lightening world, the world of aether, is the enclosure of the gods, “the element of this ether, that within which even the godhead itself is still present, is the holy.”¹¹⁴ The aether is, thus, the holy.

After having looked at each aspect of sky that Heidegger laid out in his poetic definition, it becomes apparent precisely why the earth and sky are in strife with one another. Earth, as φύσις, is the necessity of a being as the being that it is. But sky grants locations. Locations open spaces for beings. Spaces allow beings to emerge into their possibilities.

The vaulting path of the sun determines an understanding of Being and opens up the possibility for understanding ourselves, beings, and our world according to an owned understanding of Being. This understanding is not eternal and unchanging, but is determined by our historical, temporal, and changing understanding of Being in its various modes and incarnations.

The course of the changing moon determines the forgottenness of Being and the dominance of beings. This understanding both covers over the understanding of Being,

¹¹³ Heidegger 1971b: 92.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

such that we may not have an understanding of ourselves, beings, or our world according to their ends and limits.

The year's seasons and their changes specifically refers to our understanding of beings. Do we understand them in the full brightness, liveliness, and warmth of the sunny Summer or in the dark, dead, and cold of winter? I.e. do we understand beings in their being? Do we understand things as having their "time"? As being appropriate or inappropriate now? As ascending towards their end or as declining towards their dissolution?

The brightening light of day bestows upon beings the fullness of their meaning. As lighted by the meaningfulness of the sun, of Being, they shine forth in the fullness of their meaning. In the dusk of day, beings begin to lose the fullness of their radiance and move towards the darkness and disconnectedness of night.

The gloom and glow of night discloses the beingness of beings, but fails to disclose Being as their ground. As such, beings in the night of Being have a kind of glow, but one which fails to disclose the background of meaningfulness that grants these beings the being that they have. Beings become understood as isolable and as containing meaning in themselves or in some higher being, but never in Being.

In the inclement weather, the domination of a fixed understanding of Being as grounded in a being, stands in the way of a proper relation to and understanding of Being as such. This understanding leads to an unceasing business in investigating beings. As we near the final stages of the understanding of Being as the beingness of beings, the

understanding of Being becomes dismissed as a pseudo-question and the involvement in beings becomes so dominant as to close off all questioning about Being as such.

But in the final stage of the history of metaphysics in the West, when nihilism reaches its end, the complete meaninglessness of the world alleviates all distress and need for an investigation into the meaning of Being. Our world is, after all, meaningless as it is in itself. It is this very meaninglessness that grants the clemency of favorable weather such that we may recognize the most distressful distress: the total lack of distress. In response to this, we may then ask the question: what is the meaning of this lack of distress? The world is meaningless as such. But *why?* It is this simple question that may, in turn, lead us back to the question of the meaning of Being as such.

As we turn our attention towards Being, we are able to find the backgrounds of various “locations” that open up the meaning of “spaces” for beings. In particular, in asking the question “Why?” we turn our attention to the background that opens up the space for this very questioning, the questioning of the meaning of Being as such. This ‘location’ itself obscures our investigation of the meaning of Being as such, though it, at the same time, points us in the right direction.

Finally, the blue depth of aether, that the world is meaningfully charged and that this meaningful charge indicates some answer to the deepest question, the question “Why?” directs us towards the meaning of Being itself. It does not direct us towards some unchanging and eternal answer, as we see in the discussions of the sun, the moon, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, and the drifting clouds. It, rather, directs us towards the possibilities of

understanding Being, hence of understanding the ground of our understanding of Being (i.e. earth), it's historical possibilities that have been (but are no longer), the possibilities that we may open up in investigating the question of the meaning of Being as such, and the current free space of possibilities that are open to us given our current understanding of Being. It is in precisely this continual strife between the necessity of the ground of our understanding of Being and the horizon of the possibilities for Being that we find the strife between earth and sky.

CHAPTER 4

GODS

The fourfold is made up of two pairs. We have already looked at the pair of the strife-relation, earth and sky, and have seen that the sky has a special relationship with the member of the fourfold that Heidegger calls “gods.” The “sky” or “heavens” is the element in which the gods first may become gods. The second pair that makes up the fourfold is gods and mortals. Gods and mortals stand in a confrontation-relation with one another. Mortals confront their gods. Before we can get clear about what it is for mortals to confront their gods, we must begin by getting clear about what gods and mortals are. In this chapter, we will investigate the former; i.e. we will look at Heidegger’s conception of gods. As with each member of the fourfold, Heidegger gives us two poetic definitions which differ from one another only slightly. However, the variation here is more notable than that of the poetic definitions that we have seen thus far; i.e. of either earth or sky. Heidegger’s poetic definitions of gods (here called “divinities”) are as follows:

The divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead. Out of the holy sway of the godhead, the god appears in his presence or withdraws into his concealment.¹¹⁵

The divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead. Out of the hidden sway of the divinities the god emerges as what he is, which removes him from any comparison with beings that are present.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Heidegger 1971b: 147-148.

¹¹⁶ Heidegger 1971b: 176.

One of the greatest appeals of investigating Heidegger's discussion of gods is the challenge of trying to make any real interpretive sense of them at all. As Julian Young notes, "the element of the fourfold that is most difficult to understand is 'the gods,' *die Göttlichen*, literally 'the godly ones.'"¹¹⁷ Little in the way of useful interpretive work has been put forward that attempts to make sense of everything that Heidegger says about gods. This is also the aspect of the fourfold that has led many of Heidegger's interpreters to casually dismiss Heidegger's later work as more "mysticism" than philosophy. In light of his continual discussion of gods, perhaps these interpreters are right to dismiss Heidegger's later work as "mysticism." I, however, am of the mind that, if we do not bother to figure out what it is that Heidegger is trying to get at through his discussion of gods, that we cannot make any definitive judgment about Heidegger's later work, including the judgment as to whether it is "mysticism" rather than philosophy. In any event, it takes little time in reading Heidegger's later works to see that gods are perhaps the key to understanding the fourfold as a whole.

According to Young, "gods" are a somewhat enriched version of heroes and heritage as they were worked out in *Being and Time*.

Heroes are, in a word, "role" or – much better – "life" models. The gods of the later Heidegger are, I suggest, the reappearance of *Being and Time*'s heroes, rethought in a deeper and richer way. ... As members of a given community, and whether we heed their inspiring example or not, we live our lives in the light of our gods.¹¹⁸

Young's interpretation makes one of the more interesting aspects of the gods completely mysterious – namely that the gods and their manifestness are mysterious. In

¹¹⁷ Young 2006: 374.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.: 374-375.

Poetically Man Dwells... Heidegger says of the god that serves as the measure for the poet:

The god, however, is unknown, and he is the measure nonetheless. Not only this, but the god who remains unknown, must by showing *himself* as the one he is, appear as the one who remains unknown. God's *manifestness* – not only he himself – is mysterious.¹¹⁹

We have already indicated that every location requires a measure, a determination of what it is to be within the space opened up by the location. Here Heidegger is specifically referring to the god of poetry. By “poetry” Heidegger does not mean the writing or speaking of verse according to the conventions of the domain of what we call “poetry.” Rather, by “poetry” Heidegger means ποιήσις; i.e. bringing-forth in the sense of occasioning.¹²⁰ Given these clarifications, it is unclear to me how one can reasonably interpret gods as individual or even generalized heroes, role models, or life models.

It may be a factual possibility that some heroes remain unknown to us. We may not know precisely who it is that first began a practice. But this certainly need not be so. A generalized hero need not refer to a specific person any more than the “average voter” does, but why this should be mysterious is itself mysterious. Thus, the explanation as to why the gods should be mysterious is completely lacking on Young's interpretation.

One might, however, respond that Heidegger only says that the god of poetry is mysterious. This is, in a sense, correct. But it misses the fact that here Heidegger is talking about the god of ποιήσις; the god of bringing-forth in the sense of occasioning. Every instance in which Heidegger talks about gods is an instance in which he talks about

¹¹⁹ Heidegger 1971b: 220.

¹²⁰ See Chapter 2.

the relevant god as a god of a particular location or mode of revealing. Thus, it becomes apparent that all gods are determined by ποιήσις, by a mode of revealing.

Finally, we have already seen the key objection to Young's interpretation of gods in our responses to his interpretation of earth and of sky. Namely, here Young's interpretation of gods makes them into beings; i.e. his interpretation is ontic, not ontological. Each and every member of the fourfold must be understood as an existential-ontological structure of Being. While Young's analysis of Heidegger's gods is simple, clear, and indicates that what Heidegger has in mind in a way that is simple, straight-forward, and easily accessible, it is nevertheless mistaken.

Dreyfus's analysis of gods is similar to Young's and ultimately fails for similar reasons. Dreyfus says:

Heidegger also offers a cultural version of an exemplar or hero. Specific things, such as the Greek temple, have served as cultural exemplars or paradigms, which Heidegger calls gods, collecting together scattered practices and thereby setting up and stabilizing a differentiated meaningful world.¹²¹

Dreyfus is here, understandably, misled by Heidegger's discussion of the Greek temple in *On the Origin of the Work of Art*. There, like his discussion of a bridge in *Building Dwelling Thinking*, Heidegger is using a particular thing as a sign that indicates a particular confluence of the fourfold that symbolizes the essential togetherness of the fourfold in what Heidegger calls the "fouring" of the fourfold.

¹²¹ Dreyfus 1991: 339.

In *What Are Poets For?* Heidegger says that “Language is the precinct (*templum*), that is, the House of Being.”¹²² The Latin word “templum” is also translated as “temple.” Heidegger understands language in its most originary form as ποιήσις. Heidegger’s discussion of the Greek temple in *On the Origin of the Work of Art* plays the dual role of indicating the members of the fourfold *and* in indicating a particular location that opens spaces for practices, beings, and beliefs, which is determined by that location. It is not the Greek temple that is the god of the temple, but, as Heidegger says, “the god is present in the temple,”¹²³ not that the god is present *as the temple*.

It is the location that opens the space in which the temple, the physically present structure, can be *as a temple*. It is not the temple itself as some kind of cultural exemplar that first collects scattered practices, but rather that a location opens a space in which the practices (including the practices of building such structures and understanding them as holy places) become possible as the meaningful practices that they are.

Of course, our recurring objection to Young’s interpretation also holds for Dreyfus’ interpretation. The temple – even if merely abstractly thought as an exemplar – is a being; i.e. the gods are interpreted ontically. But all of the members of the fourfold must be interpreted ontologico-existentially. Leaving aside these interpretations of Heidegger’s god that we have rejected, let us return to our positive investigation of gods.

The centrality of the gods to Heidegger’s later thought can be seen in his change of terms between his transitional middle period and his fully developed later thought.

¹²² Heidegger 1971b: 129.

¹²³ Heidegger 1971b: 40.

When the fourfold first appeared, Heidegger called its aspects earth, world, God, and human beings. But by the time Heidegger's thought on the fourfold had become fully developed, he called the aspects of the fourfold earth, sky, gods, and mortals. "Earth" was the only term that remained unchanged, so let's briefly look at the other three.

Heidegger's use of the term *world* had been well established and had been well known to his readers since the publication of *Being and Time*. One important reason for Heidegger's change in terminology here is almost certain to escape the English-speaking reader, if he does not also know a little German. The German word that is translated, quite properly, as "sky" is *Himmel*. *Himmel* does in fact mean sky, but it also means "heaven." The change from *world* to *sky* is meant both to alert Heidegger's reader to the fact that he is talking about a changing horizon (of possibilities), but also to alert his reader that he is talking about a horizon that is the "house" of a god or gods. As we will see shortly, Heidegger's talk of gods is, while remaining true to his view in *Being and Time*, a reaction to a challenge that he sees put forth by Nietzsche as a result of Nietzsche's analysis of the history of metaphysics in the West – a history that Nietzsche sees as guided by nihilism; i.e. the logic of decline.

The second change in Heidegger's terminology that shows the importance of the gods is the change from *god* in his middle works — e.g. *On the Origin of the Work of Art*, *Mindfulness*, and *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* — to *gods* in his later works — e.g. *Building Dwelling Thinking*, *The Thing*. This is a result of Heidegger's recognition that there are multiple horizons (worlds, in the sense of *world* in *Being and Time*), not simply the highest horizon, each of which is the "house of," is determined by,

its own god. This is not something that Heidegger missed in *Being and Time*, but rather that Heidegger became increasingly aware his readers had missed in reading *Being and Time*. Though even after Heidegger had changed from speaking of “god” to speaking instead of “gods,” he nevertheless retains a recognition of the difference between the highest god and other gods. (In fact, in his analysis of Hölderlin’s poem *Homecoming/To Kindred Ones*, Heidegger only calls the highest god a god and calls the other gods “angels,” following Hölderlin’s convention.)

Finally, the change from “human beings” to “mortals” is obviously meant to indicate that it is against the gods that this aspect of the fourfold is to be understood. Mortals are not to be understood in a biological sense, but as an ontological-existential structure. We have seen in the previous two chapters that earth and sky stand in a strife-relation to one another. The strife-relationship is the confrontation of necessity (earth, φύσις) and possibility (world, sky). But in the other dichotomy of the fourfold we find that the gods and mortals stand in a confrontation-relation towards one another.¹²⁴ To call human beings “mortals” allows us to see that human beings, as mortals, have always measured themselves “with and against something heavenly.”¹²⁵

The question that Heidegger’s gods are meant to answer is determined by the nature of this measuring. When we take our analysis of earth and sky together, we find that every location has some measure that determines what may arise as a being within a space. The measure is determined by the τέλος (end) of the location. If our interest is in

¹²⁴ I’ve resisted calling it a confrontational-relation, since that sounds as though it is a relationship in which each side is hostile to the other. But the relation between mortals and gods ought not to be understood in this way.

¹²⁵ Heidegger 1971b: 218.

enjoyment, then the local measure for things showing up as the beings that they are as either appropriate or inappropriate is whether or not they appear as the enjoyable. E.g. enjoyableness becomes the measure. A being shows up to us as natural, if it appears as a self-emergent being. Otherwise, it shows up to us as an artifact (τέχνη ὄντα).

Rather than take on an investigation of Heidegger's gods directly, an indirect route will better help illuminate Heidegger's thought. Namely, we ought to begin by looking at the thinker who posed the question to which Heidegger's gods are meant to be a response, namely, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's question is the result of his thought about the history of two interrelated phenomena that have determined the history of Western thought since ancient times. The first is Platonism. The second is the historical development of nihilism. The latter, Nietzsche thinks, is a necessary consequence of the former. As my goal is not specifically to do an analysis of Plato, Kant, Nietzsche, or Nietzsche's analysis of Plato or Kant as such, I will merely sketch an outline of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's history of metaphysics in the West. Whether or not Heidegger or Nietzsche properly interpret their philosophical predecessors is not currently relevant, but how Heidegger understands Nietzsche's challenge is.

The history of Platonism and, consequently, nihilism begins with Plato's separating the supersensuous or transcendental world from the sensuous or empirical world. The world, on Plato's view becomes one of beings, concrete individuals, and the supersensuous Forms. Much as Antiphon had believed that material is ontologically prior to apparent beings because the former is constantly present throughout change,

according to Platonism, the Forms are more real than empirically accessible beings, because the empirically accessible is temporal, changing, inconstant, essentially the Heraclitean flux. But that which is in this flux is given order by the imposition of Forms. The Forms are that which is constant and without change. That is to say that this or that being may come to conform to this or that Form and, in doing so, it is more beingful insofar as it is participating in the eternal, the constantly present, Form. The Platonic “sun,” the “Form of the Good” (ἀγαθόν) is the highest Form or, in Nietzsche’s interpretation, the highest value. The Form of the Good is the highest *being* because it determines now and forever what it is to be good and anything conforming to a Form (including the Forms themselves) must be a good example of the relevant Form and, consequently, must conform to the Form of the Good. The Form of the Good is the most constantly present – constantly present in all beings, including the Forms themselves – of all beings. It is, thus, the ‘highest’ being; it has ontological priority over all other beings and is that being which is most real; it is the source of all beings.

The analogy, on this interpretation of Platonism, between the sun and the Form of the Good is clear. It is only in a light that our eyes are capable of functioning and then only if they are acclimated to the light. Even where our eyes are within an area illuminated by the light, we are incapable of seeing that which remains in total darkness. For example, Annelein might be standing in a field near a cave on a sunny day. Her eyes work just fine and she can see whatever the sun illuminates, but she cannot see that which remains veiled in darkness within the cave. When something begins to exit the cave, but is still in an area near the mouth of the cave that is dimly lit, Annelein cannot quite see

what the object is. She may make a guess, but there is no guarantee that she hasn't mistaken the thing for something that it is not. It is only when the bear pokes its head into the light that she can see clearly that there is a bear in the cave.

In much the same way, it is only when our minds (alternately: souls) are adjusted to the Form of the Good that we can understand beings in their being (which is determined by their participation in higher beings; i.e. the Forms) clearly. If we take Nietzsche's value talk seriously, then we can think of the Form of the Good as the highest value (a being) that grants value (meaningfulness, intelligibility) to all lower beings insofar as they conform to or participate in the Form of the Good itself. It is only because this highest value, the Form of the Good, produces a yoke under which things appear as meaningful, having a proper role, or value, that our mind's eye can discern them as such. And where our knowledge of the Good is lacking, then we can at best intellectually perceive a thing's meaning, role, or value unclearly and, perhaps, wrongly; at worst we cannot perceive it at all. It is only in the "light" of the Form of the Good that the meaningfulness, the role, or the value of a thing can be clearly seen.

Heidegger claims that it is in just this kind of misinterpretation of Plato that Western metaphysics began. (And this is precisely why Heidegger says that Plato was no Platonist). According to Heidegger, Plato still understands, however unclearly, ἀγαθόν as Being, which holds sway over all beings. But Plato does not understand ἀγαθόν as a being at all, let alone a "highest" being. Nietzsche, on the other hand, understands the structure of Platonism as the structure in which we find that no apparent, and thus inconstant, being contains its being in itself. For their being, these inconstant beings

must refer to an ontologically “higher” (prior) being that grants them their being. Insofar as Plato held that no being in the sensuous could do this, he posited a supersensuous world that contained the supersensuous Forms. Here Nietzsche understands the Forms (loosely) as concepts. The Forms, as non-temporal beings, are not subject to change and are, consequently, constantly present. But Nietzsche believed that the Forms themselves were insufficient to ground their own being. The Forms are only present where this or that form is applicable. Thus, they are in one manner not constantly present; e.g. the Form of beauty is not present in all presence. Thus, there must be some Form that is constantly present in the deeper sense of being constantly present in all presence; i.e. a being that requires no further grounding in the deepest sense of being ontologically dependent on no being other than itself for its being.

Platonism is thus first established. A gap is produced between the sensuous realm of the inconstant beings of the empirically accessible world and the supersensuous and transcendental realm of the Forms. Unlike the Aristotelian view that we looked at in the second chapter, here a “Form” is not an aspect of a being determining how it emerges into presence according to its end and limit, but is something that has its existence independently of sensuous beings. It is not merely the separating the world into the sensuous and the supersensuous realms that is most distinctive of Platonism, but rather with the positing of a being or beings in the supersensuous realm that are responsible for the meaningfulness, intelligibility, roles, and value of the beings that appear to us in the sensuous world. I.e. Antiphon’s view has been inverted. But not merely inverted: the

Forms are not only made ontologically prior to matter, but the Forms do not even rely on matter for their being.

The true world, the supersensuous world, is one that is, in a sense, attainable for the wise and virtuous man on this view. Namely, through reflection on the Forms, especially on the highest Form, the Form of the Good, the philosophical thinker can come to have insight into the reality of things; i.e. one can come to be acquainted with the Forms themselves as the measure of things and the Form of the Good as the measure of all beings (including the Forms themselves). To be virtuous, as one must be to come to know the highest being, one must come out of Plato's allegorical cave and deny the being in itself of the sensuous world in favor of the bright light of the true world of the Forms.

While I am unconvinced that Nietzsche is so kind to Plato, Heidegger simply notes that Plato's view is not yet Platonism. That is to say that the real world is not "ideal" or unattainable; the philosophical thinker can enter into a direct relationship with the supersensuous world of the Forms through philosophical contemplation.

One might think that Nietzsche *does* think that this stage of Platonism must fail and fail precisely because even the philosophical thinker cannot become directly acquainted with the real world of the Forms, thought in this sense. That is to say that reflection only takes us so far. Reflection cannot make the meaningfulness of the world fully intelligible, since the world does not (at least one might think on Nietzsche's view) have any inherent meaningfulness. Rather than face the deep inherent meaninglessness of the world, a supersensuous world of ideal Forms is posited. The distinction between the stage of Plato and that of the Christian worldview is precisely that Plato appears to

think that the meaningfulness is simply a fact that can be discerned by thinking about the meaningfulness of the world in which we live as determined by the supersensuous Forms, while the Christian worldview genuinely breaks the sensuous and supersensuous world into two worlds.

It is the introduction of the Christian worldview that raises Platonism to the stage of a nihilistic doctrine. Nietzsche specifically names Christianity as the second stage in the history of nihilism. However, this identification is misleading. Any form of thought that has the same relevant structure as Christianity is an instance of the type that is indicated by Nietzsche's description (e.g. all of the religions of the god of Abraham).

In this stage, the Form of the Good is replaced by some highest being, usually thought of as an agent (or as being somehow analogously understood as an agent). The Christian theologians' god is, of course, the paradigmatic example of such a being. For the sake of brevity, I will simply talk as though this is the only example and use the usual Christian convention of referring to their god as Yahweh.

The earthly realm, i.e. the sensuous realm, and the true world, the supersensuous world, i.e. the world as Yahweh perceives it, become sharply divided. The empirical world is deemed the world of the created. I.e. τέχνη takes center stage in our understanding of the beingness of beings. Whereas in ancient Greek thought we found both φύσει ὄντα and τέχνη ὄντα, our understanding changed such that all beings, save for Yahweh himself, passed over into being τέχνη ὄντα not in the original Greek sense, but in the Roman sense of produced beings. A layered account was left over, to be sure. The principle of artifacts, hammers as hammers and shoes as shoes, is brought about

through human production. And human beings do still have their principle internal to them in a sense – they are after all self-emergent beings. But human beings’ nature is itself not absolutely internal to human beings; it is a contingent fact that human beings have the nature that they do. Human nature (like all nature) is the product of Yahweh’s making is so. Yahweh alone is understood as that being that unconditionally has its principle internal to itself.

It is at this stage that we first genuinely come to understand nature not as φύσις, but technologically. That is, all beings pass over into being understood not as the self-emergent, but as that which is emergent as the production of the activity of an ontologically ‘higher’ (i.e. prior) being, with the exception of that being that is itself self-caused. This is why (in agreement with Nietzsche) Heidegger says that “the Judeo-Christian God is not the divinization of just any particular cause in a causation, but is the divinization of “being-a-cause” as such, that is, the divinization of the ground of explanatory representation in general.”¹²⁶ Yahweh is not any particular cause or power made into an ontologically ‘highest’ (most primordial) being, but is the god that stands as the ground and source of all causality (and causal chains) as such; i.e. Yahweh is the god of production.

This change, however, was not the only change. Whereas the world of the Forms was directly accessible through philosophical reflection, because they were present in all beings, the world of heaven was understood as genuinely separate from our world. The reason for this schism is fairly obvious. Whereas the Forms must be present in all beings

¹²⁶ Heidegger 2006: 212.

for them to appear, once our understanding of beings passes over into the Christian understanding of beings, this has changed. Instead of Yahweh being present in all beings, now Yahweh is merely the producer of those beings that are present. I.e. we no longer have something necessarily present in present beings, only something that is necessary for such beings as a cause. Without the presence of the original cause, we do not have direct access to it, but must infer its existence from its products.

At this stage, the highest values and the source of their value have already been devalued or, as Nietzsche would put it, have devalued themselves. In Plato's own view, knowledge of the true world and of the source of meaningfulness (etc.) for the true and, consequently, apparent world could be gained through contemplation of the Forms which are present in all beings. But now the true world is a world "beyond" our reach, which must be inferred not from beings as such, but merely from their being as the produced, as artifacts. In this "earthly" life, we cannot have direct access to the true world, but can only indirectly, perhaps, come to have some knowledge of it through the arguments of reason.

However, this way to knowledge is problematic. The proofs of God's existence, at best, are extremely problematic and, at worst, fail miserably. In fact, probably the most successful proof in the literature is the argument that the existence of evil is inconsistent with the existence of the theologians' God (i.e. God understood as being omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent). If we buy Nietzsche's story about the historical rise of the Judeo-Christian god, then this is an important objection. It is easy enough to deny any one of Yahweh's three classical attributes and, thus, to defeat the

argument from evil, but this undermines the reason that anyone believed in this god in the first place. Namely, Nietzsche understands Yahweh as having arisen in response to a psychological need of the oppressed persons of Judea. The religion then grew in popularity with the oppressed and helpless lower class of Rome. Yahweh was just the benevolent father figure that these oppressed persons needed to feel as though all of their suffering was justified (they would be rewarded in the afterlife in heaven) and that those who harmed them would be punished (eternally in the blazing fires of Hell). Without this guarantee, the motivation for belief in this god was lacking. If this god of causality-as-such was not a benevolent creator, then he failed to solve the need for a justification for suffering. The success of such an argument does undermine the grounds of many of the most important values that flow from the benevolent creator god. I.e. the highest values devalue themselves and what we are left with is a god that is stripped down to his Judeo-Christian Platonic core as the divinization of being-a-cause as such. But such an argument serves as no objection to Yahweh, if we merely understand him in terms of his being-a-cause of all beings.

Nietzsche, whose “madman” famously said that God is dead, need not rely on the success of an argument like the problem of evil to show that we ought not believe in God. Rather, Nietzsche is able to claim that our intellectual conscience, which he holds is a consequence of the highest values that are supposed to follow from Christianity itself (e.g. honesty, truthfulness, impartiality, simplicity, and humility) demand that we reject a belief in such a God. I.e. if we look at the facts, there is insufficient evidence for the existence of such a God and everything that God is supposed to explain can be explained

in a simpler, less “otherworldly,” fashion. The “Big Bang” does just fine and, while it itself is hardly lacking in mysteriousness, it does not require us to posit anything beyond the realm of science; i.e. it allows us to remain within a discussion of causality in the apparent world and does not force us to posit another transcendent world or an all-powerful agent that rules over it (and us).

If there is no guarantee of the existence of God, then there is no guarantee of the transcendent values that are supposed to flow from God’s existence. In fact, insofar as φύσει ὄντα had lost their being φύσει ὄντα as such and had become a kind of τέχνη ὄντα, i.e. the produced, there is no guarantee that beings have a nature as such at all. If there is no producer, then nature (which is understood as a production of the producer god) itself loses its meaning. It is reduced to mere stuff that has no nature or being as such, but is in need of a producer to produce a meaning or being for it. If we do not have intellectually respectable grounds for believing in the existence of God, then we do not have intellectually respectable grounds for believing that the meaningfulness, roles, or values justified by the true (transcendent) world are justified. We do not have intellectually respectable grounds for believing in the existence of God. So, we do not have intellectually respectable grounds for believing that the meaningfulness, roles, or values justified by the true world are justified.

One might think that the next step ought to be to simply drop the whole idea of Yahweh, god, gods, or anything that plays the same role, but this is not what happened. Rather, Kant (on Nietzsche’s reading of Kant) arrives and as a consequence of Kantian thought “The supersensuous is now a postulate of practical reason; even outside the scope

of all experience and demonstration it is demanded as what is necessarily existent, in order to salvage adequate grounds for the lawfulness of reason.”¹²⁷ Because a produced world, whose meaningfulness is imposed on it by the producer, makes no sense without a producer, reason demands that we postulate such a producer. There is no guarantee that the world does make sense, that it is lawful and ordered, but the empirical world appears to us as ordered, so reason demands order. So, as a postulate of practical reason, though we can have no direct proof of the existence of Yahweh as the god of production, we nevertheless posit the existence of such a god.

A simpler argument related to the kind of argument that Kant has in mind can be seen in the moral argument for the existence of God.¹²⁸ The argument is fairly simple: 1) If God does not exist, then objective moral facts do not exist. 2) Objective moral facts do exist. 3) Therefore, God exists.

To put the argument into a Kantian formulation: 1) The condition of the possibility of the existence of objective moral facts is the existence of a producer god. 2) Objective moral facts are actual. 3) So, objective moral facts are possible. 4) Thus, it is a necessary consequence of there being objective moral facts that a producer god exists.

But this argument is slightly, but importantly, different than what the Kantian has in mind at this point. Namely, no reason is given for accepting the second premise (in either formulation of the argument). But that the Platonic structure remains in place for this argument is made crystal clear by the first premise. Objective moral facts (or, really,

¹²⁷ Heidegger 1991a: 205.

¹²⁸ See, for example, Ch. 1, §3 in Craig and Sinnott-Armstrong 2004.

any meaning or value facts) rely on a higher source of these values, a “higher being” that produces these values, one that, since the rise of Christianity, has been called “God.”

At the stage that we are at in Nietzsche’s analysis of the history of philosophy in the West, we no longer are justified in demanding 2) as a fact. It is entirely possible that objective moral facts *don’t exist*. We are, however, able to make a similar, but weaker, argument: 1) The condition of the possibility of the existence of objective moral facts is the existence of God. 2) We have good practical reason for acting as though there are objective moral facts. 3) Thus, we have good practical reason for acting as though God exists.

But Kant’s argument, of course, extends further. To make sense of the lawfulness of reason, a real world of things in themselves must be posited. On the usual “two-worlds” reading of Kant,¹²⁹ the condition of the possibility of the lawfulness of reason and human experience requires a noumenal world of things-in-themselves, which are not nor can ever be accessible to human cognition (things-in-themselves remain an unknown x).

This kind of argument breaks the supersensuous world and the sensuous world apart in a whole new way – one that is quite foreign to the distinction that Plato himself had originally posited. Namely, now the sensuous realm is the realm that is knowable, but the supersensuous realm remains as an unknowable realm that is only postulated as

¹²⁹ This is the reading of Kant that Nietzsche accepts, wrongly Heidegger claims, because Nietzsche’s understanding of Kant was based on Schopenhauer’s *mis*interpretation of Kant. Heidegger’s claim is, it seems to me, plausible. Heidegger does not interpret Kant in this way, nor do several contemporary interpreters of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (e.g. Arthur Melnick). Which view of Kant is correct is not relevant to the current discussion. What is relevant is how Heidegger interprets Nietzsche’s interpretation of the history of philosophy.

existing for practical purposes. There is no denial of the existence of the supersensuous realm, but it is “fundamentally the same old sun, but shining through mist and skepticism;”¹³⁰ i.e. it is seen through the skepticism not of denial, but of suspension of assent as a fact, rather than as a mere necessary postulate of practical reason.

The main problem with this stage ought to be obvious. Firstly, our practical requirements are irrelevant in determining the metaphysical truth of things. Even if we need Yahweh to justify objective morality, it does not follow that Yahweh exists. Even if we need a world of thing-in-themselves to guarantee the lawfulness of reason, it does not follow that a world of things-in-themselves exists. Given the evidence, it appears to be far less probable that Yahweh and, consequently, a real world of things-in-themselves (i.e. things as they would be seen by Yahweh without the intermediary of cognition) exists, so one would be unjustified in believing that Yahweh and the true world of things-in-themselves exist or acting as though they exist.

This leads us to the next stage in Nietzsche’s history of philosophy. Heidegger takes the positivism here to be the positivism of Kant’s successors in the German idealism of the mid-1800’s. At this stage of the history of philosophy, it is recognized that belief in Yahweh and the world of things-in-themselves is, in fact, not justified. These beliefs are merely an atavism, a carryover from the Christian dogma that had preceded Kant. The Kantian view ought to be merely about those things which can be known, anything besides this is unjustified speculation which, because it does not admit of demonstration, proof, or rational justification, ought to be purged from Kantian

¹³⁰ Nietzsche 1990: 50.

philosophy altogether. If we purge Yahweh and the supersensuous from Kantian philosophy, as Nietzsche understood it, then neither can be the grounds of morality (duty). If Yahweh fails to serve as the ground of morality, then, as we have seen, the psychological motivation for believing in this god is eliminated. As this god fails to serve any explanatory purpose which is not better served by the imposition of meaning on the world by human cognition itself, Yahweh can be done away with.

The belief in Yahweh and in the supersensuous world, at this point, has no practical import for morality or explanation of the empirical world more generally. Thus, the idea of the supersensuous world is “an idea grown useless, superfluous, *consequently* a refuted idea: let us abolish it!”¹³¹ It is worth noting that Nietzsche does not say that we have refuted the idea of Yahweh or the supersensuous world by showing a demonstration that it is in fact false. Rather, that it is an idea that “has grown useless;” i.e. because it no longer serves as a measure for what is in any domain of human interest, we no longer have reason to accept it and, insofar as it is useless to us in our interests, it should be refuted. Insofar as Yahweh and the supersensuous world no longer determine any being in their being, Yahweh and the supersensuous world are useless to us. Nietzsche has, thus, posited a measure that will determine his own philosophical position (at least on Heidegger’s reading): that which exists is that which is useful to human beings, given their interests. Thus, Heidegger notes that this stage, once we have rejected Yahweh and the supersensuous world, the stage is set for Nietzsche’s own positive philosophical position.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Here the standard for truth – i.e. the highest value, Yahweh, the supersensuous world – has been eliminated. Thus, the being that served as the measure of what is (the created) against which man had compared himself and his world has also been eliminated. But Heidegger notes that the grounds of Nietzsche’s rejection already gives us a new measure on which to judge the truth or reality of things. It is because Yahweh and the supersensuous world are *useless* and *superfluous* to us that they are to be rejected. Thus, Heidegger says “In the shimmering twilight a new standard of measure comes to light: whatever does not in any way at any time involve man’s Dasein can make no claim to be affirmed.”¹³² Man becomes the measure of all beings.

In order to make up for the “death of god” we (meaning human beings) must “become gods” to be worthy of having “killed god.”¹³³ Man becomes the measure of all beings insofar as the technological understanding of beings as the produced remains. But, with the rejection of any “higher being” as the most primordial producer, it is man as representer – not according to reason, but according to the will to power – that becomes the most primordial producer of all that is. Beings exist only as the objects of representation for a representing subject (human beings).

Nietzsche accepts the Kantian point that our world needs order to be intelligible. He, however, does not locate the conditions of the possibility for the intelligibility of our world in reason, but rather in valuation. In order to value things, we must be able to reckon with them and to calculate beings as having such and such a value. But this “such

¹³² Heidegger 1991a: 206.

¹³³ Nietzsche 1974: 181-82 (= §125 *The Madman*).

and such” a value is both relative to the values of other things and is valuable not in itself, but for some definite perspective. Thus, Nietzsche says that the human will necessarily wills the calculable for some perspective. However, we should not be confused and think that the perspectives themselves are something that precedes the value reckoning. Perspectives themselves are taken to be values.

The will of the representing subject both wills the values, but also the conditions of the possibility of those values, namely the perspective for which the values are valuable. In this way, Heidegger notes that in willing according to the will to power, the representing subject is commander (producer) that posits the conditions of valuation that determines the meaning of its own intelligible world and as that which obeys (understands values thus opened up to it from this perspective) the conditions of the values that it itself has posited.¹³⁴

While we cannot be drawn into a full discussion of Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche, we can say a few more general things that will lead to Nietzsche’s challenge. Nietzsche understands the will to power as a will that seeks to posit (produce), secure (obey), and then overcome the conditions that it itself has posited (produce). In essence, the picture is that we determine some way of valuing (or understanding) beings such that we can reckon with them and calculate according to the values produced. But insofar as we succeed, we will to continue to will in the sense of positing conditions of valuation.

What is, however, lacking in Nietzsche’s view is the end point of meaning. Nietzsche himself admits both that the value of life as a whole cannot be calculated and

¹³⁴ Heidegger 1991b: 195.

that the world is only justified as an aesthetic phenomenon. In other words, Nietzsche can explain local meaning. In fact, he can explain meaning in any domain or for any perspective. But he cannot explain why these domains are meaningful. The difficulties of the tradition leading up to Nietzsche are not overcome – they are merely repeated. The delusion of meaning granted by the “higher being” in metaphysics up to Nietzsche is replaced by a delusion of meaning granted by the subject understood according to the will to power. The will posits “domains of discourse,” but the grounds that ground these domains is now placed in subject in such a way that their grounding is missing.

Nietzsche’s challenge is one that he himself does not meet. Nietzsche’s challenge is: how can we affirm (i.e. find valuable) our world without delusions of meaningfulness that are not there? In saying that our world is only ever justified as an aesthetic phenomenon, Nietzsche is saying that we are in need of a delusion – of a ground that itself does not ground – that grounds the meaningfulness of a world that is meaningless until stamped with meaning by the valuation of the will. In other words, Nietzsche can produce localized meaning, meaning in a “domain,” but he cannot explain the meaningfulness of these “domains” to the point where he has a ground that grounds their meaningfulness in a way that is more than merely aesthetic.

Heidegger’s task, in response to Nietzsche, is not to show that there is such a being that satisfies the role that Plato’s Form of the Good or Yahweh were supposed to in the structure of meaning grounded in a transcendent being according to Platonism. In fact, on that point Heidegger and Nietzsche are in complete agreement – there is no such “highest being,” if “being” here is understood as *a* being (understood as present-at-hand

or ready-to-hand). Rather, Heidegger's task is to show that the general structure that Plato took to be necessary for non-delusory and meaningfulness and value that is not merely an aesthetic delusion is not negated or made impossible by Nietzsche's assault on Western metaphysics understood from the perspective of Nietzsche's interpretation of Platonism. In doing so, it will be made clear that Heidegger is not attempting to salvage Platonism or the general structure of Platonism, but only the general structure of meaningfulness on which Plato's own position, as Heidegger understands it, is grounded.

Gods, Heidegger responds, play precisely the kind of role that Plato's Form of the Good was meant to play, but they are not properly understood as beings at all. They are neither ready-to-hand equipment, nor are they present-at-hand beings. Before we attempt to clarify Heidegger's own positive conception of gods, we must first clarify the way in which we normally understand gods and, only then, clarify what Heidegger means by gods.

Heidegger explicitly contrasts his understanding of gods with gods that arise from divinization: "Gods who arise out of divination lack godhood all together."¹³⁵ Gods as we normally understand them only arise as a consequence of divination (and consequently, completely lack "godhood" as Heidegger understands it).

In divinization, the gods are explained as primitive man's poor attempts to deal with an oft frightening, oft wondrous, and oft outright mysterious world. Why does the sea rage? Because Ægir is angry and rages against us. Why do the thunderstorms rage? Because Þórr is fighting with Jotnar or Þursar. Such gods arise as the result of a deep

¹³⁵ Heidegger 2006: 213.

ignorance about the way in which our world operates. If these people had only had the scientific knowledge that we have of such events, then they would have seen clearly that the raging of the sea was merely the result of certain natural causal conditions that determined that the sea must rage. The thunderstorms rage because certain meteorological conditions are present.

Even Yahweh, understood as the producer god,¹³⁶ arises in the same way, but rather than merely being the objectification of any particular cause, Yahweh is the objectification of causality as such. “The Judeo-Christian god is not the divinization of just any cause, but is the divinization of ‘being-a-cause’ as such, that is the divinization of the ground of explanatory representation in general.”¹³⁷ Whereas non-Christian gods were the terminus for the explanatory chain of varied phenomena (Loki’s shaking causing earthquakes, Þórr’s fighting causing lightening, etc.), the Yahweh is presented as the terminus for an explanation of any and all causal action whatsoever. As we have seen, Yahweh is the producer god and the world, understood according to this measure, is the produced which does not produce itself. With Yahweh, all other divinized gods become superfluous and we may, consequently, discard them.

Gods like the Greek gods have become impossible for us, not because they are self-undermining, but because we have been led through the history of Platonism (and Christianity) to hold intellectual conscience and truthfulness as values of great importance. These gods can be empirically eliminated: why does the sea rage? The

¹³⁶ Heidegger is, here, ignoring the ethical aspects of Yahweh that we dealt with earlier in this chapter.

¹³⁷ Heidegger 2006: 212

answer is one that is easy to give, if we know the relevant causes that are (or were) present and sufficient to account for the raging of the sea. But what is the explanation of causality as such? Yahweh as self-caused cause gives an answer.

We have learned from Nietzsche that a theological belief in Yahweh is, for one who has the intellectual conscience demanded by the theological tradition that sprung from the assimilation of Platonism into Christianity, untenable. Both Plato and Christian theology hold that truth is divine. In the case of Christianity, it is that Yahweh is the truth and Christians must have an absolute commitment to Yahweh. With the addition of a requirement of humility – including intellectual humility – everything is set up for the undermining of the theological understanding of Yahweh that we looked at earlier in terms of Nietzsche’s analysis of the history of Western metaphysics. Thus, all gods have become groundless. We have reached the point of godlessness.

“Godlessness,” Heidegger tells us, “does not consist in the denial and loss of a god, but in the groundlessness of the godhood of gods.”¹³⁸ Heidegger’s claim is *not* that godlessness consists in the lack of a *causal ground* of a god’s existence, but rather that the Judeo-Christian god and other gods lack a ground in the sense of failing to ground our understanding of Being, of being an *occasioning ground* for the worldhood of our world. The loss of godhood means that gods fail to offer the grounds that ground locations, thus the spaces that locations open, and the beings that are freed for their possibilities as beings in spaces. As we saw in the second chapter, on *earth*, “occasioning” is the word that Heidegger uses to translate Aristotle’s word *αἴτιον*. An occasioning ought not to be

¹³⁸ Ibid.: 210.

understood as a cause in the sense of a “*running ahead in time as determining a letting follow on* such that what runs ahead is itself an event that refers back to something earlier that determines it”;¹³⁹ i.e. not understood as a one being’s coming to being referring to another being which, in its turn refers to the coming to being of the being which explains its own coming to being.

Rather, occasioning refers to a way of being responsible for a being’s coming to presence; bringing-forth into appearance.¹⁴⁰ Whereas we would understand Aristotelian “causality” as the bringing of matter by an efficient cause to its completion in a form, Heidegger understands Aristotelian occasioning as the appropriate (earth) being appropriated (gathered) into its end (τέλος) according to the limits thus opened up for it, determining it as appropriate within the historical horizon that has been opened for it.¹⁴¹ All occasioning is ποιήσις, a bringing-forth, a revealing of the hidden into unhiddenness (ἀληθεύειν). To understand how this relates to the godhood of gods, we must finally turn to the discussion of the general structure of worldhood (sky) that we put off in the last chapter in following Heidegger’s discussion of the historical possibilities for worldhood. So, let’s jump right into Heidegger’s analysis.

All actions and crafts, and the beings freed in the spaces opened by the relevant locations which Heidegger calls *ready-to-hand equipment*, are incomplete; i.e. they are not meaningful in isolation from their location; i.e. in Aristotelian language, they are only chosen for some other end beyond themselves. Such beings refer to a whole context of

¹³⁹ Heidegger 2002: 131. This is Heidegger’s explanation of the Kantian causality of succession.

¹⁴⁰ Heidegger 1977a: 6-12.

¹⁴¹ See Chapter 2, “Earth.”

equipment and to the ends of the location for which their space has freed them. They are used only for some further ends beyond themselves. The “with-which” (i.e. the ready-to-hand equipment in the open space of the work-location) is only used in order to achieve some end beyond itself (which is why Heidegger says that ready-to-hand equipment is determined as an “in-order-to” do that to which it refers or to that which it is serviceable). E.g. I may cut a piece of leather into a particular shape. As such, this action serves no purpose; it is essentially meaningless. And blades for cutting are themselves meaningless, if they do not refer to cutting. Perhaps, however, this action is not one without purpose, but refers to something beyond itself; e.g. a shoe. Given that the cutting of the leather, and the leather itself, is being used in order to create a shoe, this activity becomes meaningful. Thus, the blade emerges into its being *as a blade*. Cutting emerges into its being *as a cutting*. And so on.

For example, the pattern that I have cut is appropriately formed to serve as the sole of a shoe. But it is not merely the form, the aspect in which the being shows itself (εἶδος), that matters. What has been formed is itself appropriately useful as the sole of a shoe; it has a τέλος, giving both meaningful form and limit to this ὄλῃ. The leather used is fairly hard, firm, and, as the sole of a shoe, it is useful for protecting feet against the hard ground. The thick leather used for the soles of a pair of work shoes is appropriate because it is reliable for the task. Thin cloth would be unreliable for use as the soles of a pair of work shoes. Cloth would easily rip and the worker’s feet would fail to be protected against the hard ground. It is for this reason that Heidegger says that, “The usefulness is only a consequence of the reliability. The former vibrates in the latter and

would be nothing without it.”¹⁴² If this pair of shoes were, say, a pair of ballet shoes, then the leather just described would be inappropriate for the task. It would be unreliable in allowing the ballerina to perform her dance steps and would, consequently, not be useful as ballet shoes. Thus, what is appropriate differs depending on the end at hand. The shape and look of the sole would differ by end as well. Any material shaped like a pair of worker’s shoes would be wholly inappropriate for ballet shoes. The material and the form only have their being in the revealing that happens in the occasioning of the shoe.

The ready-to-hand equipment and the activity (as involvement in the revealing within a work-location) itself only have meaning because there is a higher end towards which this activity aims. The ready-to-hand equipment, the cutting blade is that with which the leather is cut in-order-to bring forth the sole of a shoe. The sole of the shoe is only a sole of a shoe insofar as it is a gathering of that which is appropriate for use as the sole of a shoe into the look of the sole of a shoe. Each of these activities and items is meaningful only in terms of some end beyond itself, namely, though not as the terminus of the explanation, in terms of shoes. But some actions and crafts are complete, either conditionally so or unconditionally so.

Those that are conditionally complete are what Heidegger gives the lower-end meaning as a “for-which” of usability for the higher-end, which Heidegger calls the “towards-which” of serviceability.¹⁴³ The for-which ought to be understood as the action

¹⁴² Heidegger 1971b: 34.

¹⁴³ Heidegger 1962: 108.

or craft's being (taken as) appropriate to the end at hand. Heidegger calls this kind of end the "towards-which" because it is that towards which an incomplete action or craft, an in-order-to, aims and which gives that which is used in-order-to achieve some end its meaning. The towards-which is the end, but it need not be the final end. E.g. The leather that I have cut into the pattern appropriate to make the sole of a shoe aims at the end of making a shoe, but the shoe is not made for its own sake, but is made for some sake beyond itself. I.e. the shoes only are meaningful insofar as they are brought within a location in which they may be the shoes that they are. The work shoe that I have made is not made simply to produce some object or other. Rather, the shoe is produced for work. It is not produced for any kind of work. As we have already seen, the work shoe would be wholly and completely inappropriate for ballet. Rather, as thick and strong leather, the shoe is appropriate for, e.g., working in a factory, in the fields, roofing, or some other such job that calls for strong work shoes. All of that with which we gather the equipment in order to bring forth a shoe serves to bring forth a shoe in its reliability such that it may be useable as a work shoe. The shoes only have their being (truth, meaning) as the shoes that they are for the location of their use; here, e.g., in their use in the factory by the factory worker hard at work.

It is the shoes as finished products towards which all of this activity aims. But this is not the end of the explanatory story. The occasionings are only gathered together to bring forth shoes for the work (or, for the ballet shoes, dance). That something is a towards-which indicates that it is that towards which some for-which aims, but it does not indicate whether or not the towards-which itself aims at a still higher end. Thus, some

towards-whichs will only be intermediate ends that will refer towards still higher ends. The work shoe itself aims at a higher end. The work shoe aims at the work for which it was gathered. It is the work – whether the hard manual labour for which I produced my shoes in the example that I have been using, ballet, keeping one’s feet dry for walking in the rain, or keeping one’s toes warm while relaxing at home on a cold day – that determines what is and what is not appropriate in terms of material, form, etc. To use a spatial metaphor, meaningfulness runs down the chain from towards-whichs to their for-whichs. E.g. the pattern is only meaningful, only has the being that it has, because such a pattern is appropriate for shoes. The shoes are only appropriate for the work towards which they are made.

All in-order-tos, for-whichs, and intermediate towards-whichs refer towards some end beyond themselves. Everything that refers towards a common higher end in this way Heidegger says has an “*involvement*” in being towards that common end. In dealing with such and such beings, we are involved with them towards some end and they themselves are as involved in these ends as we are in dealing with them. The highest end, the primary towards-which, is a towards-which in which “there is *no* further involvement.”¹⁴⁴ Heidegger calls a towards-which of this kind the ‘*for-the-sake-of-which*.’ Heidegger calls the structure of the with-which, for-which, towards-which, and for-the-sake-of-which *significance*. Significance is the structure of the worldhood of the world; i.e. it is the general horizon that Heidegger calls “sky.”

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.: 116.

As ought to be obvious, the structure of worldhood that Heidegger is presenting is deeply Aristotelian. Like Aristotle's account, Heidegger's analysis in *Being and Time* focuses specifically on the being of τέχνη ὄντα. We will, however, in looking at the goddess of nature, mother earth - Nerþus (the Germanic equivalent of the Ásatrú god of earth, Njorðr) – show that Heidegger's analysis does not fail to allow us to understand the being of φύσει ὄντα, despite the heavy focus on τέχνη ὄντα in its presentation in *Being and Time*. In fact, Heidegger translates Aristotle's term οὐ ἔνεκα as “for-the-sake-of-which.” Knowing what aim Aristotle's for-the-sake-of-which aims, then, is a good starting place to discover towards which Heidegger thinks that the Heideggerian for-the-sake-of-which aims. As we all know, Aristotle says that “εὐδαιμονία [*eudaimonia*]...is man's οὐ ἔνεκα [for-the-sake-of-which].”¹⁴⁵

Needless to say, Heidegger does not understand εὐδαιμονία as “happiness” – a word that many offer as a translation of εὐδαιμονία. Heidegger takes the constituents of the word seriously. εὐ-δαιμονία means something like “having a good δαίμονιον.” Consequently, Heidegger says that “Εὐδαιμονία means the holding sway in the appropriate measure of the “εὐ” – the appearing and coming into presence of the δαίμονιον.”¹⁴⁶ So, whatever it is that Heidegger takes the ancient Greeks to think by the word δαίμονιον, εὐδαιμονία is our having the proper relation to it such that it comes into view.

¹⁴⁵ Heidegger 1997b: 95.

¹⁴⁶ Heidegger 1992: 117.

“The δαίμονες are more essential than any being. They ... are to be thought more originally as the attunements to which the silent voice of the word attunes the essence of man in its relation to Being.”¹⁴⁷ Before we can investigate the meaning of εὐδαιμονία further, it seems, we first have to get clear about what Heidegger means by “attunement.”

In *Being and Time* there are three fundamental existential moments that Heidegger discovers: (1) *Understanding*, (2) *Discourse*, and (3) *Disposedness*. Discourse is to be understood as the gathering through λέγειν that allows ποιήσις (the revealing bringing to presence that we see in occasioning). There is also a fourth aspect that Heidegger discovers is necessary for our world, namely *Nearing*. Though it is specifically the phenomena that fall under the existential category of disposedness [*Befindlichkeit*] is directly relevant here, each of these aspects of sky (worldhood) will have to be addressed, even if only briefly, as becomes necessary.

“What we indicate *ontologically* by the term “Disposedness” is *ontically* the most familiar and everyday sort of thing; our mood, our Being-attuned.”¹⁴⁸ By disposedness, we should simply understand that we are emotionally involved in any location in which we are involved in one way or another. The word “disposedness” is a translation of Heidegger’s German word “Befindlichkeit.” “Befindlichkeit” is a neologism that Heidegger coined to name this structure because it plays on the German phrase “Wie befinden Sie sich?” which means “How are you doing?” but more precisely means “How

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.: 106.

¹⁴⁸ Heidegger 1962: 172, H.134. Note: I’ve replaced, and throughout this paper will continue to replace, MacQuarrie and Robinson’s translation of the German word *Befindlichkeit* as *state-of-mind* with Carman’s *Disposedness*.

do you find yourself?” Disposedness is a way of finding oneself emotionally in a location in one way or another. Being disposed to a location in such and such a way, we are in a mood that attunes us to beings in the location in some way or another. Beings in our world are revealed as partially determined by our moods. When I am in an excited and daring mood, I am attuned to the beings with which I am involved in a different way that I am to those same beings when I am in a worried and cautious mood. For example, if I am in a location and find myself disposed to it as an exciting location at this time, then I am in an excited and daring mood, a hang glider might be revealed to me as an exciting possibility. The hang glider probably will not reveal itself to me as something to be avoided, as it would were I disposed to the location in a different way that put me in a worried and cautious mood. As we have seen, on Heidegger’s view, the being of a being is determined by our involvement with beings in a location. How we are involved with a being is partially determined by the mood that we find ourselves in as a result of our disposition to the situation. The possibilities for disposedness, thus our moodedness, ranges anywhere from a deep emotional attachment (e.g. a fan’s deep attachment to the Los Angeles Lakers, where losses send him into fits of anger or depression and victories bring him deep joy and excitement) to the indifference which determines the beings of the location to which one is indifferent as unimportant and not worth paying attention to. Should we simply, then, understand mood and ontic attunement as psychological coloring? Heidegger investigates just this question.

A human being we are with is overcome by grief. Is it simply that this person has some state of lived experience that we do not have, while everything else remains as before? If not, what is happening here?¹⁴⁹

The usual answer to this question is “yes.” It is usually taken that all that grief, or any mood, is merely a psychological state that emotionally “colors” the world or mere “colorless” beings. If we imagine the world to be nothing but the sum of all of those beings that are present-at-hand as “objects” of representation, then there is no room in the world for such “color”; i.e. the color is merely “in the mind” of the grieving person. The room is not really gloomy, the sky is not grim, and the world is not mournful; they are merely “colorless” as they are in themselves, neither gloomy nor grim.

But clearly, against the usual answer, Heidegger answers “no.” Whatever it is for this person to be overcome by grief is different from mere lived experience.

Everything remains as before, and yet everything is different, not only in this or that respect but – irrespective of the sameness of *what* we do and *what* we engage *in* – the *way* in which we are together is different.¹⁵⁰

Heidegger is less clear on the distinction in *Being and Time* than I would prefer, but as I read this section of *Being and Time*, disposedness refers to the ontological-existential structure that determines how we emotionally find ourselves in a location. This way of finding ourselves in a location determines the meaning of the location for us (our mood) such that this ontological-categorical mood determines the way that a location with which we are currently involved shows up to us – e.g. as joyful, mournful, playful, boring, terrifying, etc. To put it in language that we have been using up until now: our

¹⁴⁹ Heidegger 1995: 66.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

disposedness opens this location as a joyful location, opening up a space for the joyful (mood) which then frees beings as appropriate or inappropriate according both to our understanding of the situation and to our mood (attunement). Attunement or mood here, then, is being used to refer to how our disposedness determines our mood such that our mood attunes us to the beings that the space opened up by the location with which we are currently involved are revealed to us. As attuned, beings are different, insofar as they reveal themselves as different. When the Lakers fall behind by double-digits to the Celtics in the seventh game of the NBA Finals, the champagne in the fridge shows up to the deeply attached Lakers fan as an insult and a symbol of the Lakers impending defeat. It appears as distinctly inappropriate for the impending time of mourning for the Lakers defeat to their greatest rivals in the most significant of games. Why would such a thing be poured now? But once that Lakers comeback is in full swing and the Lakers victory and championship over their most hated rival becomes obvious to the Lakers' fan, the champagne reveals itself as appropriate for the celebration, whether it shows up as for pouring in a cup or for spraying and pouring all over those who are celebrating along with the Lakers' fan. The changing moods of the Lakers' fan attunes him to the champagne in different ways and determines the way in which he and the beings that he is amidst reveal themselves within the location with which he is involved. We are always in some mood or other, even boredom and indifference are moods, and these moods attune us to the beings in locations in different ways.

Insofar as the Lakers' fan is with his friends, if they share in his mood, they are in a shared location with him. This is the disposed aspect of what Heidegger calls "Being-

with.” “The manner and way in which we can be with him, and in which he is with us, has changed. It is the grief that constitutes this way (the way in which we are together). He draws us into the manner in which he is, although we do not necessarily feel any grief ourselves.”¹⁵¹ As the grief in Heidegger’s example or the deep joy in my example illustrate, our moods determine the way in which we are in a location. Heidegger calls our way of being in a location, as disposed and, thus, mooded, a “situation.” We are in a shared situation only when we have a shared disposedness that puts us in a mood such that we may be attuned to the beings in the location with which we are involved in the same way. I.e. the champagne shows up to the Lakers’ fan and his friends as something used in-order-to celebrate, if they are Being-with one another in the celebratory situation that is opened by the mood in which their disposition to the Lakers’ victory leaves them. Does this leave us with an understanding of attunement as in the subject or in the object?

[W]e can already see that attunement is not at all inside, in some sort of soul of the Other, and that it is not at all somewhere alongside in our soul. Instead we have to say, and do say, that the attunement imposes itself on everything. It is *not* at all ‘*inside*’ in some interiority, only to appear in the flash of an eye; but for this reason is *not at all outside either*.¹⁵²

As Heidegger understands them, mood and attunement, as we can see in the foregoing analysis, is neither the mental “coloring” that a subject imposes on a world of things that have no emotive significance, nor is it something objective, in the sense of something which is in the world whether or not there are mortals to experience them. Rather, since locations are only opened up because of the interests and needs of mortals,

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

every instance of our being involved in a location is an instance of our being involved in a situation; i.e. locations only have their meaning as attuned.

So far, Heidegger has named ways of being-towards locations and beings. But given Heidegger's deep interest in our way of addressing Being as such, one expects to find that there must be a related way of being-towards Being as such. This is in fact what we find. In *Mindfulness* Heidegger makes clear that grounding attunements are ontologically prior to any disposedness, mood, or ontic attunement:

[The Grounding] attunement belongs to en-ownment; as the "tune" [*Stimme*] of Being attunement attunes the en-owned (what is attuned to grounding the truth of Being) into a grounding-attunement – an attunement that becomes the ground for grounding the truth of Being in Da-sein – the attunement that en-joins Da-sein as such while attuning it ... [The grounding-attunement] is the "ground" of all comportments that thoroughly attunes them. This is also to say that grounding-attunement is not merely that within which one finds oneself [*Befindlichkeit*].¹⁵³

Enownment is the gathering together of the fourfold into its grounds that ground all locations opened up by an understanding of Being. In our technical terminology, insofar as a world (location) is understood, it has significance. Significance is determined by a for-the-sake-of-which. This does not refer to any for-the-sake-of-which, but the for-the-sake-of-which that determines what it is to be as such. I.e. in this for-the-sake-of-which we find the ground location that opens up the possibility of the grounding of any and all other locations that may be opened given our understanding of Being as such. We can only relate to beings, as we have seen, insofar as locations matter to us. Mattering to us requires attunement. A grounding-attunement is an attunement in which we find Being, what it is to be, as meaningful to us in some way or another.

¹⁵³ Heidegger 2006: 284.

Now that we know what “attunement” means, we may return to our analysis of εὐδαίμονία through our analysis of δαίμονες. The first thing to note is that δαίμονες are more essential than beings. That is, it is not beings that determine δαίμονες, which are to be understood as attunements, but rather δαίμονες that determine beings. By now, of course, this should already be obvious to us. It is only as attuned that beings are revealed as the beings that they are. Present-at-hand are, roughly, to be understood as appropriateness for and, as ready-to-hand, are to be understood as that which is used in-order-to. Insofar as this is the case, the δαίμονες must attune us to something which determines the locations for which present-at-hand beings are appropriate and that towards-which ready-to-hand equipment is meaningful as a for-which. This means that what the δαίμονες must attune us to is some towards-which or a for-the-sake-of-which. δαίμονες are not attunements towards beings, but are grounding-attunements, attunements towards Being.

The second thing to note is that the εὖ makes clear that we must be properly attuned. This is confirmed by the way in which Heidegger fills out his claim that we, in our destitute time, are godless. “Since long ago, man is without attunement.” Clearly we are not without any attunement. Our Lakers’ fan was attuned to his champagne. So, what is it to which we have for so long been without attunement? We have already seen the answer: Being. Heidegger is here claiming that we have long been without a grounding-attunement, without an attunement to Being. Without an attunement towards Being, we can have not genuinely have an open understanding of Being. What is lacking, Heidegger tells us, is the word that attunes man to his own relation to Being. The “word”

referred to here is not any arbitrary word or words as such, but rather the word that attunes man towards Being, which Heidegger calls “myth.” It is for this reason that “in the μῦθος the δαίμονιον appears.”¹⁵⁴

According to Heidegger, “μῦθος [i.e. myth] is the Greek word that expresses what is to be said before all else.”¹⁵⁵ Mythology is a saying. It is a saying of the type expressed in the Old Norse word “saga.” “‘To say,’ related to the Old Norse ‘*saga*,’ means: to make appear, set free, that is, to offer and extend what we call World, lightening and concealing it.”¹⁵⁶ Myth is the saga, the setting free, that comes first; i.e. myth is the making appear of that which discloses worldhood as such, the for-the-sake-of-which, as a response to the question “What is the meaning (truth) of Being as such?” (which we might also ask with the simple three letter question “Why?”); i.e. it is a response to the mystery of Being, the mystery of the grounds of the meaning (truth) of Being. Εὐδαίμονία is the proper grounding-attunement in relation to the question of Being. The proper grounding-attunement in response to the question of Being must be a decision on the meaning of Being as such. In this attunement, the question itself is not lost and the answer is not concealed as an answer to just this question.

That Heidegger calls the “voice of the word” a *silent* voice serves as a clue to the source of the question. That which is to be said before all else is the saying, the saga, is that which is said in response to what Heidegger calls in *Being and Time* the *call of conscience*. Heidegger both tells us that the call of conscience is a mode of discoursing

¹⁵⁴ Heidegger 1992: 117.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.: 60.

¹⁵⁶ Heidegger 1971a: 93.

(λέγειν) and that the call calls us away from the One [*das Man*]. Heidegger makes quite a big deal about the fact that the call of conscience does not contain any information: it says *nothing*. “*What* does the conscience call to him whom it appeals? Taken strictly, nothing.”¹⁵⁷ That which calls us is nothing, if nothing is thought of as being the absence of beings. “In its ‘who,’ the caller is definable in a ‘worldly’ way [i.e. as a being] by *nothing* at all.”¹⁵⁸

We will look at the latter claim first. If the call comes from nothing at all, then how can it call us in the call of conscience? Heidegger indicates that, while he has not yet developed the language of the fourfold, that he already has in mind that the call comes about in the confrontation between mortals and gods. Heidegger says that “the call comes *from* me and yet *from beyond me*.”¹⁵⁹ The sense in which the call comes from me is that the call is grounded in my owned past, my “birth.” The sense in which the call comes from beyond me is that it also comes from my “death.” That is, what the call of conscience attunes us to is “birth,” “death,” and the “in between.” “Humans are attuned to what determines their essence.”¹⁶⁰ What first determines our essence is our end (τέλος, death) and our birth (φύσις, nature). I.e. the call attunes us to the ground of our being, the end of our being, and the time-space which is opened as the in between (i.e. “life,” existentially understood, to stick with Heidegger’s talk of “birth” and “death”), the “Da” (‘t/here’) of “Da-sein.”

¹⁵⁷ Heidegger 1962: 318.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.: 321. I have replaced “alien” as a translation or “fremde” for the more appropriate word “foreign.”

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.: 320.

¹⁶⁰ Heidegger 1991c: 50.

Oddly, as crucial as “birth” is in *Being and Time*, Heidegger scholars hardly take notice. Heidegger explicitly mentions that our attunement to our thrownness and our Being-towards-death form a unity and “in this unity birth and death are ‘connected’ in a manner characteristic of Dasein. As care, Dasein is the ‘between.’”¹⁶¹ Making sense of birth is just as crucial as death for making sense of our owned existence. To be able to understand our end, “death,” we must also be able to understand our “birth.”

“Birth” is the ground of our factual understanding of ourselves, others, and the beings of our world. Or, more to the point, it is the existentiell ground of our understanding of Being; i.e. how we already understand ourselves, others, beings, and (if at all) Being as such. Heidegger calls this structure of existence “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*). Insofar as we are understandingly and dispositionally in the world (beneath the “sky”), we always already find ourselves within a horizon of possibilities to which we have been delivered over; i.e. we never are faced with a meaningless manifold of sensations or of mere uninterpreted beings that we subsequently stamp with meanings. This ground is proximally and for the most part our most basic mode of understanding, our average everyday understanding, that Heidegger calls the One [*das Man*]. The way that we proximally and for the most part [i.e. that shows up to us as most obvious and in which we normally] understand ourselves and others is as a Oneself. We will return to the One and the Oneself in Chapter 5, but for now we can work with a simplification of the One: We understand that when one is (x) or is in situation (y), then one does or ought to do (z). E.g. When one is a teacher and one is teaching a class, then one ought to speak

¹⁶¹ Heidegger 1962: 426-27.

clearly, be attentive to whether or not the students appear to be learning, write important points on the blackboard, or other such things. When one understands oneself, one understands oneself in such a role. The depth of this kind of understanding should not simply be relegated to social roles. When one is a representing subject, then one ought to represent objects. I.e. the understanding of the One grounds even our metaphysical understanding of ourselves and others (and, as follows from this example, the being of beings as a whole). Much like we cannot think beyond our “death,” we cannot get behind our thrownness, cannot fully come to grasp our “birth.” For the time being, we will simply have to offer this claim, that we cannot get behind and fully grasp our “birth,” as an assumption.

Whereas the owned self finds the terminus of the chain of meaning of the referential significance in a for-the-sake-of-which that is attuned towards the question of Being, the unowned self finds the terminus of the chain of meaningfulness of its world in the One or within the localized for-the-sake-of-which that determines some location or other (which itself is in need of a ground). I.e. the terminus of the question “Why?” is simply “because that is what one does” or because that is the localized end (for-the-sake-of-which) for some location or other. The for-the-sake-of-which of locations that haven’t been grounded in a grounded understanding of Being as such either lack grounds or are grounded in the understanding of the One. Insofar as one has a “self” when one is unowned – i.e. a “self” that is not completely dispersed in a schizophrenic lack of integrity – one is a Oneself and the grounding for those locations that are grounded is the

One. This is why Heidegger says that “Dasein is for the sake of the ‘One’ in an everyday manner, and the ‘One’ itself Articulates the referential context of significance.”¹⁶²

When what One does becomes not just the standard of meaning – whether that is in the sense of a standard set according to a belief in a Platonic Sun, a theologically-understood god, or the universal happiness of mankind –but becomes the only acceptable way in which the structure of significance may be articulated, the result is what Heidegger (following Nietzsche and Kierkegaard) calls “levelling.” “This care of averageness reveals in turn an essential tendency of Dasein which we call the ‘levelling down’ of all possibilities of Being.”¹⁶³ It is important to note that one way in which levelling levels all possibilities is that it precludes all questioning of Being as such. The answer given to the question posed by the mysterious gods in response to the guiding-attunement of wonder is forgotten as a question and then is developed into an understanding of beings that is purely determined by the essence of technology; by the degeneration of the decision given to the question of Being by the ancient Greeks that no longer serves as a ground. This ungrounded ground becomes so obvious that it is no longer recognized as a question any longer.

The owned self, the self that is properly attuned (i.e. with εὐδαιμονία), does not rip itself from its “birth” in the One. Rather, Heidegger says that the owned self “*is rather an existentiell modification of the ‘One’ – of the ‘One’ as an essential existentielle.*”¹⁶⁴ That is to say that the One is an existential structure that is necessary for

¹⁶² Ibid.: 167.

¹⁶³ Ibid.: 165.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.: 168.

our Being-in-the-World, for any understanding of Being and beings at all. It allows for the stable background on which a changing foreground can make sense. The One articulates everyday significance and everyday significance determines the meaningful ways in which we can understand the question of Being and what an appropriate answer would look like.

This existentiell modification of the Oneself into an owned self is “accomplished by *making up for not choosing* [i.e. for not making a decision].”¹⁶⁵ The understanding of the One articulates the referential whole of significance. Insofar as we are familiar with beings in one way or another, we may follow the chain of grounding-questions opened *in regard to this understanding of Being*. But, as the One does not give a final answer to the grounding-question, the question of the meaning of Being as such, but opens an intelligible and articulated space in which possible answers are freed, we may choose from amongst the possible answers – i.e. make a decision – that justifies these beings that are opened to us. We do not invent an answer, we discover one (amongst other possible answers).

Heidegger’s discussion of rivers and demigods in *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* is particularly helpful here. Heidegger says that the more thoughtful ones remain at the source of the river, almost seeming to go backwards towards the source, rather than follow the flow out to the sea. Of course, what Heidegger is telling us is that the more thoughtful ones, the demigods remain thoughtful on the for-the-sake-of-which, the decision that is made in answer to the question the meaning (truth) of Being, rather than

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.: 313.

becoming lost in the sea of ungrounded meanings that flow from the leveled and, in the end, ungrounded understanding of the One.

As with death and Being-towards-death, it is not really ‘birth’ as such that is important for owning one’s self and Dasein, but what analogously might be called Being-towards-birth. In Being-towards-birth, we are thoughtful about the grounds of significance, understanding them as an answer to the simple question “why?,” the question of the meaning (truth) of Being as such. As the standards of the One do not stand on their own – they are ungrounded – once we have recognized the question-worthiness of this question – as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Hölderlin all did – then “the totality of involvements of the ready-to-hand and present-at-hand discovered within-the-world, is, as such, of no consequence; it collapses into itself; the world has the character of completely lacking in significance;”¹⁶⁶ i.e. “everyday familiarity collapses.”¹⁶⁷ This does not suggest that we no longer recognize what tables and chairs are for, but, rather, that we do not see a completion to the chain of meaning, that there is no ultimate ground that grounds the being of tables, chairs, and such. The world lacks in significance because the for-whichs and towards-whichs only get their meaning and ground in terms of a grounded for-the-sake-of-which and in average everydayness there is no grounded for-the-sake-of-which that requires no ground beyond itself, there is no such end which has been taken up and made one’s own.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.: 231.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.: 233.

Now that we have (albeit briefly) looked at the “birth” of Da-sein, we may now (again briefly and incompletely) turn our attention to “death.”¹⁶⁸ The sense in which the call of conscience comes from beyond me is that it comes from *death*.

The full existential-ontological conception of death may now be defined as follows: *death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility – non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped, Death is, as Dasein's end, in the Being of this entity towards its end.*¹⁶⁹

When Heidegger calls “death” non-relational, it is easy to imagine that what he means is that, when you are dead, you can no longer interact with or think about anything whatsoever; i.e. it is impossible to relate to anything because you are dead (biologically and your consciousness has ceased to be). But this is a mistake. The non-relationality is a distinctly existential one. When significance collapses into insignificance because it is ungrounded, then one can no longer relate to others for whom the question has not been posed and the lack has not been recognized. As we saw in our discussion of disposedness, mood, and attunement, to be-with others in a shared situation, one must have a shared understanding and mood in relation to a location. When the world falls into insignificance, one is not attuned to a location at all, one is attuned to the worldhood of the world (“sky”). Without a shared location, one cannot be in a shared situation with others (one is not *situated* in a location). Thus, one cannot relate to others or to beings at all in such attunements as anxiety or deep existential boredom.

Nietzsche saw this problem clearly enough. In fact, it is at the heart of Nietzsche's challenge. This is why his madman lights a lantern in the bright morning.

¹⁶⁸ Given Heidegger's poetic definition of *mortals*, we will have to continue our discussion of death in Chapter 5.

¹⁶⁹ Heidegger 1962: 303.

The Platonic Sun and its degenerate successors no longer serve to illuminate the madman's world with meaning, so he must light a lantern. This dim light of the lantern is the meaning that is opened by the madman's search in the dark of meaninglessness for a ground. This very non-relationality is precisely why Nietzsche's madman is called "deranged." He is *de-ranged* in the sense that the question "what is the meaning (truth) of Being?" – what is the ground that grounds all meaningful locations and that answers the existential "why?" question – finds no answer for him and he can consequently find no range of meaningfulness such that some things matter and others do not. Everything is equally pointless. The entire structure of significance has collapsed for Nietzsche's madman and part of his deep horror is the fact that he recognizes that the standard that served as the for-the-sake-of-which of the people in the marketplace is no longer tenable for the reasons that we discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

The sense in which death is certain is that it is an ever-present possibility. This is a possibility that, given the structure of meaningfulness of finite beings such as ourselves, may become actualized at any time. That is, at any time I may find that the standard(s) that I have used to answer the question of the meaning (truth) of Being as such and that I have used to determine the for-the-sake-of-which that determines the structure of significance for my world is either impossible for me, like the self-undermining Platonism that Nietzsche attacks, or simply no longer matters to me. If this possibility becomes actual, then the structure of my world will fail to have meaning and things and others will no longer have anything to say to me that will matter to me. As certain, the

possibility of death is also indefinite. That is to say that this possibility is every-present, but when, or if, it will be actualized is indefinite; unknown and unpredictable.

Our Being-towards-death only arises to us in light of a need; i.e. a need for a ground. This need is determined by the structure of Being; it is not merely a psychological need. The presupposition of philosophy, essential poetry, or any thinking that responds to the question of Being is “nothing else but the *need that has come to utterance*.”¹⁷⁰ This utterance is the mythological saga. But what is the need that has come to utterance? The need, once we have reached the stage of Nietzsche’s challenge is not merely any need, but a need that Heidegger calls *the distressing need*. In what way does Heidegger mean that this need is a need? Heidegger explains that there are two senses of the word “need” – a negative and a positive sense.

The negative sense of the word need is the experience of “the absence, lack and necessity” of a thing; “it means to be ‘in need, in distress’ with respect to something.”¹⁷¹ In a fairly commonsensical way, we can see how this use of need works. For example, your car may need a new radiator, because the old one is broken. Your car is lacking something that allows it to be complete as a car, i.e. as an automobile. Heidegger has nothing psychological in mind when he thinks of *distress*, so, that your car obviously isn’t suffering any psychological distress is not something that we need worry about. This example is, of course, a need specific to a being – a car. There is also, however, the possibility of a need in relation to Being. This possibility is the one that we have been

¹⁷⁰ Heidegger 2003: 20.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.: 14-15.

investigating: the need for a ground. The need for a for-the-sake-of-which which itself ends the chain of grounding.

The positive sense of need “means to set out for something, to work for something, to take pains to obtain something.”¹⁷² I assume that what Heidegger means by need in the positive sense (though he himself is less than clear) is that in order to reach ends, like our own, is not to fill a lack, but rather to a come to our essence as Being-towards-death and in having an attunement towards the question of the meaning (truth) of Being as such. This need is a needfulness of openness to the grounds of our worlds such that we may ground the structure of significance. But this is not done by positing some present-at-hand or ready-to-hand being in the place of the for-the-sake-of-which, but rather is done by answering the question of the meaning (truth) of Being and being continually ready to give up an answer given when it has become impossible for us (i.e. to be ready to take it all back).

In our “destitute time” the gods are in need. Remember that our ‘destitute time’ is determined by the understanding of Being (or, rather, lack thereof) for which Nietzsche’s challenge becomes a legitimate problem. If we’ve followed Nietzsche to his conclusion, then we have found that the justification for the existence of any transcendent or supersensuous realm is lacking. As lacking, a commitment to truthfulness and to intellectual conscience demands that we cannot accept such realms into our ontology. If we cannot accept such realms into our ontology, then we must look at the world in one of two ways: namely empiricism or intellectualism. In either case, we are faced with a

¹⁷² Ibid.: 15.

world of indeterminate and meaningless stuff that is stamped with a meaning by a representing subject. This stuff is essentially meaningless.

The logical conclusion of empiricism is an unacceptable view like that of the Churchlands. No matter how much meaningless stuff you put together, you will never get to meaningful things, just a larger concatenation of meaningless stuff. In fact, it is unintelligible to think of the world represented in such an extreme position that represents the world as mere matter while denying the subject of representation; i.e. there is no representation without something that represents, no seen without that which sees. But, as we saw in Chapter 2, the present-at-hand ought not to merely be thought of as “meaningless stuff.” Rather, the present-at-hand is to be understood as that which is appropriate for some end. Even in the most detached theoretical understanding of matter, what is considered is that which is appropriate to a certain kind of contemplation. It is understood not as completely de-worlded, but is understood as that for-which we can contemplate the world as it is outside of the work-world of human beings. Towards-which we gain further insight into the physical workings of our world. Insofar as such radical empiricism cannot account of the structure of significance, it cannot grasp the worldhood of the world. I.e. it is a definite way of characterizing a region of beings, innerworldly beings, but neither one which captures either the structure of that domain itself nor that is capable of accounting for the world determined by significance, which in

turn is the grounds of the meaningfulness of the world of the present-at-hand. “*Nature as reality can only be understood on the basis of worldhood.*”¹⁷³

The intellectualist position essentially accepts the world of the empiricist, except also allows for a distinct realm of the mental. Though the world of meaningless stuff is still meaningless as such, the subject of thought projects meaning onto the things in its experience. The natural conclusion of intellectualism is functionalism. The present-at-hand, understood as mere stuff, is the ground of the world, but gets its meaning by having value and function predicates to that, in-itself, meaningless stuff.

Whereas Heidegger’s own view, like Aristotle’s, is a top-down-holist account of meaning, what the intellectualist gives us is an account in which we begin with meaningless stuff and then add on more and more value and function predicates to arrive at a structure of world that is analogous to and captures everything that the world understood as the world of significance does. I.e. whereas, on Heidegger’s view, we get to the present-at-hand by wrenching ready-to-hand equipment out of the domains that make them useful in-order-to something or other, e.g., a hammer for hammering, and then placing it in a scientific domain of theoretical questioning to come across the merely present-at-hand, the intellectualist begins with the merely present-at-hand and adds value and function predicates to produce our understanding of hammers as equipment used in-order-to, e.g., nail nails into wood. To reconstruct the world from the bottom up requires that we apply the function-predicate “hammer” and the value-predicate “good” to a piece

¹⁷³ Heidegger 1985: 199.

of meaningless stuff. But to know when to be able to apply these predicates, we must already know what it is to be a good hammer.

In either case, what we end up with is a world of meaningless stuff. But we do not *just* end up with a world of meaningless stuff, we end up with a world in which there is no meaning, no ground, in which an final ground, a final answer to Nietzsche's question "Why?" or, put more existentially, Heidegger's question "what is the meaning (truth) of Being as such?" is completely and utterly lacking. Nothing grounds the for-the-sake-of-which. It is this lack, this failure both of a ground and of even questioning towards a ground in any deep way that is the distressing need of Being. The most distressing need is the lack of distress, the lack of an attunement of individuals or peoples that draws them into this questioning. We are for a long time without a grounding-attunement. To be owned, Being must be grounded. Being is, thus in need of a ground. This need, the need for a ground, is the need that calls us to question, calls us to gods, in the call of conscience.

As the question-worthy ones, "Be-ing is needed by gods: it is their need."¹⁷⁴ Gods only come to the fullness of their Being when they both presence and absence. This only happens in their confrontation with mortals, with those who live *on the earth* (in their grounded natures) and *beneath the sky* (within the horizon of possibilities opened up for their being within their historical situation). That is to say that it is only in a confrontation with those who require grounds and for whom their being is an issue such that they take a stand on Being (and not just their own being) by responding to the

¹⁷⁴ Heidegger 1999: 309.

question of the mysterious gods that gods can first come into the fullness of their Being and that the “holy”¹⁷⁵ – i.e. the grounded meaning articulated in the structure of significance – may arise.

The mythological saying given as a response to the grounding-question of Being that is opened up for us in our grounding-attunement towards the distressing need, the need for a ground not just of any location of beings, but of beings in general, names one specific god, according to Heidegger, and this god Heidegger calls *the Last god*. Whereas the Judeo-Christian god, Yahweh, was the producer god, the Last god is the god of revealing (ποιήσις) as such, the god of poetry. The reason that Heidegger calls this god the last god is twofold: (1) Heidegger claims that in the totalizing machination that arises out of the essence of technology, every location has been given a proximal ground that is itself ungrounded. This ought not to be understood as the claim that no other gods may arise, as a consequence of our response to the last god, but that, given our current understanding of Being, this god is the only god that explicitly calls us to thought. Nietzsche’s madman, who has the clearest and sanest response to our current metaphysical position, recognizes that *nothing* matters and that *nothing* is grounded in any deep way. If the highest question, the question of the meaning (truth) of Being as such receives no answer whatsoever, then the question of the ground made relative to this or that location is not clearly even a legitimate question. Some ground would have to be given for Being in general before a question could even be raised as to the grounds of

¹⁷⁵ Heidegger calls this *the holy* or *æther* for what I hope is an obvious reason. Namely, wherein there is grounded meaningfulness, it ultimately points back to a god, whether explicitly, implicitly, knowingly, or unknowingly.

some location or other. (2) As ought already be evident from the first reason that Heidegger calls this god the last god, we can see that this god is the last god in the sense that it is also the final god, the “highest” god. This is the god that occupies the space of Plato’s sun, but like Plato’s sun and unlike the Platonic sun, this god is no being. In the chain of groundings of meaningfulness, this god is the god that ends the chain of grounds and allows for a grounding in an answer to the question of the meaning (truth) of Being as such.

In *Homecoming/To Kindred Ones* Heidegger calls the last god “father Aether” (Αἰθήρ). This god, as the god of revealing (ποιήσις) as such and as the god that grants a ground that itself needs no further grounding is the last god. Aether is the name that Heidegger, following Hölderlin, gives to name the holy (which in *Homecoming/To Kindred Ones* Heidegger calls “joy” or “gaiety”), the grounded meaning contained within the articulated structure of significance. Father Aether is not enownment (appropriation, *Ereignis*) as such, but is the god that calls us to enownment as such; i.e. the god that enowns us to ourselves as owned [*eigentlich*] selves. As the god of enownment as such, one would expect that this god will also be the ‘father’ of both the god of nature (the ground of our nature freed in Being-towards-birth) and of the sky (possibilities freed in Being-towards-death). And this is precisely what we find:

“The joyful one and the joyful messengers of the brightening, father aether, and the angel of the house (earth), and the angel of the year (light), cannot accomplish

anything by themselves.”¹⁷⁶ Here, following Hölderlin, Heidegger is referring to the gods other than the highest god, father Aether, as “angels.” The latter claim, that they cannot accomplish anything by themselves, is merely a claim that, if we are not attuned to them, then they do not reveal anything. But, for the moment, let us focus on these gods.

The “angel of the house” is the god of the earth. Heidegger clarifies what he means by ‘the house’ by saying that “here ‘the house’ means the space opened up for a people as a place in which they can be at ‘home,’ and thereby fulfill their proper destiny.”¹⁷⁷ The “house” is the space opened up for the possibilities for mortals given their historically situated location. Heidegger here specifically says that the house is the space opened up for a people to be at “home” and to fulfill their proper *destiny*. In *Being and Time* Heidegger distinguishes between *fate* and *destiny*.

Of *fate* Heidegger says “this is how we designate Dasein’s primordial historizing, which lies in owned resoluteness and in which Dasein *hands* itself *down* to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen.”¹⁷⁸ When an individual becomes at “home” by his fate, he has discovered some possibility of understanding his world that grounds his way of being, that grants his manner of being an integrating ground, such that he has an end (τέλος). “Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not to be itself.”¹⁷⁹ That is to say that either we have set our own ends, from amongst the possibilities open to us, or we

¹⁷⁶ Heidegger 1971b: 38.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.: 35.

¹⁷⁸ Heidegger 1962: 435.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.: 33.

have not and are guided by the One. In having taken ownership of this end, he discovers that there are limits to his being such and such a way. I.e. in taking up specific possibilities of his being, he must forsake other possibilities that are incommensurable with his way of being. For example, if Elizabeth finds that what matters to her is peace and she takes ownership of this possibility by understandingly becoming a pacifist, then she forsakes the possibility of being a brutal dictator. Of course, this is a simplification. When we take up a possibility of our being, we seldom, if ever, primarily take up such specific possibilities. Rather, we take up a style of being. Styles of being can be exceptionally complex and, while they are probably best captured by the kinds of character traits that are central to virtue ethics, they may be situational (i.e. differently determined by mooded locations).

What one is committed to in having a fate is not merely a determination of who one is oneself. One's style will determine how one is disposed to locations and, thus, how one is attuned to beings. In taking ownership of one's end and holding oneself to that end does not merely alter the owned person, but also alters the world in which she lives. Beings and other mortals reveal themselves differently to her, though there may be no outward 'objective' change. What should be apparent is that the very structure that we saw for occasioning a being recurs in Heidegger's analysis of fate. Elizabeth's history, taken as a whole, lays the ground (ύλη) for what is possible for her. These possibilities are only the possibilities that they are for some end (τέλος). The end that she takes up determines what is appropriate for her and she this shows herself in this aspect of her

being (εἶδος) as either living up to the possible way of being that she's taken up or failing to live up to that possible way of being.

Here is where we see why Young thinks of the gods as role models or life models: what gathers Elizabeth up to this possibility is the question "What kind of person ought I be?" Here Elizabeth is faced with a mystery, a god, and a for-the-sake-of-which that is in need of an answer, which demands a decision. What gathers her, with her personal history, to this end, setting the limits of how she ought to be, is a mystery that demands a decision, a question that demands an answer. In the realm of fate, we find what Heidegger might call personal gods. The gods are not the role models or life models that Young imagines, but the impetus to take up a way of being – either one based on a role or life model or one that is determined by a new way of being for which there is no role or life model to guide the way.

Destiny is the equivalent of the fate of a people, rather than of an individual. "If fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with Others, its historizing is a co-historizing and is determinative for it as *destiny* [*Geschick*]. This is how we designate the historizing of a people."¹⁸⁰ Destiny is not to be understood as the fates of individuals that are first isolated and that come to converge in a kind of coordination. Rather, as a people, a people share a historical situation that determines the possibilities of their understanding themselves both as individuals, but also as a whole (i.e. as a people). Destiny is something like a shared fate; i.e. in destiny a people discovers some end (τέλος) and understandingly takes ownership of the possibility for

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.: 436.

the people as a whole. For the sake of argument, but contrary to fact, let's assume that when the Roman Empire became Christian that they took over the Christian understanding of the world wholesale. When the Roman Empire adopted Christianity the meaning of many locations and beings was completely changed. The temples of Jupiter ceased to be holy places, but became places of blasphemy against Yahweh. Jerusalem became the "Holy Land." Not only that, but the self-understanding of the people in the Roman Empire changed. No longer were heroes, conquerors, and the ridiculously rich the most praiseworthy of persons. Instead, saints and the humble became the praiseworthy. Beings were transformed into the products of the producer god. Although nothing objective had changed, everything had changed. And what we also see is that this change in the people's understanding of the possibilities of being determined by the destiny of the people also determines the possibilities that are open for the individual to take up as her fate.

It is worth noting that Heidegger says that the "house" is the space in which a people *can* be at "home," not in which they are at home. In understandingly taking up possibilities for our being opened up by our understanding of Being as such (i.e. in a decision), we become at "home." We may nevertheless be not-at-home in the "house" opened up by the angel of the house, the god of earth, by allowing the ground of our being to remain ungrounded; i.e. in which the for-the-sake-of-which that grounds our world remains grounded by the ungrounded understanding of the One.

Here, following Hölderlin, Heidegger is referring to the gods other than the highest god, father Aether, as "angels." The "angel of the house" is the god of the earth.

Heidegger explicitly names Nerþus (the Germanic equivalent of the Ásatrú god Njorðr) as the goddess of the earth. As we have already seen in Chapter 2, “earth” refers to φύσις, to that which gathers itself into emergence, into unhiddenness (ἀλήθεια, truth). In understandingly taking up one’s fate, one gathers oneself into emergence as the being that one is, into one’s φύσις. The same is true of a people and its destiny. The gods call mortals to gather themselves into their being, but the gods alone cannot gather mortals. The call gathers us to think on our essence, but only mortals may decide.

Still, we have been limited in our talk of the god of nature. We have addressed human nature, but what about nature in the sense of plants and animals? These are φύσει ὄντα as well. How are we to understand these beings as self-emergent on Heidegger’s view? The answer is simple. The emergent is the apparent, that which shows itself in its being; i.e. that which is able to be seen as something. That which may be seen as something must be able to be seen for some way of seeing. This way of seeing is determined by a location. It is in the observing, enjoying, or marveling at animals, plants, and those things that we typically call “nature” in which these beings can bring themselves into their appearance as plants, as animals, etc. I.e. we have dealings with beings and locations that are not of practical use to us. We may see how such natural beings fit into the location determined by our interests – whether this is discovering giraffes as the most marvelous animals or of the rose as the most enjoyable of plants – and this determines the possibility of their appearing to us, for the kind of seeing in which we are engaged. We do not make the giraffe the most marvelous animal, rather we discover it as such, insofar as it appears as such.

Heidegger associates the angel of the year with light. Light, as we have seen, is a recurring theme in Heidegger's discussion of sky – both in terms of its presence and absence. The god of light has for a long time been understood as a solar deity. Insofar as Heidegger explicitly names the angel of the house (the goddess or god of earth) with the name of the Germanic goddess Nerþus (Njorðr) we will name the angel of the year (i.e. the god of light) according to the corresponding deity of the same tradition: Balðr.

The god of light is the god that presences in everything that appears beneath the sky. The god of light has a special place in both Heidegger's philosophy and in the Ásatrú tradition. Snorri attests that Balðr is also called Bældæg,¹⁸¹ which means “the shining day.”¹⁸² Balðr is the god that is appears differently in the time of the world's day and the time of the world's night. In the time of day, Balðr appears in his presence. Beings are understood according to their grounded being, their grounded natures are revealed to us according to their nature (φύσις). Njorðr and the other Vanir (the name for earth gods in the Ásatrú tradition) come to presence in our understanding of the nature of beings as grounded in their location and ultimately in a decision on the meaning of Being in response to the question of the meaning (truth) of Being in general. But insofar as things appear in their grounded nature, the locations (local horizons) also come to presence. That is to say that Balðr, as the solar god, also brings to light the Æsir (the name of the Ásatrú sky gods); the horizons of locations that open spaces themselves are brought to appearance.

¹⁸¹ Sturluson 2001: 4.

¹⁸² Simek 2007: 26.

The world's night (forgottenness of Being) is also captured by the Ásatrú myth of Balðr. It is Balðr's death that brings about the Ragnarok (i.e. the so-called "twilight of the gods"). Upon Balðr's death, he is sent to the underworld (Helheim) and it is this that sets free the powers that destroy the gods. The myth is not to be taken at face value. Rather, what we see is that when the holy light of the solar god, Balðr, is covered over, the gods can no longer gather men to themselves. As the mythology says, after the powers that have destroyed the gods have been defeated, the gods return in a changed form. That is, given the historical transformation of our ungrounded and covered over understanding of Being, the attunements (e.g. deep wonder) that brought us to a need – the need to discover what beings are – are no longer the attunements that bring us to think, rather these are replaced by other attunements (e.g. reticence) that bring us another need – the need to ask the question of the meaning (truth) of Being as such. The gods that call us to think are different every time that a people comes to be attuned by the call of such a deep existential need. And it is only in being called to gather ourselves out of existential dispersion that we may then give an answer to the question of the meaning of Being as such.¹⁸³

This leaves us with only one more god to discuss within the confines of this discussion, namely the god that Heidegger calls *the last god* and in *Homecoming/To Kindred Ones* he calls "father Aether." Father Aether is the god of revealing, the god of ποιήσις (i.e. of 'poetry' understood in the sense of revealing). To continue our naming

¹⁸³ While I have done little to directly quote Heidegger here, I take it as obvious that everything that I have said is consistent with our discussion of sky in Chapter 3.

practice up until now, we will use the Ásatrú name for the god of ποιήσις, Óðinn. As we saw in Chapter 2, both τέχνη and φύσις are manners of ποιήσις.

As we have seen again and again, gods draw us into a questioning. Whereas the god of earth draws us to question the being of φύσει ὄντα and the god of the sky draws us to question the possibilities for beings (wherein τέχνη becomes possible), the god of ποιήσις draws us to ask about revealing as such. But this does not simply draw us to ask about any manner of revealing, but leads us to ask about that revealing that opens the most primordial location for our understanding of Being. Namely, Óðinn calls us to ask “what is the meaning (truth) of Being as such?” This is a question that cannot be given an answer in the sense of a-temporal answer. Rather, this is a question that can find its possibilities only within the sky and on the earth (as possible grounding) of our historical situation.

That no god, save the god of revealing himself, may offer an answer to this riddle, to the question of the meaning (truth) of Being as such, is confirmed by the Balðr myth to which we have already discussed. The most famous, mythologically central, and mysterious riddle is asked by Óðinn: “What did Óðinn say into the ear of his son before he mounted the pyre.”¹⁸⁴ In the mythology, Óðinn is often faced with challenges (usually from unwitting Jotnar, “gods” of chaos; i.e. “gods,” understood as fixed measures rather than open questioners, of ungrounded locations) that take the form of a contest of wisdom in which the loser also loses his life. The contests invariably end with Óðinn asking his mysterious riddle, to which his adversary concedes that none but Óðinn know the answer

¹⁸⁴ Sturluson 2001: 48 (*Vafþrúðnismál*).

and the Jotunn is, consequently destroyed (the fixed measure of the ungrounded location is undermined).

Óðinn is also called the “All-father.” Though he has this name, there are very specific gods that are explicitly addressed as the sons of Óðinn, including Balðr. As the god of revealing as such, i.e. the god that calls us to ask the question of Being as such, it is Óðinn’s call that allows for the grounding of all locations. I.e. everything that is revealed is revealed as being in some way or another. Thus, the grounds that grounds all locations is that from whence all locations and their gods are born.

Heidegger never explicitly says why he names this god the *last god*, but he does ask a question to which one imagines his answer is “yes, that is precisely why!”¹⁸⁵

What if the last god has to be so named because in the end the decision about gods brings under and among gods and thus makes what is ownmost to the uniqueness of the divine being [*Gottwesen*] most prominent?¹⁸⁶

The last god is the *last* god because in calling us to the question of the meaning (truth) of Being as such, this god is the god of gods, the god that reveals the nature of the mysterious gods. The last god is also the last in the sense of being an open question that cannot be overcome and cannot be surpassed.

As to why Heidegger also used Hölderlin’s name “father Aether” for the last god,¹⁸⁷ Heidegger gives us more to work with. The name “Aether” itself is revealing.

¹⁸⁵ Heidegger might also ask the translators why they couldn’t more coherently translate his German into English.

¹⁸⁶ Heidegger 1999: 286.

¹⁸⁷ Heidegger 2000a: 39.

Aether (Αἰθήρ) is the uppermost horizon of the sky and is traditionally (and in Heidegger's own analysis of this god) tied to illumination as such.

It is no accident that this is the name that Hölderlin gives to the highest god and that Heidegger picks up on this association. The highest horizon is, of course, Being. Father Aether is the mysterious god that reveals Being as such. As we have already seen, gods open up horizons of meaningfulness only in relation to an attunement that in turn attunes us to the world as is appropriate to the domain in question. So, what father Aether attunes us to ought to then be the highest domain of questioning. This is, in fact, the case. "Solely gods are great, great insofar as their godhood is out of the inceptuality of be-ing."¹⁸⁸

The other aspect of aether that is notable is the association with illumination. Heidegger calls father Aether "the joyful one" and the other gods "the joyful messengers of the brightening."¹⁸⁹ The brightening is the same kind of brightening yoke for which Plato's "sun" (Form of the Good) was supposed to be responsible. But, whereas Plato's "sun" was eternal, Father Aether, the last god, Óðinn (the "wanderer"), is distinctly historical.

The question of Being is asked in different ways, depending on how revealing is itself revealed to or concealed from us. The time of the world's night is a time in which Óðinn remains concealed from us or, as Heidegger says, it is a time in which the god and gods have fled; the world's night is that which follows the twilight of the gods. As our

¹⁸⁸ Heidegger 2006: 223.

¹⁸⁹ Heidegger 2000a: 38.

attunement to the gods determines how the possibilities opened beneath the horizon of the sky appears and earth appears to us, the absence of Óðinn and, consequently, Balðr and even Njorðr, determines that the sky and earth will appear to us only veiled in darkness, with their meaning hidden to us.

The time of the world's day is, then, the time in which the god and gods show themselves in their mysterious presence; i.e. the time in which a grounding-attunement attunes us to the most distressing need that calls us to ask the question of the meaning (truth) of Being as such. Beings then appear to us as the meaningful beings that they are, freed in their spaces that are opened by locations.

It is important to note how Heidegger's view is quite unlike Nietzsche's own. Nietzsche's view simply posits a new being as the highest being, namely the representing subject understood according to the doctrine of the will to power. Nietzsche's view is much more akin to the traditional interpretation of Kant's view. But whereas Kant has a fixed set of categories necessary for representation, Nietzsche denies these and replaces them with a view in which the being of the subject is determined by its continually coming to master its world and in a kind of perpetual becoming. Nietzsche does not escape the conception of being as a highest being, but merely replaces the one conception of Being as a being for another one; i.e. he makes Being into a being that is determined by becoming – namely, the representing subject understood as the will to power. In this sense, Nietzsche does not escape the very metaphysical picture that results in Nietzsche's challenge. Nietzsche is left with a view in which he can give no answer to his own challenge: his view in which the world is only justified as – receives its meaning and

being as – an aesthetic phenomenon is precisely the kind of delusion that Nietzsche sought to avoid. Nietzsche himself appears not to have thought that his own challenge could be met. It is for this reason that he speaks of festivals and games that we must play in order to make up for the death of god. Though there is no meaning, we can produce meaning by deciding that certain things are valuable and others are not, though nothing is meaningful as such.

Heidegger's response to Nietzsche's challenge is to reject the key assumption on which the challenge rests. Namely, Nietzsche accepts that the world is basically a chaotic mess of intrinsically meaningless stuff that must then have meaning imposed on it. On Heidegger's view, the world *already* has meaning from the start. This is not a world that we produce or create. It is not merely the world of cognition, if that is meant in any intellectualist sense. It is the only world to which we have access – a world that is already meaningful for us and in which various meaningful fields are disclosed to us, not produced by us, by our being situated in those locations that open themselves for us. It is only in stripping down the world from the intrinsically meaningful place that it is and in attempting to de-world it in speculative thought that we can reach something like a localized domain in which there is something like mere material with its Cartesian properties. Thus, the gods serve as a response to Nietzsche's challenge insofar as they are that which gathers us to meaningful fields that we ourselves do not produce. If we were, for example, blind to the possibility of projecting nature mathematically, then the field of the mathematical physics would be impossible. Much as we saw in Chapter 2 that beings as material are not prior to their being, beings are not prior to locations and

locations are only opened by the beckoning of a god. Our world does not need some being that grants meaningfulness or a ground to beings, because according to Heidegger's view our world is always already meaningful.

CHAPTER 5

MORTALS

The final member of the fourfold is mortals. We have already said quite a bit about mortals. Mortals live on the earth, both in the sense of living amidst beings determined in their being by φύσις as well as potentially in their own φύσις. Mortals live under the sky, within the horizon for the possibilities of Being, hence, the possibilities of their being, the possibilities of the being of others, and the possibility of the being of beings as a whole. Finally, though the fourfold are inseparable, mortals are linked most closely with the gods, in a confrontation relation in which the gods call mortals to make a decision on their being as mortals. Without further ado, let's look at Heidegger's poetic definitions of *mortals*:

The mortals are human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death *as* death. Only man dies, and indeed continually, as long as he remains on earth, under sky, before divinities.¹⁹⁰

The mortals are human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies. The animal perishes. It has death neither ahead of itself nor behind it. Death is the shrine of Nothing ...¹⁹¹

Heidegger's first claim could be all too easily misunderstood. When Heidegger calls mortals "human beings," we could easily understand this as a biological classification. Mortals are the species *homo sapiens*. But Heidegger's second poetic definition adds something important that is omitted from the first. Namely, Heidegger

¹⁹⁰ Heidegger 1971b: 148.

¹⁹¹ Heidegger 1971b: 176.

says that, while man alone is capable of death as death, “the animal perishes.” Thus, mortals are not to be understood as human beings, understood as a biological classification.

Although we have already looked at death in Chapter 4, perhaps, given the centrality of death in Heidegger’s poetic definition of mortals, we should look at death again. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes between *perishing*, *demise*, and *death*. As we can see in Heidegger’s second definition of mortals, he has not abandoned the distinction. So, we will look at perishing and demise, to eliminate these possible ways of understanding death as the distinctly existential manner of death that Heidegger links essentially to mortals.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger explains that “the ending of that which lives we have called ‘perishing’ [*verenden*].”¹⁹² A monkey dies, plants die; everything that lives has its death. Death is a biological fact. All biological functioning of living organisms comes to a final end¹⁹³ and, leaving aside the technical determination of when this has actually occurred in any case, when death occurs, that which was alive has ceased to be alive. According to Taylor Carman,¹⁹⁴ Heidegger’s term for “death” meant in this biological manner is *perishing* (*verenden*). Because Carman gives us alternate names for the first two meanings of “death” in *Being and Time* and Carol White, whose

¹⁹² Heidegger 1962: 291.

¹⁹³ I say here ‘final end’ to rule out any problems about cryogenically frozen organisms that may have ceased all biological functioning while in cryogenic slumber, but may be revived afterwards. I am not sure that it is true that cryogenically frozen organisms really do completely cease to biologically function while frozen, but if they do, I don’t want to call them ‘bio-dead’.

¹⁹⁴ Carman 2003: 278.

interpretation of these same phenomena we will look at later, does not, we will call the phenomenon of “perishing” as Carman interprets it *‘bio-death’*.

Bio-death is certainly something that comes to all beings that are alive. Everything that is born or otherwise brought into life will eventually cease to function, will no longer be able to maintain its activity as the kind of biological being that it is, and will lose its consciousness, if it has any (e.g. beavers seem to be conscious, orange trees don’t). In this sense, human beings, understood merely as members of the species *homo sapiens*, will all meet their end. As biological entities that have been born into this world, we will all eventually bio-die. It is worth noting that this has, unfortunately, been taken as somehow the central feature of Heidegger’s discussion of death. Often times, what one will hear in a university-level lecture on Heidegger is not that this, bio-death, is something that Heidegger spends little time on and that contributes little to his position, but rather that it is the key to Heidegger’s position. What usually follows this proclamation is that, once we have realized that we will some day bio-die, then we will realize that life is short and we should stop putting things off and get to making something of our lives. Of course, this position *could* be of interest to someone who simply needed something to draw herself to action. But it equally could undermine any reason for action: why get to making something of my life? It’s going to be over soon and will, in the long run, be nothing to me and, when the human race dies out, will be nothing to anyone. Few, if any, of Heidegger’s important interpreters are lured into this misunderstanding (e.g. Carman is not), but far too many others are. But Heidegger himself explicitly rejected this interpretation:

No one has yet surmised or dared to ponder what was thought *ahead* regarding being-toward-death in the context of *Being and Time* and *only* there, i.e., what was thought “fundamental-ontologically” and never anthropologically and in terms of “worldview.”¹⁹⁵

Whatever Heidegger has in mind in *Being and Time*, it cannot be bio-death, nor a change of worldviews in light of the certainty of bio-death. That Heidegger is not concerned with bio-death in *Being and Time* when he talks about being-toward-death ought to be clear. Quite a few people, in fact pretty much every human being that has ever achieved a conscious recognition of bio-death has considered it and how it ought to affect their way of living at some time or another. It would be ridiculous to think that Heidegger would say that no one had “surmised or dared to ponder” the fact that he will bio-die and that he ought to live his life in light of the knowledge that it will someday – in the relatively near future – bio-die, when it seems fairly obvious that most people have at one time or another dared to ponder that.

Secondly, Heidegger here explicitly says that being-toward-death in *Being and Time* was thought fundamental-ontologically, not ontically. Insofar as being-toward-death is thought fundamental-ontologically, it is thought in terms of the most basic structures of Being, not of a being. I.e. whatever Heidegger means by “being-toward-death,” it does not merely refer to the ceasing of one being’s being within the world, but bears on Being and, hence, beings as such.

Finally, Heidegger says that being-toward-death ought not to be thought in terms of a worldview. This means that, whatever Heidegger has in mind in *Being and Time* in his discussion of being-toward-death, it is not something so simple as a change in

¹⁹⁵ Heidegger 1999: 199.

worldview, a change in perspective in which changes our way of seeing things, which makes us get to living our lives to the fullest or simply realizing that we aren't going to live forever.

Carman's interpretation of "perishing" as bio-death is not the only important interpretation of perishing. Carol White has one of, if not the, most respected interpretations of Heidegger on death. On Carol White's Interpretation,¹⁹⁶ perishing is not quite the biological conception of "death" that we saw in Carman's Interpretation, though there is a biological aspect to it. Rather, perishing is going out of the world of significance¹⁹⁷, i.e. to cease to be a living being that is engaged with beings, other Daseins, or with one's own Dasein itself; to cease to be a self-interpretive living being engaged in a world composed of meaningful fields of significance. The reason that White explicitly states that perishing is a living being's "going out of the world of significance" is because she wants to distinguish perishing from *mere* bio-death. In bio-death, as we said of "death" in an undifferentiated way at the beginning, "A monkey dies, plants die; everything that lives has its death," or, as we can say more precisely now "A monkey bio-dies, plants bio-die; everything that lives bio-dies, *but not everything that lives perishes.*"

To perish, something must have been the kind of being that "takes a stand on its own being," or "Da-sein" as Heidegger calls such a self-interpretive being (i.e. us). How else could a being go out of the world of significance? Thus, we have here a rather

¹⁹⁶ White 2005: 66-71.

¹⁹⁷ "Significance" is a technical term for Heidegger that relates to the structure of any world that can be meaningful for us. Precisely how this is worked out is tangential to our current aim, so I'll leave that for another time.

important but fine distinction between bio-death and perishing. Monkeys, plants, and non-human living things are not self-interpretive in Heidegger's sense. We are. In this sense, it is only Dasein that can perish, while everything that lives bio-dies.

White's interpretation of perishing has an obvious flaw. Namely, Heidegger *explicitly* says that the animal perishes. One might attempt to save her interpretation by claiming that the "animal" that Heidegger is referring to is specifically the *human animal*. Such a response would be exceptionally speculative and would, furthermore, be inconsistent with Heidegger's usual uses of the unqualified term "animal." E.g in *On the Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger says "A stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world...the peasant woman, on the other hand, has a world because she dwells in the overtness of beings, of things that are."¹⁹⁸ Here Heidegger specifically says that animals are worldless, but that peasant women (and, we can certainly infer, human beings generally) do have worlds. Heidegger's brief explanation suggests that the peasant woman has a world because she occupies a location (or, more appropriately, a situation). So, White's suggestion that perishing has something to do with going out of the world of significance seems to have some ground. But whatever that "going out of the world of significance" refers to cannot be uniquely related to the going out to the world of significance that happens to human beings in bio-death (or brain-death or anything else that eliminates our ability to comport ourselves to beings).

¹⁹⁸ Heidegger 1971b: 43.

“Perishing” is, thus, the end of that which lives, of that which has a “course of life,” of that which has βίος. Naturally, this refers to a particular kind of φύσει ὄντα¹⁹⁹ - the φύσει ὄντα that has a course of life, that is understood as that which develops towards some end and then declines away from that end towards no longer being-towards that end. Such beings come to emerge into the world of significance as the beings that they are by having an end, which sets limits to their being. In perishing, they decline away from that end towards no longer having that end. When a being no longer has the end, e.g. of being a monkey, then it has perished. In other words, we have an understanding of what it is to be a monkey, but when a monkey bio-dies, then it no longer appears to us as a monkey, but as that which is no longer a monkey, but is now, e.g., a monkey corpse. The being has changed over in its being. It is only because biological beings show up to us in a field of significance that they may exit that field. This is confirmed in what seems to be the ignored second half of Heidegger’s sentence defining perishing: “[that which lives] has [its death in the sense of perishing], not in ontical isolation, but as codetermined by its primordial kind of being.”²⁰⁰ I.e. the being that had its being in being *as* a monkey can only have perishing because it moved out of a location of significance and has changed over into another mode of being. This “*as* a monkey” for such and such a way of addressing this kind of living being is what is lost in perishing. In this sense, human beings too “perish.”

¹⁹⁹ See Heidegger 1992: 108.

²⁰⁰ Heidegger 1962: 291.

Now that we have come to understand perishing (as well as bio-death, and White's limited interpretation of perishing), we can turn to *demise*: "In so far as this is the case [i.e. that everything that lives perishes], Dasein too can end without ownedly dying, though on the other hand, *qua* Dasein, it does not simply perish. We designate this intermediate phenomenon as its "*demise*"."²⁰¹ Neither bio-death, nor perishing are the only senses in which our lives come to an end. But there is some "intermediate phenomena" between perishing and the kind of existential death that is essential for a justified interpretation of Heidegger's term "mortals." Understanding this intermediate phenomenon, demise, ought to help give us insight into which direction to take in our analysis of existential death. We will begin, again, by looking at Taylor Carman's interpretation of demise.

Jim Morrison famously said and asked: "You've seen your birth, your life and death, you might recall all of the rest. Did you have a good world when you died? Enough to base a movie on?"²⁰² Leaving aside that we probably did not witness our birth in any relevant sense that is still with us, that we have only 'seen' our lives up until now, and that we have yet to face death in any sense that we have laid out thus far, what Morrison seems to be hinting at is that our lives unfold in a very real sense just like a story, a movie or, rather, as a kind of (auto)-biography. At some point, the story comes to an end. At some point, there is no new material to unfold. Once your story has come to completion, there is, so to speak, no more to be written about your life's story.

²⁰¹ Ibid.: 291.

²⁰² Morrison 1991: 191.

A worry here, that comes up in some Heidegger scholarship and, which we will return to, is whether or not one's story is a coherent well-formed story.²⁰³ Much like a good movie or the composition of a good orchestra, the structure of the composition is extremely important. If we are to have led a good life, one that is "enough to base a movie on", it is important how our lived auto-biography unfolds.

This is Carman's Interpretation of what Heidegger calls *Demise (Ableben)* and Carman calls "*biographical death.*" We will, thus, call this sense of "death" "*biographical death.*" But, again, so long as we are alive, our story is still unfolding and the completion of our biographical story, our biographical-death, is never present to us. How my life's story will end is still an open question. I may well be understood as a hero, to myself and others, for the entirety of my life, right up until my final moment where I do something so vile that the everyone, including me with my dying breath, come to understand everything that preceded it in an entirely different way. In fact, my life's story, if it is not only limited to my understanding of my life's story, but how others understand me as well, may even change (perhaps even radically so) long after I have bio-died.

Much as White has a very different interpretation of perishing than Carman does, she also does not interpret demise as biographical-death. Death as bio-death, perishing, and biographical death, have particular meanings for us, biodeath has been given a particular interpretation, this understanding of bio-death, according to White, is demise.

²⁰³ Some have taken Heidegger's term "ownedness" (*Eigentlichkeit*) to refer to having such a coherent life-story. See, e.g., 1983.

One understands mortals' death as a changeover from the kind of being of a self-interpretive being to another manner of being (or non-being).

Bio-death can have the meaning, for example, of being transformed into an immaterial spiritual state in which we will be granted eternal bliss for having been a good Christian or in which we will be sentenced to eternal damnation and suffering for having lived our lives as sinners. We may understand our bio-death as a transition to a new life where we will be united with the gods, if we have been brave and honorable, or sent to the dull and dreary underworld for a new life of eternal boredom, if we have been weak and cowardly. We may instead understand the meaning of our bio-deaths to be nothing more than the end of all consciousness and experience – like an eternal dreamless sleep from which we will never awaken (i.e. becoming nothing).

Because the meaning of our bio-death, demise, conditions how we understand our place in the world, it also conditions how we live. If one understands our demise in a Christian way, then one has good motivation to obey the word of Yahweh and to avoid sin. If one has the (superficial) Ásatrú understanding of demise, then one has good reason to act bravely and honorably. What about the conception of demise in which we simply go out of existence altogether? As I wrote an earlier version of this paper, a former student of mine told me a story about a hit-and-run accident that she had just witnessed in which three young women were injured. She asked me how someone could do such a thing and then simply drive off not knowing if any or all of the three young women were hurt or even dead. Though I'm hardly going to rule out that there can be a substantive ethics with the conception of demise in which death is like an eternal and

dreamless sleep, it seems to me that it is very easy for one to come to an egoistic understanding of how one should act such that the “cover your own ass principle” that seems to have been in effect with the hit-and-run driver, though I find it reprehensible, is the reasonable principle to follow. On that understanding of demise, this is the only life that you have and, when it’s over, it’s over. What deep motivation could possibly force such a person to stop and risk losing years of his one and only life to prison? Here one might reasonably think of Dostoyevsky’s claim that if god is dead, then anything is permissible. Many people do in fact take it that this is what follows from the interpretation of demise in which there is no afterlife. Though this is a bit of a simplification, we can clearly see that demise does, or at very worst we believe *should*, have strong implications for how one who has such and such an interpretation of demise leads (or *should* lead) ones life.

Each of these interpretations of demise, Carman’s and White’s, is interesting and enlightening about how we might think of death, but both rely on a mistaken interpretation of perishing. Heidegger distinctly calls demise an *intermediate phenomenon* between perishing and death. Perishing, as we saw, is to be understood as a being’s changing over from being alive, in the sense of a living being as self-emerging, to being no longer alive. This meant that beings that we understood, that were opened within some field of significance for us, as alive lost that meaning; i.e. there was a changeover in their manner of being. This means that what is dealt with in perishing is innerworldly beings (i.e. beings that are either ready-to-hand, present-at-hand, or are otherwise worldless, like animals). Insofar as human beings are understood bodily, as an

animal, they perish. But Heidegger explicitly says that “Dasein never perishes.”²⁰⁴ Why? Because, Dasein (human beings understood as mortals) are *not* innerworldly beings.

Other mortals (as Dasein) appear to us as Dasein-with (*Mitdasein*). Other Dasein’s “being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with*.”²⁰⁵ Much as we discover beings in their being by locations of interest or need, we discover other mortals in just this way. However, we do not discover them as beings in the world. Rather, we discover them as the locus of just the same kind of revealing gathering of beings to their being that we ourselves are.

Dasein’s world frees beings which not only are quite distinct from equipment and things, but which also – in accordance with their kind of being *as Dasein* themselves – are ‘in’ the world in which they are at the same time encountered within-the-world, and are ‘in’ it by way of Being-in-the-world.²⁰⁶

What we discover in experience, proximally and for the most part, is not ourselves as subjects isolated from or prior to other subjects. Rather, we begin with the worlds of our interests, with fields of meaning. Much as we understand beings according to their being within a space opened by a location in terms of our interests and needs, we understand ourselves and others as those who open locations and are involved with beings in those locations in such and such a way. “Dasein finds ‘itself’ proximally in *what* it does, uses, expects, avoids – in those things environmentally ready-to-hand with

²⁰⁴ Heidegger 1962: 291.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*: 155.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*: 154.

which it is proximally *concerned*.”²⁰⁷ We neither proximally nor for the most part discover ourselves as “subjects of experience,” but rather discover ourselves as being involved in some situation or another for some end. When in a situation, understood thus, One is involved in such and such a way. One may either be involved in a way appropriate to such a situation – e.g. such and such a style of comporting Oneself to beings is the way that One appropriately comports Oneself to beings, when one is teaching; chalk, lecterns and blackboards have the meaning that they do not for *me* as a teacher, but for *One* who is teaching, including me – or inappropriate to such a situation – e.g. drinking whiskey in One’s pajamas between singing verses of Slayer’s song “Reign in Blood” is not what One does when One is teaching. As such, others are “those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too.”²⁰⁸

Much as we saw that in Heidegger’s top-down holism it is the synaesthetic experience that precedes the experience of the individual senses, the whole being which precedes it as a visual, auditory, sensory, gustatory, or olfactory being, it is the whole of being-involved that precedes our experience of a person that is involved. I.e. it is the teaching that allows me to discover myself as a teacher. I do not first experience myself as a “subject” and then impose the role “being-a-teacher” upon myself-as-subject. This is why Heidegger says that we are proximally and for the most part a Oneself. I.e. we normally understand ourselves as One understands Oneself as engaged in the situations in

²⁰⁷ Ibid.: 155.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.: 154.

which we are involved. Because we proximally and for the most part understand ourselves as a Oneself, we have the characteristic of Being-with, which allows us then to discover others as Dasein-with. “Being-with is in every case a characteristic of one’s own Dasein; Dasein-with characterizes the Dasein of Others to the extent that it is freed by its world for a Being-with. Only insofar as one’s own Dasein has the essential character of Being-with, is it Dasein-with as encounterable for Others.” I.e. insofar as we have the grounds of discovering ourselves and others as Oneselves, as the gatherers of such meaningful locations, we have the ability to discover ourselves and others in our being as being-a-teacher, being-a-student, etc.

The purpose of this aside was merely to show that, whereas we understand beings as φύσει ὄντα that gathers itself or τέχνη ὄντα which does not gather itself, mortals are those that gather beings to themselves into situations. I.e. it is because my current interest is in teaching that the chalk and blackboard show themselves to me as having the meaning that they do – that is the meaning that these beings have to One who is being-a-teacher. And, in cases such as this, there is another obvious way in which others are discovered. Teaching is only teaching if there is learning. It is only by being-with others, i.e. students, in a shared situation that the chalk and blackboard have the meaning that they do for One who is being-a-teacher or for One who is being-a-student. Others are not beings, but the locus of meaningful fields, of locations.

As an intermediate phenomenon, demise includes a kind of going out of the world of significance. However, unlike perishing, demise does not indicate the going out of the world of significance for a being. Rather, demise is the going out of the world of

significance of another, in their no longer being Dasein-with, but being no-longer-Dasein-with. In other words, insofar as another goes out of the world of significance, insofar as I no longer have the possibility of being-with her, she has demised. But Heidegger specifically says that demise is the unowned end of Dasein. Demise is the understanding of death that we have when we say that *One* dies. This is no biographical death nor is it a shared understanding of what it means to bio-die or perish. White, as we saw in our analysis of perishing, captured just this phenomenon, but mistakenly labeled it as perishing, when it is in fact demise.

Finally, we may turn to *death*. Carman makes an important point to begin his discussion: “Strictly speaking, Dasein cannot *be* dead, since to *be dead* is, for Dasein, precisely *not to be*.”²⁰⁹ Human beings, understood as mortals, cannot be dead; they can only be dying. Once dead, the mortal is no longer, only a corpse – the remains of the human animal that had been mortal; Dasein - remains. Thus, Heidegger constantly talks about being-towards-death and never speaks of being-dead.

According to Carman’s interpretation of death, what we are not, rather than what we are directly, determines our deaths. A possibility for me is a possibility that is opened up for my way or style of being, for the decision that I have made on who I am or, if I have not explicitly taken up any of my possibilities, the possibilities that are open for me based on my having fallen into some way or another without having explicitly chosen that way of being. Death is determined by impossibility. These impossibilities “are what

²⁰⁹ Carman 2003: 277.

or who I *am not*, or more precisely *cannot be*.”²¹⁰ Further, in our taking up or falling into some possible ways of being, we are at the same time closing up some other possibilities of being, rendering them impossible for us. Carman’s example is that in choosing to be a committed husband, being a flirtatious bachelor becomes impossible for him. “For every possibility that opens up for Dasein, others are constantly being closed off.”²¹¹ That is to say that every decision to be one way is at the same time a decision against being some other (incompatible) way of being. Thus, Carman says that, when Heidegger says that we are constantly dying so long as we live, what he means is that in being some way, e.g. as a committed husband, other possibilities of our being are being constantly rendered impossible for us, e.g. being a flirtatious bachelor.

Carman then distinguishes between “unowned” (i.e. unowned) being-towards-death and “owned” (i.e. owned) being-towards-death.²¹² In unowned being-towards-death, one does not have an integrated view of one’s taking up possibilities and of one’s closing down possibilities. Carman does not spend very much space explicating unowned being-towards-death, but it appears to be something like this: In taking up being a committed husband, he may lament the fact that he cannot at the same time be a flirtatious bachelor. In doing so, he would then see not being able to be a flirtatious bachelor as a mere unfortunate side effect of his being a committed husband that, perhaps, in his perfect world being both would be an open possibility for him.

²¹⁰ Ibid.: 281.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.: 282-283.

Owned being-towards-death, on the other hand, involves one's having an integrated understanding of his taking up of possibilities and his closing down of possibilities as being one and the same. In taking up the possibility of being a committed husband, one who is ownedly being-towards his death also takes up the impossibility of not being a flirtatious bachelor as part of the possibility of being a committed husband.

Carman's interpretation is not so much wrong as it is incomplete. In only dealing with the opening and closing of possibilities given fairly local choices, he does not move beyond a merely existentiell (i.e. local) conception of death, whereas death is an existential phenomenon. Heidegger makes clear that death, in being-toward-death, is specifically related to the disclosure (truth) and grounding of an understanding of Being that opens and grounds a world (i.e. it is enowned) when he says that "the uniqueness of death in human [i.e. mortal] Da-sein belongs to the most originary determination of Da-sein, namely to being en-owned by Being itself in order to ground its truth."²¹³ This is why White calls Heidegger's conception of death "*existential death*."

White rightly begins her analysis by noting that existential death is grounded "in Dasein's relation to Being."²¹⁴ Heidegger confirms this claim: "That death is projected-open ... means initially, in the confines of the task of *Being and Time*, that death is connected to ... the domain of projecting-open the truth of Being itself."²¹⁵ Death is not about the closing up of existentiell possibilities, though the closing up of some existentiell possibilities can follow from existential death, insofar as they not only fail to

²¹³ Heidegger 1999: 199.

²¹⁴ White 2005: 72.

²¹⁵ Heidegger 1999: 199.

be live possibilities (e.g. the committed husband's being a flirtatious bachelor), but they fail to be possibilities at all (e.g. I cannot be a medieval knight). "The point ... where Dasein's possibilities leave off and its impossibilities begin is...determined by its way of being."²¹⁶ Our distinctly non-Christian-medieval understanding of Being closes off the possibility of my being a medieval knight (although it allows for the possibility of my pretending to be a medieval knight at the Renaissance Fair).

White's discussion of death brings us right back to our discussion of the call of the gods from Chapter 4: Death "always has something unsettled in it, a problem in need of a solution, a question in need of an answer. But death marks a limit which puts an end to the debate over what it is to be."²¹⁷ As we saw in the previous chapter, the gods call us to the question of the meaning (truth) of Being and demands that we make a decision in response to this question. Heidegger again confirms this claim: "What is at stake [in Heidegger's discussion of being-toward-death] is ... to draw death into Dasein, in order to master Dasein in its breadth as abground and thus fully to appraise the ground of the possibility of the truth [i.e. meaning] of Being."²¹⁸ But, insofar as this question does not admit of an eternal answer, one whose ground is a-historical, it is always an open question in need of an answer, insofar as we are comported towards this question. The task of directing ourselves towards being-toward-death "is necessary only within the sphere of the task of laying the foundation for the *question of Being* – a task, however,

²¹⁶ White 2005: 77.

²¹⁷ Ibid.: 72.

²¹⁸ Heidegger 1999: 200.

that is not limited to philosophy.”²¹⁹ Being-toward-death is laying a foundation, a preparing the way for, a confrontation with our gods, with the last god, and with the question of the meaning of Being as such. Heidegger notes that this task is not limited to philosophy. Heidegger certainly thinks that this is also a task for essential poetry, understood as ποιήσις (i.e. revealing). It is reasonable to assume that Heidegger thinks that this is a task for any thinking that is prepared to think about the most essential question to our being and that all of us have the possibility of thinking the question of Being. This is because, as we will look at later in this chapter, Heidegger holds that human beings (understood as mortal Dasein) are meditative, that is are capable of thinking meditatively, in their nature.

“It is not that Dasein is no more but that it is not ... able-to-be-Dasein any more, that is, it is not able to be the ‘there’ through which being discloses itself.”²²⁰ In the breakdown of an understanding of Being, when it no longer is able to ground our world – e.g. as it was not for Nietzsche when he first raised his challenge – Dasein can no longer be t/here (Da). I.e. the understanding of Being that had served as the measure of what it is to be a (good) person or a being no longer held sway. While this happens on the deepest level of our understanding of Being (i.e. of what it is to be at all), we can clearly see an analogy in pretty much any world-changing event. For example, there was a level of security that Americans had in which it was completely obvious that we were safe here in the United States against the horrible terrorist actions that plagued Israel. After the

²¹⁹ Ibid. (my emphasis).

²²⁰ White 2005: 76.

September 11th attacks, we could not go back to our former understanding of ourselves as completely protected and secure against international terrorism. In essence, we couldn't go back to where we were (the there) in our understanding of our position in the world. In much the same way, once we have determined beings as the represented for a representing agent, we cannot simply go back a "naïve" understanding of ourselves as what Merleau-Ponty called empty heads turned towards the world.²²¹ As the most primordial level of our understanding of Being changed over, some possibilities for our understanding of ourselves, others, and the beings in our world were opened up and, consequently, others were closed off.

It is in this sense, in the sense that some possibilities of our understanding of Being fails us that indicates that death is upon us. This is why Heidegger says that "Death is the shrine of Nothing, that is, of that which in every respect is never something that merely exists, but which nevertheless presences, even as the mystery of Being itself."²²² Heidegger uses the term "nothing" in at least two ways. The first is that the nothing is that which is not in Being. As our understanding of Being gives a measure for all that is, it determines what may and what may not emerge into presence as a being. The second way that Heidegger uses the term is that the nothing "is" no being. In the former case, we could think of Kuhnian revolutions as changing measures such that that which could not emerge into presence in such and such can now come to be experienced. For example, it would have been impossible for saints and sinners to emerge in pre-

²²¹ Merleau-Ponty 2002: 413.

²²² Heidegger 1971b: 176.

Christian Europe. The second sense actually includes the most important case from the first use, namely: Being. Being is not a being. Being is, according to the measures set in response to Being itself, not a being, nothing.

White indicates that the reference to Kuhnian revolutions is not a mistake: “The nature of Dasein’s death can be adequately determined simply by the notion of it as being-at-the-end in the sense that its current, actual possibilities are finite or come to an end, although we continue to live.”²²³ As we saw in Nietzsche’s analysis of the understanding of Being in Western metaphysics suggests, the decisions that we make in response to the question of the meaning (truth) of Being play themselves out and, from time to time, call for a new answer according to some possibility opened up by the need raised by the failure of the current understanding of Being.

In being comported toward the impossibilities of being in being-towards-death “Dasein confronts the limits of its disclosedness.”²²⁴ I.e. in being-towards-death, we are brought to the limits of what is possible for our understanding within the horizon of possibility (sky) opened for us by our understanding of Being. In being brought to this limit, as we are with Nietzsche’s challenge in which we find that our current technological understanding of Being does not allow us to capture the meaning of Being as such, the measure that serves as the measure of all that is for us fails and we are forced either to make a decision in response to the question of the meaning (truth) of Being in general or we can cover over the lack inherent in our understanding of Being.

²²³ White 2005: 76.

²²⁴ Ibid.: 77.

So long as we take heed of the problem opened up for us when our understanding of Being becomes problematic in this way, we become capable of comporting ourselves towards our world as being the world that is revealed by us, by our attuned understanding of Being, and that it is only for a seeing like ours, a gathering of the earth and sky into their strife and in confronting our gods that the world, beings, ourselves, and others are revealed to us. This is why White says that “what is at issue is Dasein’s ownmost being as the being through whom Being is revealed.”²²⁵ What is at issue is our existence. “Existence” here meaning our taking a stand on what it is to be (i.e. making a decision about the meaning of Being), which is both determined by possibilities opened up for being by that understanding and the impossibility of possibilities for being that are closed off by that understanding. This is why Heidegger says that “Dasein *is* its world existingly.”²²⁶

In comporting ourselves toward the question of the meaning (truth) of Being as such, “death discloses what it is for Dasein to be *as* a disclosure of Being.”²²⁷ That is to say that we free ourselves for the understanding of ourselves as world-disclosers; as those for whom Being is an issue and, in taking a stand on that issue, beings are freed for their being. “Hence death lays claim to Dasein as what it is; it clearly distinguishes Dasein from what-is as nature, the ready-to-hand, and the present-at-hand.”²²⁸ In our open

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Heidegger 1962: 416.

²²⁷ White 2005: 79.

²²⁸ Ibid.

confrontation with our gods (esp. the last god), we become the gatherers of Being. This is why Heidegger famously calls mortals the “shepherd of Being.”²²⁹

Like Carman, following Heidegger, White distinguishes between owned and unowned being-toward-death or, as White typically prefers, “unowned dying.” “Dying is a particular way of existing. Dasein can die either ownedly or unownedly.”²³⁰ We will begin by looking at White’s account of unowned dying.

In unowned dying, we thoughtlessly take our limits (or, more precisely, the limits for beings as a whole) as those laid out by the One rather than our ownmost possibilities as an individual. The leveled down possibilities for understanding which are open to any-One are the possibilities determine the possibilities for beings as a whole. In unowned dying, One does not question the meaning (truth) of Being as such or recognize the groundlessness of the leveled understanding of Being. Mortals are not understood as the world disclosers and gatherers that they are, but are merely understood as a being – although perhaps as a being of a special kind (e.g. immaterial substance, representing subject, etc.). Unowned Dasein flees anxiety in the face of death by making anxiety in the face of death into fear of our own demise. That is, we take the limits of our existence not to be a limit to the possibilities and impossibilities of our understanding of Being, but rather as a limit to our being as an innerworldly being. Furthermore, to avoid even dwelling on the possibility of death, besides merely misunderstanding it as demise, One tells Oneself that One’s demise is off in the future, so put the fear off as not to be

²²⁹ Heidegger 1993a: 252.

²³⁰ White 2005: 81.

concerned about yet. Death as demise happens to One, but not me, not now. In this way, unowned Dasein completely covers over its being as Dasein.

What unowned being-toward-death avoids is the understanding of the dependency that our world has on us, as Dasein and the limits that arise as a result of this dependency. But even if I accept that I am a Oneself and that, as such, I will demise does not give me owned being-toward-death. Such a change in my orientation towards my demise only gives me a personal, rather than an impersonal, understanding of my demise, not an owned comportment towards my own death. The problem with the unowned conception of death is not that it is factually mistaken – it is not that it mistakenly makes me think that One dies, but I won't die – but “an unowned conception [of death] has not grasped Dasein's being *as* Dasein.”²³¹ Whereas unowned being-toward-death is the death of the Oneself, the end of Oneself as being amongst beings in the world, “owned being toward death manifests Dasein's ownmost self as the being through which Being is revealed.”²³² I.e. what unowned being-toward-death misses out on is the limits of our being as mortals, Dasein, the shepherd of Being, gatherers of Being, and as world (location) disclosers.

In unowned being-toward-death, we have allowed the structure of significance to be determined by a being-for-the-sake-of-the-One. In doing so, all of the possibilities of Being, at the deepest levels, stagnate. We understand that this is how One acts, this is what One does, this is what One is, when One is such and such a kind of person. But

²³¹ Ibid.: 82.

²³² Ibid.: 87. Properly speaking, White is mistaken to call Dasein a being (she actually says “entity,” but as I have indicated in the introduction, I have replaced “entity” with “being” throughout this paper for consistency in terms). But this mistake does not, otherwise, effect the accuracy of her claim.

“Dasein’s understanding of Being can change, and new ways of being are not always impossible. Being can reveal the way of being which was formerly concealed, as happened in the shift of understanding from the Greek to the medieval to the modern worlds.”²³³ That is to repeat what we have already said: It would have been as impossible for someone with the understanding of the Ancient Greeks to have been a saint, impossible for the medieval to have been a media mogul, and impossible for you or me to be a medieval knight. “The world made sterile and banal by the One’s reduction of its possibilities to a bland sameness is transformed by the new insight into Being. Possibilities are unconcealed which were not illuminated before.”²³⁴ I.e. the One serves to make ways of being obvious and accessible to any-One. Once the One has fully taken control of the possibilities for being in an understanding of Being, they become completely obvious and are no longer our own, taken as our decision against other possibilities as a result of the question of the meaning (truth) of Being in general.

In contrast to unowned being-toward-death, it ought already be somewhat obvious precisely what owned being-toward-death is. Namely, in owned being-toward-death, we are open to our being as mortals, as Dasein, etc., as those gathered to question Being that then gathers together a world in a response to the question of the meaning (truth) of Being in general. Or, as White puts it, “owned being toward death is the relationship to Being that opens up Dasein for such new possibilities of being.”²³⁵

²³³ Ibid.: 88.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

Before we continue, there is sufficient reason to consider what we would have, if we were to incorporate Carman's interpretation of being-toward-death into White's deeper interpretation of being-toward-death. Doing so would give us a better understanding of being-towards-death. Carman's view was, as you will remember, that unowned being-toward-death took up some possibilities, but did not explicitly take up the impossibilities that resulted from his taking up the possibilities that he did. Owned being-toward-death was, on the other hand, not only the explicitly taking up of some possibilities, but of also explicitly taking up the impossibilities that result from the taking up of those possibilities as a part of the possibilities themselves. If we, then, transpose these distinctions into White's interpretation of owned being-toward-death, what we find is that White's owned being-toward-death can either be owned or unowned in Carman's sense. That is, we might understand ourselves as Dasein, as world disclosers, and make a decision in response to the question of the meaning of Being in general, explicitly taking up a definite horizon of possibilities for beings, but it still is an open question whether or not, in doing so, we also explicitly take up the impossibilities of Being that results from our having taken up the understanding of Being that we have. I would like to suggest that a fully owned being-toward-death is a being-toward-death that both takes us as Dasein and also takes up both the possibilities and impossibilities that make up the decision that we make in response to the meaning (truth) of Being in general. This is why, I take it, that Heidegger says that Dasein "maintains itself both in the truth and untruth with equal primordially" and that "Resoluteness appropriates untruth ownedly."²³⁶ I.e. as mortal

²³⁶ Heidegger 1962: 345.

Dasein, beings are always revealed to us in their truth, their being, whether the being of these beings is within a grounded or ungrounded location. But beings are also in the concealed, in the untruth, insofar as we have, by taking up some understanding of Being, rendered other possibilities for these beings impossible. In resoluteness (holding on to) being-toward-death, mortal Dasein explicitly takes up both a possibility of understanding Being and also explicitly takes up the impossibilities resulting from the decision about Being as well. Of course, this does not mean that every possibility and every impossibility for Being that results from a decision must be taken up. But rather, that those other possibilities that show themselves to us as a live possibility for understanding Being, especially the rejected understanding of the One, must be taken up as impossible. In taking up a new decision, we do not destroy the One, but only one understanding of the One. In opening up a new understanding of Being, once that understanding takes hold and determines how we experience ourselves, others, and beings as a whole, we open up a new One as well.

Owned Daseins are those mortals which Heidegger calls demigods in *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister."* Owned Dasein are those who are between the gods and mere mortals (understood here as Oneselves) and who thus stand between the question of the meaning (truth) of Being in general. This is why "Owned Dasein is ... a forerunner [*Vorläufer; anticipator*] or harbinger of a new understanding of Being."²³⁷ As demigods, owned Dasein is a forerunner into a new possibility for understanding Being. It is precisely here, not as gods as Young thought, that we find role or life models. Not any role or life

²³⁷ White 2005: 89.

models, to be sure, but the exemplars that first open up a whole new way of understanding our very being (e.g. Zoroaster, Jesus, or even Descartes).

Unowned and owned being-toward-death can be genuine or not genuine. I take the genuine-not genuine distinction to refer to our way of understanding ourselves as the disclosers of being, either as Dasein (genuine) or as a being (not genuine). Heidegger says “Any *genuine* method is based on viewing in advance in an appropriate way the basic constitution of the ‘object’ to be disclosed, or of the domain within which the object lies.”²³⁸ I.e. we can understand ourselves as “subjects” of experience that represent the world and, consequently, disclose the world. In this sense, we understand the world ownedly, as dependent on us. But this understanding is not genuine insofar as it takes us to be innerworldly beings rather than as the gatherers of beings to their being as a result of our own being gathered to decide on Being as a result of the needfulness of Being as such.

Whereas I offered competing interpretations of perishing and demise, in response to Carman and White, I am convinced that, once we have combined the insights of Carman and White on death and added on the genuine-not genuine distinction, that we have a solid interpretation of being-toward-death.

To be an owned Dasein, it should be obvious, is not simply to produce your life as a coherent story, a kind of lived out autobiography that you “write” (by doing whatever it is that you do) as you go along. Nor is owned Dasein getting to making the most of your life, since you’re soon going to die in the sense of either bio-death, perishing, or demise.

²³⁸ Heidegger 1962: 350.

In fact, that misunderstanding of being ownedly towards death sounds like just as good a reason to curl up in a dark corner and lament the meaninglessness of life in a Schopenhauerian fit as it sounds like a good reason to get to living your life to the fullest. But being an owned Dasein does not mean that you are always in a state of existential anxiety, being-towards-death, and reassessing your decision on the meaning (truth) of Being as such. As Heidegger said, mortals are *capable* of death as death, not that mortals are continually being-towards-death at all times. Rather than spending every moment of our owned existence focused on death, owned Dasein is resolute; i.e. it is ready for anxiety, ready to be redirected towards its death, when the gods call this understanding of Being into question; i.e. when this understanding of Being is no longer grounded and shows itself as somehow inappropriate for grounding the worlds (locations) in which we dwell (are involved). It is in this sense that the worldhood (sky) of our world in its strife with our earth is determined by our confrontation with our gods.

One of the key objections to this understanding of mortals is that in his later works (esp. the memorial address for Konradin Kreutzer) Heidegger no longer talks much about the importance of ownedness, but instead focuses on what he calls *releasement* (*Gelassenheit*). On most of the interpretations, what we see is a distinction between a voluntaristic willing in owned Dasein and with releasement our releasing ourselves from willing, in giving up control and leaving beings to emerge of their own without imposing our will on them. For example, we can indirectly see why Guignon thinks that:

The ... change consists in the shift away from [a] focus on Dasein as the source of the intelligibility of things, to the project of thinking the “history of Being,” where humans and their modes of understanding are themselves treated as offshoots of a wider historical unfolding. ... Being is seen as a complex “happening” that, although it “needs” and “uses” humans, is not to be thought of as something that humans create.²³⁹

As with his interpretation of *Being and Time* in general, we ought to already see problems with Guignon’s interpretation of mortal Dasein. Mortal Dasein was never, not in *Being and Time*, not before *Being and Time*, nor after *Being and Time*, understood as the “source of the intelligibility of things.” Much as Guignon had turned Being into a being, Guignon now has succeeded in turning mortal Dasein into the subject of representation. Heidegger rejects this determination by saying that “subject and object do not coincide with Dasein and world.”²⁴⁰ But Dasein is not a subject, thus not a subject of representation that serves as the source of intelligibility (that is, rather, the metaphysical view, e.g. Nietzsche’s, that Heidegger rejects).

Caputo says:

It was clear to everyone that Heidegger’s thought had taken still another turn. ... This later thinking had become radically anti-voluntaristic, anti-Nietzschean. ... The task of “thinking” was now identified precisely as not willing, first by willing *not* to will and then by not willing at all. Here “willing” was taken in a general sense to mean not only choosing and willing in the determinate sense, but all conceptual or “representational” thinking. ... Instead of willing, Heidegger spoke of “letting be,” using at this point the word *Gelassenheit* [releasement].²⁴¹

It is not at all clear to me that Heidegger’s later thought had taken any such turn from a voluntaristic understanding of what it is to be an owned mortal Dasein to being a released mortal Dasein. The clarity of this view appears not to be based in a thorough

²³⁹ Guignon 2006a: 15.

²⁴⁰ Heidegger 1962: 87.

²⁴¹ Caputo 2006: 337.

reading of Heidegger's work as a whole, but of first reading *Being and Time* according to a metaphysical perspective in which to be owned mortal Dasein is to will a meaning into Being, rather than to be open to the meaning that Being has, which is not itself a result of or determined by human production. It is also rather unclear precisely why we ought to understand releasement as not-willing. As much as the interpretation of owned mortal Dasein appears to be determined by an understanding of mortal Dasein as the representing or willing subject in the voluntaristic understanding of ownedness, releasement is equally so determined. However, releasement is merely understood here as the willing subject merely refraining from willing. But this assumption appears to be unfounded insofar as Heidegger himself does not describe releasement as refraining from willing and, in fact, does not say that releasement outright precludes calculative thought (which is determined by willing). Caputo's basic position is not unique. Michael E. Zimmerman says:

Early Heidegger maintained that the moment of ownedness required resoluteness, a decision to allow human temporality to transform itself into a more radical openness for the self-manifesting of things. Later Heidegger, however, played down the voluntaristic dimension discernable in resoluteness and conceived of ownedness in terms of *Gelassenheit*, releasement from will.²⁴²

This is merely one of numerous examples that either explicitly or implicitly suggest an incompatibility between ownedness and releasement. Let's look at Zimmerman's claims – which seem to be the sort of claims behind all such explicit or implicit claims of incompatibility. Namely, is resoluteness to be understood as a voluntaristic imposition of one's will on beings?

²⁴² Zimmerman 2006: 310.

Heidegger's initial presentation of resoluteness seems to confirm the suspicion that Zimmerman is right: "The choosing to choose a kind of Being-one's-Self...in accordance with its existential structure ... we call '*resoluteness*.'"²⁴³ Heidegger's own presentation here suggests that in resoluteness, we choose to impose our will onto both ourselves – in being resolute, I give my life's story a singular point by becoming resolute about becoming a businessman – and, in order to do so, I impose my will on beings as well; e.g. I impose my will on others into making them into clients, I impose my will onto beings by making them objects to be acquired or sold for the purposes of making money, as businessmen do. But this simply cannot be how we should understand resoluteness. Aside from its very important relationship to being ready for anxiety, hence being-toward-death, Heidegger, even here, says that this choosing is in accordance with the *existential* structure of the call. The imposition of the will is merely existentiell, never existential.

Later in *Being and Time*, Heidegger says:

The disclosedness of Dasein in wanting to have a conscience, is thus constituted by anxiety as disposedness, by understanding as a projection [*Entwurf*] of oneself upon one's ownmost being-guilty, and by discourse as reticence. This distinctive and owned disclosedness, which is attested in Dasein itself by its conscience – *this reticent self-projection upon one's ownmost being-guilty, in which one is ready for anxiety* – we call "*resoluteness*."²⁴⁴

Once we translate from Heideggersprache into plain English (or, rather, as plain English as a philosophical discussion of Heidegger allows), we can see that resoluteness is not a kind of voluntaristic imposition of our will onto beings. Resoluteness is what is

²⁴³ Heidegger 1962: 314.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 343.

disclosed to us, opened for our thinking, in wanting to have a conscience. Wanting to have a conscience is determined by anxiety (i.e. the world explicitly showing up to Dasein as failing to ground locations), by a projection onto our own being-guilty (i.e. our being responsible for being's showing up as they do to us in our world), and by reticence in discourse. This last point – discourse as reticence – is a distinct *withholding of willing*. Discourse is reticent in resoluteness because what one does in resoluteness is not impose one's will onto beings, but rather, listen for the call that asks for us to make a decision on the meaning of Being. In fact, resoluteness is not even determined by being anxious, but merely being prepared for anxiety. Ownedness is, put simply, determined by a recognition of ourselves as world-disclosers that are not themselves innerworldly beings and that are resolutely awaiting anxiety and prepared to face their death, to face a change in their understanding of being such that some ways of being will become possible and will at the same time render other ways of being impossible.

One might respond that this merely puts off the voluntaristic aspect of ownedness. I.e. ownedness calls us, when anxiety hits us, to make a decision about the meaning of Being. It is this decision that is a voluntaristic imposition of the will. But Heidegger does not understand such decisions as voluntaristic decisions at all. Heidegger says “what we called decision [when understood as a response to the question of the meaning of being alone] shifts into the innermost swaying mid-point of Being itself and then has nothing in common with what we call making a choice and the like.”²⁴⁵ Insofar as we are

²⁴⁵ Heidegger 1999: 61.

called to answer the question of the meaning of Being by a specific call according to a specific need, certain possibilities show up to us as answering the call.

An analogy that I like to explain how we respond to the call, how we decide without making a voluntaristic choice, is stereoscopic images.²⁴⁶ When one first looks through the stereoscopic glasses, one sees two unclear images, each of which uncomfortably is seen through one eye. But this shows up to us as somehow inappropriate, in lacking in a single unified field of vision. We are drawn by a need to bring the images into a unified field of vision, this need is not something that we choose. As our eyes adjust, the two images converge into a unified (now three dimensional) field of vision. The visual meaning of each two-dimensional image, now unified into a single three-dimensional image has changed. Unlike the two independent images, the new single image has a depth that was lacking in the two independent images.

Much like the stereoscopic images, what we find is a kind of schism in our understanding of Being. As we saw in our discussion of Nietzsche's interpretation of the history of the nihilistic decline of metaphysics in the West at the beginning of Chapter 4, the need that calls us to ask about the meaning of is an uncomfortable schism in our understanding of Being. This schism, this need, is answered by a decision, but this decision is a turning towards the possibilities and, rather than voluntaristically choosing some possibility, some possibilities show up to us as solving the schism, as bringing Being into clear view. Once we have seen the fragmented field, the ungroundedness of

²⁴⁶ In particular, I am thinking of the stereoscopic images and lenses included as the CD jacket of the progressive metal band TOOL's album *10,000 Days*.

the locations that matter to us and our understanding of Being, our metaphorical eyes can adjust until we have discovered an answer and may explicitly take up that possibility as the measure of what is. But it is only in being open to the possibility that such a schism will call us to the question of the meaning of Being in a new way that we are resolute; that we are owned mortal Dasein. This is hardly either Zimmerman's voluntaristic conception of ownedness.

In responding to Zimmerman, what we have seen is only that ownedness is not voluntaristic, but we will obviously have to look at releasement to be able to definitively say whether or not it is incompatible with ownedness. Here are two typical examples of what interpreters have had to say about releasement:

[Heidegger's] later writings ... move toward an ideal mode of comportment called *Gelassenheit*, a nonmanipulative, nonimposing way of "letting things be" what they are.²⁴⁷ Instead of the search for a center of all structures we find 'releasement' (*Gelassenheit*) from the craving for a center and meditations on the epochal search for such a center.²⁴⁸
(Charles Guignon)

By the end of the war, Heidegger has embraced "letting-be" (*Gelassenheit*) and "pure waiting" as the only appropriate attitudes.²⁴⁹
(Richard Polt)

Guignon appears to be distinguishing releasement from just the kind of conception of ownedness that we dismissed in our response to Zimmerman's interpretation of ownedness. This is hardly surprising, as Guignon interprets ownedness (roughly) as our taking control of one's life's story, in the manner that we saw in our discussion of biographical death, and making one's life's story into a consistent story

²⁴⁷ Guignon 2006a: 35.

²⁴⁸ Guignon 1983: 240.

²⁴⁹ Polt 2005: 385.

with a point. Because we have already dismissed this interpretation, let's turn to what Guignon has positively said.

Releasement is (a) non-manipulative, (b) non-imposing, (c) allows things to be what they are, and (d) a meditation on structures rather than a search for the center of all structures. First, I will make an assumption: Guignon is using the word "things" as another word for beings. Given that assumption, taken absolutely (a) is simply false. The being of equipment is – from Heidegger's earliest to latest writings – understood as having its being precisely in being manipulated; i.e. in being used in-order for some end or another within a space opened by a location. But this is indicative of a mistake in Guignon's understanding of Heidegger. Heidegger is not making a statement about how we treat beings, but rather about how we understand them. (b) If by "non-imposing" Guignon means that releasement is not imposing in the sense of not imposing meaning in the way that we looked at a moment ago in our response to Zimmerman, then Guignon is correct. But insofar as ownedness is not an imposition of this kind either, this does not serve to differentiate, let alone show incompatible, releasement from ownedness. (c) Insofar as ownedness first allows us to ground the possibilities for all locations, it is difficult to see how "allowing things to be what they are" differentiates releasement from ownedness. It seems that the only possible way to understand (c) as differentiating releasement and ownedness is by assuming that, by (d) meditating on structures rather than searching for a center of all structures, Guignon thinks that releasement is some sort of thinking about locations without bothering to ground them. Neither in his early, middle, nor in his later works is there any evidence that Heidegger thought of Being as

some unchanging source of locations. In fact, his entire discussion of ownedness and death in *Being and Time* seems to rule that possibility out. But, if what I have said about the fourfold up until now is on the right track, then Guignon's claim simply has to be false.

Polt's interpretation of releasement as being an attitude of pure waiting would serve to differentiate releasement from ownedness, if it were in fact the correct interpretation of releasement. I have already said that in resolute ownedness, one awaits anxiety and death. This awaiting is, however, not a "pure" waiting. Owned mortal Dasein can be socially, politically, scientifically, militarily, etc., active. Owned mortal lives in some definite understanding of the meaning of Being, hence of its own being, and this understanding will all but certainly involve the owned mortal being engaged in all sorts of situations. So, is releasement a pure awaiting in which we refrain from action in a kind of exaggerated resignation in which we do nothing or, at most, only do whatever we are drawn along to do? Or should we understand Polt as, rather, indicating that this "pure awaiting" is pure in the sense that we do not take a stand on the meaning of Being in general, but rather withhold assent from any answer to the question of the meaning of Being? The former seems outright silly, given that Heidegger's primary presentation of releasement is given in honor of a man for his work. The latter must be wrong as well, since, as I showed in Chapter 4, much of Heidegger's later work is intended to give a positive response to Nietzsche's challenge, not to accept the nihilistic problem that spawned the challenge.

No such responses show that there is any conflict between Heidegger's early view of owned Dasein and his later view of mortals released to things. However, simply showing that these interpretations fail to show that ownedness and releasement are incompatible hardly shows that ownedness and releasement actually are compatible. Thus, we must now turn to look at what Heidegger himself says about releasement.

What seems to be ignored is that Heidegger does not merely say "releasement," but rather "releasement *to things*." It seems that many, if not most, of Heidegger's interpreters simply take this to mean "releasement to beings." But we must take note of the fact that Heidegger takes quite a bit of interest in *things*, not merely *beings* in his later works. Things are beings understood as being occasioned, either as φύσει ὄντα or as τέχνη ὄντα, into the spaces in which they are freed to their being located within a situation.

An example that we've used multiple times is the chalk. The chalk could be understood as an object, as a purely present-at-hand being (the available for mere looking) perhaps with a function or value predicate added to it. Or it can be understood as this meaningful thing that gets its meaning by being gathered together into its being within a space that frees it for its being in a situation; i.e. it is the thing that it is in my writing with it on the blackboard as I lecture. Things are, insofar as they come to emerge and maintain themselves as the beings that they are only within a location and only matter as they do in a situation, a gathering of the fourfold. This is why Heidegger says,

“Our language denotes what a gathering *is* by an ancient word. That word is: thing”²⁵⁰ and the word thing “denote[s] anything that in any way bears upon men, concerns them, and that accordingly is a matter for discourse.”²⁵¹ It is beings, insofar as we understand them as situated by our involvement with them, that they are things. In being situated (as opened up by the confrontation between gods and mortals), they have their possibilities (sky), they have their limits and nature (earth). I.e. a thing is a gathering of the fourfold. Whatever releasement to things is, then, it specifically relates to things - beings as they are understood as gathered to their being according to the existential structures of the fourfold.

What kind of relation to things do we have in releasement? Knowing this would obviously help give us some idea of the relation. Here Guignon is correct. The relationship that we have toward things in releasement is one of meditative thought. Heidegger distinguishes between calculative and meditative thought. We will first look at calculative thinking, so as to distinguish it from the meditative thinking that we are investigating. What, then, is calculative thinking?

[The] peculiarity [calculative thinking] consists in the fact that whenever we plan, research, and organize, we always reckon with conditions that are given. We take them into account with the calculated intention of their serving specific purposes. Thus we can count on definite results.²⁵²

Calculative thinking already assumes an understanding of Being, an understanding of what it is to be a being, and this understanding of what is not brought to light or questioned, but merely serves as the background of calculating with the beings

²⁵⁰ Heidegger 1971b: 171.

²⁵¹ Ibid.: 173.

²⁵² Heidegger 1966: 46.

that it grants their being. That is to say that what is dealt with is always beings, never Being itself. There is already set measure for what counts as an appropriate result, what counts as a being, what matters, and what does not matter. And the understanding of what it is to be in this or that domain of discourse (or at all) is taken for granted – in fact, so much so that it has become so familiar as to have fallen into the forgottenness of the background and is reckoned on, but is not thought; i.e. it goes unseen and unquestioned. That is not to say that it is assumed that this object or that object “exists”, but rather that what it is for any such object to be, the ground of its being, is not asked in any manner that specifically relates to our decision in response to the question of the meaning of Being at all.

“Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is.”²⁵³ Calculative thinking does not ask the question of the meaning of Being, nor does it make a decision in response to this question; calculative thinking merely reckons with beings. Meditative thinking is the thinking that resolutely asks the question of the meaning of Being as such and reticently awaits a response, a decision.

Once we see that Heidegger distinguishes between calculative thinking – thinking that reckons with beings, but does not address the question of the meaning of Being – and meditative thinking, Heidegger’s rather strange-sounding proclamations from his later work no longer seem so strange. For example, early in the memorial address to Conradin Kreutzer, Heidegger tells his audience, presumably a learned audience: “Let us not fool

²⁵³ Ibid.

ourselves. All of us, including those who think professionally, as it were, are often enough thought-poor; we all are far too easily thought-less.”²⁵⁴ What Heidegger is saying here is not that his audience, or modern man more generally, does not plan, investigate, make scientific breakthroughs, contemplate, work out philosophical problems, or such. Rather, what Heidegger is claiming is that modern man seldom and unclearly (thought-poor) thinks of the meaning of Being, if at all (we are too easily “thought-less”).

It is, however, in the danger posed by this thoughtlessness that Heidegger thinks offers us the possibility of being drawn into asking about the meaning of Being. “The danger is the saving power, inasmuch as it brings the saving power out of its – the danger’s – concealed essence that is ever susceptible of turning.”²⁵⁵ That is to say that in our thoughtlessness about Being, in understanding beings as mere stuff as represented (i.e. as objects) by a representing subject, we may, like Nietzsche, find ourselves alienated from our world. There is no ground and we do not seek any ground and this lack of asking about a ground, if it is recognized, as it was by Nietzsche’s madman, is itself a call to discover a ground. This explains Heidegger’s amazing claim in *What is Called Thinking?* that what is “most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking.”²⁵⁶ This most-thought-provoking is the needfulness of the last god, the need to discover a ground for revealing as such, the need to make a decision on the meaning of Being as such.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.: 44-45.

²⁵⁵ Heidegger 1977a: 42.

²⁵⁶ Heidegger 1968: 6.

Why does Heidegger think that this thoughtlessness is so thought-provoking? What is the need that draws us away from the purely calculative mode of thought and prepares us for the meditative thinking that awaits and responds to the question of the meaning of Being as such? The provocation to think is determined precisely by the lack in this understanding of Being that has forgotten Being and abandoned us to beings. Heidegger says:

Now the world appears as an object open to the attacks of calculative thought, attacks that nothing is believed able any longer to resist. Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry.²⁵⁷

The world is the calculable, the measurable, that with which we may reckon. The “measures” of the “world” are understood not according to our involved interests or needs, but according to objective standards. It is easy, very easy, to think that the objective measures are the most basic measures. But anyone who has ever had to sit through a boring lecture knows otherwise. An exciting and engaging lecture seems to just fly by. It seems that just as soon as it has begun, it is over. But a boring lecture can drag on and on seemingly without end. This is reflected in the way that we often actually talk about a boring lecture. After a boring lecture, it would hardly be surprising to hear a student say to her friend that “that was the longest fifty minutes ever!” It is precisely this kind of time measuring on which objective time measuring is based, not vice versa. It is because we have interests in organizing our time and of coordinating time with others in their involvement that we are able to derive objective time-measures by use of time-

²⁵⁷ Heidegger 1966: 50.

measuring devices. This discussion should not be misunderstood as claiming that Heidegger denies that objective time can be disclosed to us, but rather that it is only disclosed for a particular way of being interested in time and it is not the only one.

I once mentioned that an airplane is merely understood as a physical object, at our disposal, for use in travelling according to the way of looking appropriate to calculative thinking. A fellow graduate student responded that that is simply not true, he sees airplanes as magnificently amazing things that leave him in awe. Aside from what is likely hyperbole on his part, it's worth noting that this answer is not entirely incompatible with the picture of calculative thought that Heidegger is presenting. Rather, the airplane is understood as objectively a mere physically extended object, which is then represented by my fellow graduate student as having appeared to him in his experience as an amazing and awe-inspiring thing.

Heidegger's two claims ought to be taken separately, but not as unrelated. The sense in which it appears that nothing in the world can escape the attacks of calculative thought is that in the understanding of the world as being made up of represented beings and us as representing subjects, we make everything reckonable and calculable. The airplane is represented as objective, as having objective properties, including causal and mechanical properties that allow it to fly, and my fellow graduate student's awe in the presence of the airplane is taken to be objectively nothing, but is taken to be a subjective ascription of his representation of the thing that is objectively not amazing. In other words, representation holds in both cases. It is representation that serves as the measure of what is. What is is separated into two kinds of beings: the objective and the

subjective. The subjective sphere gives the representation of the objective free reign in determining the being of beings in the world. The amazingness of the airplane is dismissed as mere psychological coloring, nothing that is objectively real, merely something in the sphere of “lived experience.” But, given Heidegger’s understanding of beings – understood as things – as being disclosed to us according to our interests, it becomes obvious why he would reject this understanding of beings. Namely, my fellow graduate student’s amazement attunes him to this being and is partially determinative of the being of this being; of this airplanes being *as an amazing thing*.

The second claim is related to the first. In the technological understanding of Being, nature is no longer understood as φύσις, as the self-emergent. Rather, it is understood, like everything else that gets its being in representation (i.e. calculative thinking) as the material for representation. Nature is then represented as being a source for meeting demands for such and such quanta of energy, such and such amounts of grain or other food, and generally as material to meet demands for production. This is why Heidegger calls the beings that are revealed in such a challenging-revealing the “standing-reserve”²⁵⁸ and calls the technological understanding of Being that “gathers man thither to order the self-revealing [i.e. φύσις] as standing-reserve: “*Ge-stell*” [Enframing].”²⁵⁹ Even, Heidegger notes, when tourists are brought in to enjoy the Rhine, it is not experienced as a φύσει ὄντα, but as an object on call for the tourist industry; i.e. as a source of the production of tourism, of tourists’ enjoyment and the tourist industry’s

²⁵⁸ Heidegger 1977a: 17.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.: 19.

profit. The Rhine can also technologically be understood as a source for hydroelectric power. Even in enjoyment, we do not understand it as a φύσει ὄντα, but only as an object that is on reserve for producing pleasurable sensations in our “lived experience.”

Although Heidegger’s language and tone often suggest hostility to technology and the technological understanding of Being guiding Enframing, he is careful to note that technology is not to be blindly attacked or taken to be evil. “It would be foolish to attack technology blindly. It would be shortsighted to attack it as the work of the devil. We depend on technical devices; they even challenge us to greater advances.”²⁶⁰ Heidegger’s words might come as a surprise to those who are only familiar with the usual conception of Heidegger’s works on technology as promoting a kind of ludditism.²⁶¹ Heidegger’s worry is not technology or even the technological understanding of Being, but only that the technological understanding of Being may come to be so dominant that we will fail to recognize the call to the question of the meaning of Being, since everything can be leveled down and seemingly – but only seemingly – captured by calculative thought (either as objective or as subjective “lived-experience”).

We can allow the domination of technology to become complete – in which even human beings are understood as the standing-reserve, as “human resources.” This, however, need not be so. We can both allow for the insights that we have been granted by the technological understanding of Being while still not abandoning our understanding of nature as φύσις for one kind of addressing nature and as the standing-reserve for

²⁶⁰ Heidegger 1966: 53.

²⁶¹ In using this word, I cannot help but remember what Steven Wagner tells me with regularity when this word is used: interestingly, the Luddites, the source of the term “luddite,” were not luddites.

addressing it in another way. While Heidegger's interests are clearly against merely understanding nature as a source for industry, automated agriculture, etc., he is not against this (or any other) understanding of Being. His worry is merely that the technological understanding of Being will not only cover over other possibilities, but that it covers over its own ground and that it may become so dominant that it might snuff out any possible questioning of the meaning of Being.

We are, however, not condemned to the complete covering over of any path that leads us to question the meaning of Being. "We can act otherwise ... We can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste to our nature."²⁶² We can come to ownedly understand ourselves as world-disclosers and understand Enframing as a mode of revealing that is a consequence of a historical understanding of Being that determined that that which is is that which is constantly present. We now, once we have passed by Nietzsche, understand beings as present only as being made present as standing-reserve; as resources for production; the material of productive representation. Finally we are ready to look at Heidegger's full definition of "releasement toward things":

Through this both saying "yes" and "no" to technology "our relation to technology will become wonderfully simple and relaxed. We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is, let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependant on something higher. I would call this comportment toward technology which expresses "yes" and at the same time "no," by an old word, *releasement toward things*.²⁶³

²⁶² Heidegger 1966: 54.

²⁶³ Ibid.

The yes-saying to technology is the admitting this way of a being's appearance as one way in which beings are revealed; as the source of material for representation and cultivation. The no-saying is a rejection of Enframing as the only mode of revealing. In so doing, we are open to reveal nature as φύσις as well as also as the standing-reserve – a standing-reserve which is understood as dependant on the φύσις of the beings challenged-forth. But the meaning of the standing-reserve, what historical destiny it is that grounds this understanding, must nevertheless be asked, if we are to ground this (or any) understanding of Being. As world-disclosers, as mortal Dasein, we cannot make ourselves into standing-reserve, because it is for us that beings are revealed as standing-reserve, they stand on reserve for us.

We can make use of technological devices, of calculative thought, but not allow them to dominate our understanding of the meaning of Being. Rather, we can understand these beings, this way of revealing, as dependant on φύσις, as dependant on ποιήσις, as dependant on a decision as to the meaning of Being in general. Releasement to things is a releasement *to things*, a letting things be. That is a letting things presence as the beings that they are – as φύσει ὄντα, as τέχνη ὄντα as understood by Aristotle, or as the standing-reserve. Heidegger makes clear that it is this openness to multiple ways of revealing to which releasement toward things refers. Take special note of the “*only*.” “Having this comportment we no longer view things *only* in a technical way. It gives us

clear vision and we notice that while the production and use of machines demands of us another relation to things, it is not a meaningless relation.”²⁶⁴

What releasement toward things demands of us is not an abandonment of calculative thinking or Enframing (if this is not understood in the sense of total machination; i.e. of the technological understanding of beings becoming the only understanding of beings), but rather it demands that we think meditatively.

[M]editative thinking does not just happen by itself any more than does calculative thinking.²⁶⁵

At times it requires a greater effort. It demands more practice. It is in need of even more delicate care than any other genuine craft. But it must also be able to bide its time, to await as does the farmer, whether the seed will come up and ripen.²⁶⁶

Meditative thinking is being open to the question of the meaning of Being. This means that meditative thinking is open to the groundedness of things in the spaces, opened by locations, which free them into their being. That meditative thinking is not some idle wishy-washy “mediation” on local structures, but is thinking on how these structures are related in being dependant on an understanding of Being in general. Heidegger, in fact, all but explicitly makes this point:

Meditative thinking demands of us not to cling one-sidedly to a single idea, nor to run down a one-track course of ideas. Meditative thinking demands of us that we engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Heidegger 1966: 54 (my emphasis).

²⁶⁵ Ibid.: 46-47.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.: 47.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.: 53.

It is because meditative thought is what thinks the question of the meaning of Being that Heidegger says that “questioning is the piety of thought.”²⁶⁸ Meditative thinking is pious thinking. Meditative thinking is just the kind of “thinking” that resolutely owned mortal Dasein has in confronting the question of the meaning of Being from within the technological understanding of Being. Meditative thinking at times requires greater effort than calculative thinking. It is difficult to resolutely hold on to the openness to the possibility of the impossibility of your current understanding of Being when you experience no need that attunes you to the question of the meaning of Being. It must bide its time, as resoluteness must bide its time to hear the call of conscience and bring mortal Dasein into a confrontation with its gods.

Meditative thinking is the thinking determinative of releasement toward things. It is not some sort of resignation, nor is it a cessation of willing, it is, rather, the openness to the truth of beings as appearing within some manner of revealing that is itself dependant on spaces, locations, and ultimately our world-disclosure as mortal Daseins as a result of a decision in response to the question of the meaning of Being as such. Rather than being opposed to ownedness, what we find is that releasement toward things is a *kind of ownedness*; releasement toward things is the kind of ownedness that is made possible within the technological understanding of Being.

Further evidence of this conclusion is Heidegger’s claim that releasement toward things and the openness to the mystery belong together. As we have already seen, Heidegger uses the word “mystery” to refer to the nature of the gods that call us to the

²⁶⁸ Heidegger 1977a: 35.

question of the meaning (truth) of Being. The mystery that Heidegger is specifically referring to here is the mystery of the meaning of the technological understanding of Being. “*The meaning pervading technology hides itself.*”²⁶⁹ But as we must in resoluteness, we must listen for the call to ask the question of the meaning of this understanding of Being. “*If we explicitly and continuously heed the fact that such hidden meaning touches us everywhere in the world of technology, we stand at once within the realm of that which hides itself from us, and hides itself just in approaching us.*”²⁷⁰ We must listen for the call to ask the question of the meaning of this revealing of Being. Insofar as this understanding of Being covers over the question of Being in calculative thought, it both presents itself in everything that is, understood technologically, and yet hides itself in disallowing any questioning that is not about and within that with which we can reckon and calculate. “I call the comportment which enables us to keep open to the meaning hidden in technology, *openness to the mystery.*”²⁷¹ Openness to the mystery is the resolute awaiting the call to ask the question of the meaning of Enframing and being ready for the existential death in which this possibility as totalizing of all beings itself may be rendered impossible. This is why Heidegger says that “*Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together.*”²⁷² The openness to the mystery is the resoluteness that opens up the possibility of the owned way of being that Heidegger calls releasement toward things.

²⁶⁹ Heidegger 1966: 55.

²⁷⁰ Ibid. (my emphasis).

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

If openness to the mystery is a kind of resoluteness and releasement toward things is a kind of ownedness, then one would expect that Heidegger would link this form of resolute ownedness to existential death. If we have understood being-toward-death in the way that we have in this chapter, then we find that Heidegger does make just such a claim, though he does not explicitly use the word “death.”

[Openness to the mystery and releasement toward things] grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground and foundation upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it.²⁷³

Here Heidegger indicates just the kind of radical change in understanding that we saw captured by Heidegger’s existential conception of death. Not only does this passage suggest that openness to the mystery and releasement toward things relate to death, but here we see that it opens a new grounding for our understanding of Being and, as is apparent in Heidegger’s later works, the technological understanding of Being is in need of just such a grounding. But as I have previously claimed, Heidegger does not intend to abandon the technological understanding of Being altogether, but only stave off the possibility that the technological understanding of Being could “so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may some day come to be accepted and practiced *as the only* way of thinking.”²⁷⁴ Rather, the understanding of nature as φύσις and of mortals as world-disclosers ought to allow us to understand technology as one mode of ποιήσις (revealing) amongst others. In coming to understand ποιήσις as determining of and determined by the meaning of Being as such, we ought to be able to

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.: 56.

achieve a new ground for all of the locations that are open to us. This is why Heidegger says that “releasement toward things and openness to the mystery give us a vision of a new autochthony which someday even might be fit to recapture the old and now rapidly disappearing autochthony in a changed form.”²⁷⁵

Thus, what we have seen is that mortals are those who are capable of experiencing beings in their being and, perhaps more importantly and definitive of the nature of mortals, mortals are those that can ask the question of the meaning of Being. The ability to be able to await and respond to the question of the meaning of Being relies on our ability to think meditatively. In this regard, we are fortunate, as “man is a *thinking*, that is, a *meditative* being.”²⁷⁶ Insofar as our being as mortals is Being-in-the-world, in being world-disclosers, a possibility of our being is hearing the question of the meaning of Being as such and in being able to decide on the meaning of Being as a response.

Heidegger speaks of the confrontation between mortals and gods. Often times we speak of gods as the immortals, infinite, eternal, *αίδιον*, in contrast to mortals as finite, temporal. Heidegger understands the eternal not as being that which has always been in time objectively understood, but that which presences (even in its absencing) in all things; i.e. that which is the measure of the being of all beings. The gods are present in the measure of that which is insofar as the gods are the needful question to which the measure is a response, a decision. But an answer is only an answer in response to a call

²⁷⁵ Ibid.: 55.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.: 47.

or question. The gods always presence in all that is, because all that is only presences in light of the measure. But insofar as the measure serves its purpose, it is not called into question and insofar as a needful call does not attune us to the question of the meaning of Being as such, the gods are absent. In this way, the gods are present in their absencing.

Why might we think of this as the “eternal” or “infinite”? The reason that Heidegger might think of this presencing that absences as infinite is that beings and human beings, understood either as mortal Dasein or as mere animals, are given an appropriateness of form by their end (τέλος) and, thus, given limits. It is precisely the measure that is given in a response to the needful call and questioning of the gods, especially the question of the meaning of Being as such. Insofar as mortal Dasein responds to the call and questioning of the last god, mortals make a decision; i.e. take a stand on what it is to be. In making such a decision, mortals both determine the measure which determines what it is to be – which itself opens up possibilities for being that are themselves not foreseen in the decision itself – and at the same time decides what it is for beings to be the beings that they are (necessarily, actually, or possibly) and decides what it is for itself to be as a mortal (again, either necessarily, actually, or possibly). Although I have already said this, it strikes me as important to remind my reader that such decisions are not the result of “free will” in any libertarian sense. Rather, certain possible answers to the question of the meaning of Being as such present themselves to the mortal who is attuned to the question and one amongst them presents itself to him as an answer that responds to the particular form (i.e. given the source of the needfulness) of the question. The answer that serves as the decision is an answer that allows the mortal

Dasein to regain a level of equilibrium in which beings seem to regain their place and the needfulness (i.e. the strain on our relationship with what is) is eliminated. Some possibilities, of course, cannot eliminate the needfulness that calls us to ask the question of the meaning of Being. Given the grounds of the understanding of Being that we already have, from which the decision is made, some things seem possible as the next step, and others don't.

In deciding on the measure of what it is, mortal Dasein achieves its end and sets limits for what it is to be a mortal. Insofar as this is true, mortals become finite; i.e. that which has limits. It is because it is mortals that can ask this question that Heidegger calls mortals meditative beings. And insofar as we have made the decision on the meaning of Being – in particular *our being* - ourselves, we are the being that grants itself its own limit. Thus, we are self-emergent in a way differently than any other φύσει-being, insofar as we grant limits as such, but only in response to the gods' questioning. Thus, we have a special relation to the gods that no beings without the nature of Dasein have; we confront them in being brought to account, being asked the question of the meaning of Being as such, and in responding to the question with a decision.

The gods are the infinite in the sense of being without measure. Insofar as he has interpreted the Greek word ἀεί to mean “at any given time” or “at the time,”²⁷⁷ this “perhaps” suggests to us how to understand the gods as “eternal.” The gods are “eternal” in the sense that their questioning, and our decision in response to their questioning, is present in all beings that present *as* beings. Furthermore, they are *perhaps* present in all

²⁷⁷ Heidegger 1998b: 205-6.

presencing insofar as any location, or the uppermost horizon that we have called “sky” may at any time become untenable and may draw us into a confrontation with our gods or the last god. The gods are present in their absence when the measures for beings laid out by a decision in response to the meaning of Being in general are functioning smoothly and the question itself goes unasked and, perhaps, unnoticed. And the gods are present in their presencing in the call that calls us to ask the question of the meaning of Being. In this sense, the gods are present in all things, in all beings, but when our measures are functioning without problems, they are only present in their absencing, which is to say that they are only present in a hidden possibility. I.e. the gods are present, at very least indirectly, in all that presences, in everything that emerges into its being as the being that it is.

On Heidegger’s interpretation, the Greek word *αἰδιον* does not mean “eternal” in the sense of being, having been, and always in the future to be constantly present. Rather, “the *αἰδιον* is something present of and by itself without other assistance, and *for this reason* perhaps something constantly present. Here we are thinking not with regard to “duration” but with regard to presencing.”²⁷⁸ While Heidegger is less than clear here, what he is trying to make clear is that the *αἰδιον*, the “eternal,” is without measure. Insofar as gods, and Being itself, is without measure – it is the source of measure, it itself is immeasurable – they are without assistance, without the assistance of a measure. This “without assistance” should not be, however, overestimated. Recall that Heidegger said that Being is the need of the gods and that, thus, gods need mortals. Insofar as the gods

²⁷⁸ Ibid.: 206.

are those who call beings that take a stand on Being (including their own being) to account, to answer the question of the meaning of Being as such, the gods need mortals to come into their own being. Thus, mortals are in need of the gods to establish a measure and open the world in which the strife of the earth and sky may arise; i.e. Being is only possible when all four aspects of the fourfold are in play – even in the deficient mode in which the gods are only present in their absencing and the mortals remain thought-poor or thought-less.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 2 we discovered that earth (φύσις) should not be understood as the totality of beings with which we share our world. In a sense, Young is not mistaken, if we stretch his meaning beyond what he himself seems to have meant. Earth is the being of those beings, but earth is not to be misunderstood as an ontic category for classifying beings. Rather, earth points to beings as the self-emergent, that which gathers itself together into presence. The self-emergent gathers itself to presence and is indebted to four modes of occasioning for its having come to emerge of itself into its being.

Beings are indebted to their ύλη (“matter”) for their being. Without something that is appropriately orderable to emerge into a way of being, a being could not emerge as the being that it is.

Beings are indebted to their μορφή (“form”). Nothing could be appropriately orderable unless it were appropriately orderable for something or other. It is the form, the space in which a being would make sense, that allows for ύλη to first emerge as ύλη. This is precisely why, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger says that the present-at-hand is ontologically derivative from the ready-to-hand.

Beings are also indebted to their τέλος for their being. But each of these modes of occasioning must be brought together for a being to emerge as the being that it is. Thus, beings are also indebted to this gathering, whether the principle of this gathering is

internal to the being itself or it is gathered by a principle external to itself. The former are φύσει ὄντα (natural beings) and the latter are τέχνη ὄντα (artifacts).

Our discussion in Chapter 2 was limited by the discussion at hand. Now we can see that these beings are not simply gathered for their own sake, but that their ends can only be the ends they are in some free space opened up by a location. A natural being, e.g. a tree, only emerges as a tree having the end that it does (being a tree) in relation to a whole field of meaningful relations between beings in a natural location – whether the location with which we are focused at the time is a study of biological beings or a location in which it is mere enjoyment that is significant; in which case, the being of the tree is different in each case. What earth grounds is the necessity of beings – what they are in their nature, as determined by the location in which they appear.

In Chapter 3 we discovered that sky ought not to be understood as the literal sky or as things that are thought of as being “higher,” as Young claimed. As is a recurring problem in Young’s interpretation of the members of the fourfold, this is to make the sky into a being or a class of beings; i.e. to make Heidegger’s discussion ontic and existentiell. What is thought of as “higher” is a historically determined existentiell possibility and what are contained in the class of the “higher” are beings, albeit abstract beings.

Rather, in contrast to the necessity of beings’ nature as the beings that they are, sky refers to the worldhood of the world, which frees beings into their possibilities. It is because there is a location which frees a space in which we understand things like biological beings that a space is opened in which the form “tree” makes sense and into

which some “matter” may appear in some possible aspect of its look as a tree. I.e. all beings can only be freed into their being within the space opened up by a location; i.e. beings may only be meaningful in a meaningful field that is understood.

Which locations, thus spaces opened by locations and the possibilities for beings in such spaces, are historically determined. While worldhood, i.e. the structure of significance, is the existential aspect of the fourfold that allows for locations, which locations and beings arise is existentiellly determined. For example, ancient man could not have understood beings as the representational objects of a representing subject, since there was no understanding of subjects, objects, or representation in the modern sense whatsoever. This, of course, means that beings themselves could not have the technological meaning that they now have in ancient times. In much the same way, we cannot understand ourselves as medieval knights and the beings with which we deal cannot, thus, be understood according to the ends appropriate to medieval knights. (This is not to say that we cannot imagine what these things would mean to a medieval knight, but rather that we would be attuned to them in a different way than we would, were being a medieval knight a live possibility for us, a possibility that we had taken up).

In Chapter 4 we found that gods are not role models, life models, or cultural exemplars. As with the misinterpretations of the first two members of the fourfold, the primary failure of Young’s (and Dreyfus’) interpretation of gods as role models, life models, or cultural exemplars is that these interpretations make this member of the fourfold into an ontic and existentiell category. These interpretations do, however,

indicate the importance of the measures that arise as a result of our confrontations with the gods.

Gods, instead, are to be understood as those who call us back to the question of the meaning of the Being of a location or to the question of the meaning of Being in general. This calling calls us as a result of distress. The distress may simply be that some location fails to serve its end. While the examples in science are obvious, there are other examples. For example, many stories about racism begin with someone who is a member of a majority of ruling class that has a definite understanding of what it is to be a member of the minority or ruled class. We will call the member of the majority or ruling class Emily and the member of the minority or ruled class Elizabeth, for ease of presentation. Emily's understanding of the minority or ruled class, as so many negative stereotypes about such persons are, is that they are lazy, stupid, and dishonest. In having actual involvement with Elizabeth, Emily discovers that Elizabeth is quite industrious. Elizabeth often works so hard that she finishes all of the assignments that Emily gives her well ahead of schedule. Emily also discovers that Elizabeth's ability to work so quickly and so well is that she gives off every indication of being exceptionally bright. Finally, in her dealing with Elizabeth, Emily finds that Elizabeth is extremely honest, more so than many of the people that Emily knows in the supposedly more honest majority or ruling class. Emily's understanding of Elizabeth as a member of the minority or ruled class member becomes uneasy, it becomes distressful insofar as Elizabeth does not conform to Emily's understanding of the minority or ruled class. Most such stories seem not to require those like Emily to have similar experiences with others like Elizabeth, but just so

that we don't make Emily into someone who takes the exception as the rule, let's say that Emily does have other experiences with Elizabeth's class. As Emily learns, the minority or ruled class turns out to be much like the majority or ruling class. Some members of each class are hard working and some are lazy. Some members of each class are bright and some are stupid. Some members of each class are honest and some are dishonest. Emily's understanding of what it is to be a member of each class must be revised. I.e. this location and, consequently, Emily's way of being in this location, her situation, has changed.

It is in response to this kind of questioning – whether it is at a local level or at the level of our understanding of the meaning of Being in general – that we attain measures for what it is to be. In this sense, there can be paradigms that serve as measures. These paradigms are Young's role or life models, when the location in question is what it is to be a (good) person or to be a particular kind of person (e.g. one might want to become a basketball player and take Pau Gasol as an exemplar for what it is to be a good power forward; but Pau Gasol can only be an exemplar insofar as he conforms to the measure).

Gods are those that dwell in the heavens (i.e. the sky). Insofar as we have interpreted sky according to the structure of significance, we ought to be able to find the gods as appearing in some way or another in Heidegger's discussion of significance in *Being and Time*. In fact, we do. Gods should be understood as the grounding-attunements that turn us toward the question of the meaning of Being as such. In responding to this question, we make a decision, producing a measure, a "mythic saga." That grounds the *for-the-sake-of-which*. The for-the-sake-of-which is the "highest" point

in the structure of significance. It is only in mortals' confrontation with gods that the for-the-sake-of-which is grounded. It is only in the grounding of the for-the-sake-of-which that the grounds of locations are themselves grounded.

All of our meaningful relationships to beings, others, or ourselves, are guided by a response to the meaning of Being in general and more locally a lived response to the question of who we are – our taking a stand on our own being – and what others and beings are. In our relating to beings as φύσει ὄντα or τέχνη ὄντα we have already decided on how these beings may presence and in this decision we have decided on who we are as those who relate to beings in this or that way. This decision decides the measure of what it is for these beings to be the beings that they are. When we make a decision on what it is to be in general, we decide on how we, others, and beings may appear for us as something that is, rather than as something that is not, or we cover over possibilities for beings to arise such that some beings cannot arise at all (e.g. the holy cannot emerge into appearance in a fully technological understanding of Being).

Mortals are human beings, understood as those who are capable of death *as* death. In our investigation of existential death, we distinguished existential death from perishing and demise. Following Carman and White, we looked at two interpretations of each of these three phenomena and, ultimately, I provided a new interpretation of perishing and demise and accepted a slightly supplemented version of White's interpretation of existential death.

Carman interpreted perishing as biological death. This interpretation of perishing seems implausible to me, but there is no obvious reason to reject it, as Heidegger himself

spends little time discussing perishing. However, White's interpretation of perishing is, once its major error has been corrected, far more plausible. In *Being and Time* Heidegger is interested in ontological structures, not physical processes. White interprets perishing as Dasein's (human being's) going out of the world of significance. Her mistake here is, however, to say that it is not the going out of the world of significance of anything that is alive, but *only* Dasein's going out the world of significance. But Heidegger explicitly says that anything that is alive perishes. This means that White's interpretation cannot be correct. The basics of White's position on perishing seems right to me, once we extend it to be the going out of the world of significance of anything that lives, rather than specifically Dasein (human beings). Their going out of the world of significance is something that happens *within the world*; i.e. it is impossible for me to experience my own perishing.

Carman interprets demise as biographical death. In biographical death, one thinks of one's life as a story and biographical death is the death in which one's life's story comes to an end; i.e. in which it has played itself out. Carman's interpretation, however, does not seem to explain in any way whatsoever how demise is to be understood as an intermediate phenomenon between perishing (here understood as bio-death) and existential death. Thus, we saw that there is good reason to reject Carman's interpretation of demise.

White, on the other hand, interpreted demise as the way in which we understand what it means to die. For example, Christians understand death as the soul's leaving the body and going to another realm of existence, whether that is heaven, hell, or purgatory.

And a purely scientific view of life likely will view perishing as the end of consciousness with nothing left of one except for a body that itself will eventually break down and leave only the materials of which it was made. But as an intermediate phenomenon between perishing and death, demise seems to be closer to what White had understood as perishing. But, instead of a being's going out of the world of significance, what we find in demise is that another human being, understood not as a living being but as another locus of existence, goes out of the world of significance.

We then turned toward an interpretation of existential death itself. We saw Carman's interpretation of existential death as the closing up of possibilities (i.e. making them impossible) in taking up other possibilities. His main example was that by deciding to be a committed husband, he closes down the possibility of being a flirtatious bachelor. The sentiment of Carman's position is right, but it misses the target by making death into an existentiell phenomenon. I.e. death is made into a closing up of particular local possibilities, but Heidegger is quite clear that death ought to bring us face to face with the question of the meaning of Being as such. White's interpretation of existential death is able to take the final step that Carman's is not. Namely, White's interpretation of existential death shows is that in making a decision on the meaning of Being as such, we close down possibilities not in a local sense, but of opening up possibilities that are incommensurable with our understanding of Being as such. E.g. when the understanding of the Homeric Greeks was replaced by that of the medieval Christians,²⁷⁹ people could

²⁷⁹ There were, of course, intermediate stages between these two.

no longer understand themselves as heroes or villains in the sense of the ancient Greeks, but understood themselves as either sinners or saints instead.

Mortal Daseins are resolutely owned when they are open to their place as those for whom the world is disclosed along with locations, spaces, others, and beings because of our interested involvement with these locations, spaces, others, and beings. Furthermore, resolutely owned mortal Dasein is ready to be recalled by the gods to the question of the meaning of Being, to take back a decision that has been made, and to respond to the question anew when a distressing need requires that we make a new decision in response to the question.

The primary objection to my interpretation of the works from Heidegger's late period as consistent with the works of Heidegger's early period was that Heidegger's claims that ownedness is the proper relationship between Dasein and Being in his early works is inconsistent with his claims that releasement toward things is the proper relationship between mortals and Being in his later works. I argued in Chapter 5 that this relies on a mistaken interpretation of both resolute ownedness and of releasement toward things. If my argument in Chapter 5 was correct, then releasement toward things, along with openness to the mystery, is simply the form of resolute ownedness that is appropriate to the technological understanding of Being. If my argument in Chapter 5 was successful, then there is no inconsistency between resolute ownedness and releasement toward things. Even if my argumentation only convinces my reader that this is one of several legitimate readings of releasement, my hope is that charitability in interpretation (i.e. trying to make Heidegger's view consistent, if interpretation allows) in

addition to what I take to be overwhelming evidence elsewhere of the general consistency of Heidegger's earlier and later view will convince my reader that he ought to accept this interpretation of releasement, rather than one that requires that we take it that Heidegger made a rather sudden and radical change in his view without having explicitly explained the reason for this change.

Heidegger calls "the unity of the fourfold ... the fouring."²⁸⁰ The fouring is not the union of four initially isolated or isolable existential structures. Rather, the four essentially belong together; they are, as Heidegger would say, the same. As we have seen in our analysis of the four members of the fourfold, Heidegger typically notes the special relationships of strife between earth and sky and of confrontation between gods and mortals. But it takes little effort to recognize how each member of the fourfold needs and already presupposes the others. Heidegger's confirmation of this is absolutely explicit, as he ends his poetic definitions of each member of the fourfold with the claim that "When we say" whichever member of the fourfold that he is defining at the time "we are already thinking the other three along with it, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four."²⁸¹ With the exception of the member named, Heidegger repeats this claim at the end of each of the four poetic definitions verbatim. Heidegger confirms this as well in

The Thing:

The fouring does not come about in such a way that it encompasses the four and only afterward is added to them as that compass. Nor does the fouring exhaust itself in this, that the four, once they are there, stand side by side singly.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Heidegger 1971b: 178.

²⁸¹ Ibid.: 147-48.

²⁸² Ibid.: 178.

Heidegger's point is again the top-down holist point that we have been pushing throughout this paper. The members of the fourfold only have their meaning as ontological-existential structures, structures that only can open a world together, in the way that the four ways of occasioning only can allow a being to emerge into its being together and, absent the other ways of occasioning, are nothing. Earth is only earth beneath the sky; i.e. as opened up by the historical possibilities for locations to open spaces that free beings. But sky is only sky, possibilities of being, for some beings that are opened into the necessity of their nature. Gods are only gods in calling mortals to the question of the meaning of Being. And mortals are mortals as those who are capable of being called to this question and responding in a decision. Mortals are mortals only according to their essence, which is partially determined as being amongst the emerging-abiding sway of earth. And, thus, mortals are only mortals insofar as they dwell amongst the beings opened by the earth and beneath the possibilities for being opened by the sky which is, in turn, determined by the call of the gods and mortals' response-as-decision to the gods.

The fouring, the unity of the four, presences as the enowning mirror-play of the betrothed, each to the other in simple oneness. The fouring presences as the worlding of world. The mirror-play of world is the round dance of enowning.²⁸³

Enownment is the ontological-existential equivalent of occasioning. Enownment is in the fouring of the fourfold such that a world – “world” now understood not as what Heidegger had called *Being-in-the-world* in *Being and Time* – may be grounded in an

²⁸³ Ibid.

owned understanding of Being. There are two possible reasons that Heidegger might call the relationship between the four members of the fourfold a “round dance.” The first is that each of the four members of the fourfold are interrelated, so a change in any one of the four essentially demands a change in the other three – changes which are regularly happening, as we saw in Chapter 3 and at the beginning of Chapter 4. Another possibility is that it is only insofar as each member of the fourfold plays a role in determining the being of the other three members of the fourfold, our way of understanding them leads in a hermeneutic circle. Heidegger appears to mean the latter of these two possibilities:

The round dance is the ring that joins while it plays as mirroring.
Enowning, it lightens the four into the radiance of their simple oneness.
Radiantly, the ring joins the four, everywhere open to the riddle of their presence.²⁸⁴

Enowning lightens the four into the radiance of their simple oneness by lightening the holy aether in the sense of making beings show themselves to us in their being. I.e. insofar as we are open to the round dance of enowning, we are attuned to beings in their being and are capable of understanding beings as being freed by spaces opened by locations that are themselves opened by the opening of a world in the fouring of the fourfold in its round dance (i.e. in the ringing of the ring).

The riddle of their presence is, as I have said again and again, the question of the meaning of Being as such. Beings only arise as an answer to this riddle that admits of no eternal answers, but always remains as a riddle. Any answer that we make, any decision on the meaning of Being as such, renders some beings actual, necessary, and possible. This renders some possibilities impossible. But the possibilities that are now actual,

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

necessary, or possible may themselves be rendered impossible by a new decision in response to a call.

Heidegger says that “out of the ringing mirror-play the thinging of the thing takes place.”²⁸⁵ Things are occasioned, and occasioning can only happen in a space opened by a location within a world. Insofar as a thing understood as thing relies on the fourfold for its being as a thing, “the thing stays – gathers and unites – the fourfold. The thing things world. Each thing stays the fourfold into a happening of the simple oneness of world.”²⁸⁶ Insofar as Heidegger makes this claim, we come closer to confirming the significance of the addition “toward things” in Heidegger’s phrase *releasement toward things*. Releasement toward things is an openness toward the ground of the world in the fourfold, it is not a mere cessation of willing or a non-manipulative attitude, it is a reorientation in a grounding-attunement towards the question of the meaning of Being as such. In fact, it is only in thinking of things in this way that we think of things as things; i.e. that we let things be things; that we are released toward beings. Heidegger says “If we let the thing be present in its thinging from out of the worlding of world, then we are thinking of the thing as thing.”²⁸⁷

What is required for releasement is to take a “step back from the thinking that merely represents – that is, explains – to the thinking that responds and recalls.”²⁸⁸ I.e. releasement toward things is precisely to respond to the call of the gods to the question of

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.: 179.

the meaning of Being in general and to reticently respond in decision or, as we have called this orientation towards the question of Being earlier, to be resolutely owned.

At this point, I take it as proven that Heidegger holds that the members of the fourfold are essentially interrelated and that we have seen at very least a strong indication as to why this is so. Furthermore, it is resolute ownedness generally and in releasement toward things and openness to the mystery in particular in the technological understanding of Being that opens us to the fourfold as the fouring that gathers together the world in its round dance of enownment. This is why owned mortal Dasein in confronting its gods in their questioning is able to enown the fourfold together in a decision that opens a world. It is because owned mortal Dasein stands, not as a being, but as the gatherer of the fourfold into a world, that Heidegger occasionally calls owned Dasein “demigods”; i.e. those between the gods and mere mortals (as those who live as a Oneself).

To end this paper, I think that it is worthwhile to briefly look at the possibilities that Heidegger says are open to us in our technological age for our relationship toward Being. Heidegger tells us that we have three possible ways of responding to the totalizing of technology that covers over the question of the meaning of Being as such and which attempts to render the very possibility of asking the question impossible, since only beings as objects matter in this understanding of Being and what calls to us is itself, as we have seen, not a being, let alone an object of representation.

“[The first possibility is this:] whether in laying claim on Being, beings once again are grounded inceptually and appear in the simpleness of their ownmost.”²⁸⁹ This possibility is the possibility in which our alienation from our world in the age of technology, an age in which all is explained according to representation as the objective or the subjective, becomes so unsettling that we, as a people, are called by the distressing need of the lack of distress to ask the question of the meaning of Being as such.

Heidegger does not specify how this possibility would come about. Would it be the result of a mass recognition of the insufficiency of our understanding of Being to allow us to make ourselves at home amongst things? Or would it be the result of a possibility opened by some few resolute individuals such that what is so unsettling in the technological understanding of Being that is then taken up by others?

In either case, Heidegger notes that this possibility only becomes possible in thinking to that which is foreign to us. Namely, we must think not of beings as objects in which we find ourselves both “at home” but not-at-home in the sense of being alienated from our world. In doing so, we think of the source of our understanding of Being, of what Heidegger calls the first beginning with the Greeks. This is why Heidegger says that “the poetic meditation on becoming homely must also for its part be of a historical nature and, as poetic, demand a historical dialogue with foreign poets.”²⁹⁰ It is only in thinking the guiding-question “what is a being?” that we can discover the grounds of our understanding of Being that has alienated us from our world and which can,

²⁸⁹ Heidegger 2006: 204.

²⁹⁰ Heidegger 1996: 49.

consequently, lead us back to the grounding-question “what is the meaning of Being as such?”

The meaning of Being was, on Heidegger’s interpretation, for the Greeks so obvious as to go unnoticed and unasked. But what alienated them from their world was the question of what beings are. Thus, we must recognize this foreign ground as the ungrounded ground of our understanding of Being; ungrounded such that it has alienated us from our world, that it has left us without a ground for the meaningfulness of our world or of Being as such. Once the groundlessness is recognized, it allows us to hear the call of the last god, the call that calls us to answer the question of the meaning of Being as such.

It is in opening up the possibility of being called by the last god to confront the question of the meaning of Being as such that a homecoming becomes possible. Here a “homecoming” means a becoming at home in our world such that we are no longer alienated from our world or the locations, things, and beings opened by it. As opening the possibility of a homecoming, “the *foreign* that relates to the return home, that is, is one with it, is the *provenance* of such return and is that which has been at the commencement with regard to what is one’s own and the homely.”²⁹¹ This return through the medium of the foreign, if it is to happen according to the first possibility, would entail a radical reorientation of our understanding of Being *as a people*. That is, as a people the understanding of beings as the production (object of representation) of a producer (subject of representation) would have to be either abandoned or, more

²⁹¹ Ibid.: 54.

plausibly, relegated to the level of being just one legitimate way of understanding things, for a particular manner of investigation, amongst others.

Heidegger offers the second possibility in an unnecessarily labyrinthine sentence.²⁹² But, in short, the second possibility is the possibility in which the question of Being is forgotten and the essence of technology comes to total domination; i.e. to be the only legitimate method of revealing or, as he calls it, *total machination*. If this possibility were to become an actuality, then the possibility of asking the question of the meaning of Being in general and the understanding of the world as disclosed by the fourfold for a particular kind of seeing may become completely impossible.

In this possibility, any question that we might ask about beings will be answered in terms of beings. Ultimately, the answer will be in terms of the relationship between a representational object and a subject that represents. Any insight into Being as such, into that grounds that first opens up the possibility of understanding ourselves as subjects of representation or of understanding beings as the objects of representation will become covered over and we will merely move through different possible ways of filling this structure in – whether that is in an idealistic form in which we understand the representational subjects as minds and of the represented objects as ideas in minds or in a fully scientific way in which the “mind” is merely understood as the brain or physical

²⁹² “The other possibility is this: whether beings hold on to the chains and conventionalities of the hitherto historically mixed up and inextricable beingness and compel to a total lack of decision; whether within the sphere of this lack beings then pile upon beings in ever-newer arrangements and ever faster controllability; whether under the guise of an intensified ‘living’ a being chases another being, takes its place, and settles the haze of an amusement over all beings – an amusement that is sure to succeed but is wanting in validity – until the end of this mastery of beings (of ‘actuality that is close to life’) has become endless” (Heidegger 2006: 204).

body as a whole causal system and representation merely understood as structures in the brain producing representations in response to bodily stimuli.

Once we have reached the level of total machination, attunement is degraded to the level of mere mood, in the sense of a psychological projection onto represented objects; i.e. a mere subjective “coloring” or beings in “lived experience” that is ultimately explainable in terms of physical processes, which themselves are represented as objective. In this possibility, we will either become sufficiently alienated from our world that we will feel the call of the gods to ask the meaning of this understanding of Being or we will be abandoned to a world in which we are alienated, but which has the additional problem of being meaningless as such.

Heidegger calls this possibility *the* danger of the technological age. He makes clear that this danger is greater than the danger of the hydrogen bomb or of any housing shortage or any other such problem of the modern age. The danger here is that man may cover over and forget his own essence as a world-discloser. If this is forgotten, then calculative thinking may become the only kind of thinking and the possibility of meditative thinking and preparing for the changes in understanding of Being (which is understood, but nevertheless forgotten), of preparing to ask the question of the meaning of Being in the technological age, may become impossible.

But Heidegger also says that where the danger is, the saving power is as well. What Heidegger means here is that insofar as total machination completely alienates us from our world, renders the world completely meaningless outside of ungrounded proximal meanings. Insofar as we become more and more alienated, the possibility that

this unsettling alienation and not-at-homeness may open us to the needfulness of Being' i.e. may render us more and more open to the call of the gods. Thus, insofar as the technological understanding of Being endangers us, it also may send us into a confrontation with our gods and reopen the question of the meaning of Being as such in the technological age.

Heidegger offers the third possibility in much the same manner as he did the second.²⁹³ The third possibility is that the second possibility will come to be, that the technological understanding of Being may completely cover over our openness to the question of the meaning of Being as such, but that there will be a few rare ones who will come to be so alienated in their relationship to our world that they will be touched by the needfulness of Being and become attuned to the distress of the lack of distress in the technological understanding of Being as such. This is why Heidegger famously says: "Only a god can save us."²⁹⁴ In being called by the gods in their needfulness, such rare ones will become resolute in awaiting a decision in response to the question of the meaning of Being as such.

Through the destitution of the second possibility, these rare ones hearken back to the first possibility as an "echo," and open a path for the "ones to come" who "belong to the last god"; i.e. like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Hölderlin, the alienation of man in

²⁹³ "And still the other possibility is this: whether the first possibility stays away, and though the second one does assert itself, and given their admitted appearance, beings dominate all being but something else happens: whether the history of be-ing (the grounding of its truth) begins in the unknowable hiddenness-shelteredness within the course of the struggle of the 'alone ones' and whether be-ing enters its ownmost and longest history whose jubilation and sorrow, triumphs and defeats beat only in the sphere of the heart of the most rare ones" Heidegger 2006: 204-5:

²⁹⁴ Wolin 1993, esp. ch. 5.

modernity will become obvious to such rare ones. In becoming obvious to them, they will clear the way for a new understanding of Being, though, especially in the case of Nietzsche, this will not ground Being anew, but will merely clear the way for the grounding of Being for the ones to come; i.e. the ones for whom the question of the meaning of Being is not only an issue, but for whom a new understanding of Being as such will come into focus.

Whereas the rare ones stand alone in their resolute ownedness in relation to the question of the meaning of Being, it is with the ones to come that the third possibility turns into the first possibility. It is only when the understanding of Being thus opened becomes a place in which we, as a people, are at home that we pass from one beginning, from the understanding of Being grounded by the guiding question of the Greeks, to the other beginning, the understanding of Being that does not leave the understanding of Being that we have handed down to us from the Greeks through its many modifications behind but which grounds that understanding according to the grounding-question of the meaning of Being as such.

Releasement toward things and the openness to the mystery refers to the resolute ownedness that is appropriate to the technological understanding of Being. To be released in this way is to be open to the worlding of the world; i.e. the round dance of the fouring of the fourfold. In being open to the fouring of the fourfold, we are open to ourselves as world-disclosers. But to be open to ourselves as world-disclosers is to be open to our confrontation with the gods; to our making a decision in response to the question of the meaning of Being as such. In being open to the confrontation between

mortals and gods is to also be open to the strife between the necessity of earth and the possibilities of the sky.

I take it these are the rewards of this paper:

(1) Each member of the fourfold has been interpreted existential-ontologically and without any great strain in interpretation on what Heidegger himself says. In fact, this interpretation, unlike any other of which I am aware, has successfully laid out the fourfold in such a way that it is clear why Heidegger takes these four – earth, sky, gods, and mortals – to be those existentials that make up the fourfold that grounds our world. Implicitly in working through the chapters focusing on each member and explicitly in the conclusion, this interpretation also shows why the members of the fourfold essentially belong together and why Heidegger thinks that in thinking of any one member of the fourfold, we are also thinking of the other three, whether we pay any mind to them or this connection as such.

(2) Although Heidegger's technological works were not the focus of this paper, I take it that I have given substantial grounds for interpreting Heidegger's technological works such that one can both understand them in themselves, but also in light of Heidegger's poetic works as well as in light of *Being and Time*.

(3) This paper has proven that it is highly plausible that Heidegger's later view is consistent with his view in *Being and Time*. The evidence, it seems to me, is extremely strong, if not overwhelming. The major objection, that resolute ownedness is inconsistent with releasement toward things is inconsistent, has been shown to be false.

There is a strong reading of each such that resolute ownedness and releasement toward things are not only consistent, but that the latter is a mode of the former.

(4) Finally, in the conclusion I have given an indication of the possibilities that Heidegger has left us for continuing or failing to continue his project of attempting to ask the question of the meaning of Being as such.

In conclusion, I do not intend to suggest that all of the work is done for a full interpretation of Heidegger's poetic works generally or even of the fourfold more specifically. Rather, it seems to me that, if this paper has been successful, I have given a starting point for further interpretation of the fourfold in a way that the fourfold need no longer be stuffed into the "too-hard basket," but has been moved to the "hard, but not too basket."

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