

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

Department of Philosophy

HEIDEGGER AND THE QUESTION OF TRAGEDY

A Thesis in

Philosophy

by

Karen Gover

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2005

The thesis of Karen Gover has been reviewed and approved* by the following:

Dr. John Sallis
Edwin Earle Sparks Professor of Philosophy
Thesis Advisor
Chair of Committee

Dr. Charles Scott
Edwin Earle Sparks Professor of Philosophy

Dr. Dennis Schmidt
Professor of Philosophy

Dr. Daniel Purdy
Associate Professor of German

Dr. John Christman
Professor of Philosophy
Head of Department of Philosophy

* Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

Heidegger and the Question of Tragedy, examines the significance of ancient Greek tragedy for the thought of arguably the most important philosopher of the twentieth century and critic of modern Western society, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). References to Greek tragedy only appear in Heidegger's writing during the years 1933-1946. This decade and a half following the 1927 publication of *Being and Time* is considered to be the most important, and undoubtedly the most controversial, period in Heidegger's long career. I argue that Heidegger's thought of the tragic illuminates an irresolvable tension that he finds at the origin of the Western tradition and its understanding of being. This tension appears at the inception of Western thought as the tendency for being to show itself as pure presence; as a stable, unchanging origin; an infinite source of all beings. While this interpretation of being has taken various forms during the epochs of the Western tradition, it has consistently and with accelerating force resulted in the concealment of the temporal character of being. According to Heidegger's diagnosis, this oblivion of being has led in the modern age to an increasingly fervent drive for technological mastery of nature and peoples; a hubristic faith in the human capacity to order and control; and an understanding of truth that tends to universalize and to assure human dominion.

Yet Heidegger finds that the modern obsession with technological mastery and scientific truth, while nearly indomitable, betrays *in its very fervency* a tacit acknowledgement, concealed from itself, of this other, hidden character of being that cannot be captured by the conceptual tools for thinking it that the tradition assigns. Heidegger's fundamental, tragic insight is that both the understanding of being as pure presence and the self-concealing counterplay of being in its temporal, finite character issue from being itself; that the manifestation of being is also its concealment, and that this dynamic structure in which being is constantly at odds with itself is proper to it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
Chapter 1 Introduction: The Question of Tragedy.....	1
Speaking of Tragedy.....	2
Tragedy and Truth.....	5
Disavowal.....	10
Tragedy and Metaphysics.....	13
Ascribing an Essence.....	15
Aristotle.....	19
Tragedy and the Political.....	27
Chapter 2.....	31
Heidegger's Heroism: From <i>Being and Time</i> to <i>Introduction to Metaphysics</i>	31
Heidegger's Heroism.....	33
The Passion for Unconcealment: <i>Oedipus Rex</i>	40
Oedipus.....	44
Between Being and the Human Being: <i>Antigone</i>	46
From Violent Ground.....	47
Uncanny Violence.....	50
Doubly Violent.....	53
Excessive Gathering.....	63
Chapter 3 Tragic Attestation: Beiträge zur Philosophie.....	71
Tragedy and Truth.....	72
Continuity and Collapse.....	74
Ungrounded Loss.....	79
Necessity.....	81
The End of Metaphysics.....	82
<i>Untergang</i> and Overcoming.....	86
A Two-fold Unity.....	91
Selfhood and Sacrifice.....	96
Chapter 4 The Negative as Counterturning: <i>Parmenides</i> and <i>Der Ister</i>	101
The <i>Polis</i>	101
Tragedy and the <i>Polis</i>	105
The Politics of the Uncanny.....	106
Detour through the Uncanny.....	108
Uncanny ground.....	110

Nihilism and the Negative	114
Before the beginning	119
Chapter 5 The Essence of Tragedy	120
Beginning at the End	120
End and Origin	122
The Fragment.....	124
Tragedy.....	129
Tragedy and the Origin of the Work of Art.....	135
Poetic violence.....	142
Bibliography	146

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This doctoral thesis was completed with the assistance of a research grant from the Pennsylvania State University Institute for the Arts and Humanities.

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Question of Tragedy

What is the relation between Heidegger's thought and tragic poetry? How does he understand the connection between tragic poetry and the "tragic"? These questions impinge on one of the most striking aspects of Martin Heidegger's thought—namely the place and importance of poetry in the thinking of being. The sustained emphasis that he gives to poetry, beginning in the thirties and continuing until the end of his life, is well known, and in recent years has been the subject of prolific commentary. And yet relatively little critical attention has been devoted to the role of tragic poetry specifically within the so-called turn to poetry that occurs after the publication of *Being and Time*. This state of affairs is all the more striking given the fact that Heidegger, at least at times, seems to privilege tragic poetry among all other kinds. He says, for example, that "Great—essential—poetry as founding [*Stiftung*] of beyng is 'tragic.'"¹ This assertion would appear to make tragic poetry a key aspect of the history of being. This is further borne out by the fact that Heidegger designates as "tragic" the Greek experience of the being of beings.²

Given these assertions, it seems clear that the emphasis and attention that Heidegger gives to poetry, beginning in the thirties, cannot be fully understood without taking tragic poetry under special consideration. If the poetic founding of beyng is

¹ GA 66: 223. "Die große—wesentliche—Dichtung als Stiftung des Seyns ist „tragisch“."

² Heidegger makes this assertion in the essay, "The Anaximander Fragment" in *Early Greek Thinking*. This text is discussed in detail in the final chapter.

distinctively “tragic,” then it would seem that the Attic tragedies would be a particularly important group of texts for Heidegger. But what exactly does Heidegger understand by the term “tragic,” and what does it have to do with Greek tragic poetry?

We might also ask what implications this has for the work of art. Heidegger claims in “The Origin of the Work of Art” that the essence of art is poetry, whose essence in turn is the founding [*Stiftung*] of truth.³ Are we to infer that this essential founding of truth is a distinctively tragic occurrence, and if so, what exactly does that mean? Is tragedy the highest form of art? The present work takes its impetus from this constellation of questions. In order to begin to address them, however, we must examine in detail the places where tragedy and the tragic arise thematically in Heidegger’s work.

Speaking of Tragedy

Heidegger’s references to tragedy take place during the so-called turn in his thinking, beginning shortly after *Being and Time* in the Rectorial Address, and ending with the 1946 essay, “The Anaximander Fragment.” Although his references to Greek tragedy tend to be terse, passing observations rather than sustained treatments, for all of their brevity they appear fairly regularly in his lectures and writings during this time. The most important of the texts with respect to tragedy are also some of the most important and influential texts of the Heideggerian corpus generally, viz.: *Introduction to Metaphysics*, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, the Parmenides

³ Holzwege, 62.

lecture course, and the “Der Ister” course. At the very least, we could say that tragedy is a leitmotif that runs through his work during the war years.

And yet, with the exception of two sustained treatments of the same choral *stasimon* from *Antigone* (in *Introduction to Metaphysics* and the “Der Ister” course), the references are often so terse and undeveloped that it is difficult to infer from them just what Heidegger thinks Greek tragedy was, and thereby to develop an understanding of its importance for his thought generally. Heidegger does not offer a theory of tragedy in the Aristotelian, Hegelian, or perhaps even Nietzschean senses of the term. But that is perhaps part of the problem: for to ask, “What is Greek tragedy?” is to place it within a metaphysical formulation. It is to ask about the essence of Greek tragedy, and therefore to risk reinscribing tragedy within its metaphysical determinations. This is particularly important for Heidegger to avoid in the case of tragedy and the tragic, since, as we shall see, he looks to tragic poetry as a site of precisely that Greek experience of the truth of being that was lost with the inception of metaphysics in Plato and Aristotle.

One of the curious aspects of tragedy’s role in Heidegger’s texts is that it is never presented as something to be interpreted for its own sake. All of his discussions of tragedy, including and perhaps most importantly the two major ones, always have the formal status of a digression. His first sustained treatment of the choral *stasimon* from *Antigone*, in the 1934 lecture course *Introduction to Metaphysics*, arises from an interpretation of Parmenides and Heraklitus. The status of Heidegger’s discussion of tragedy is ultimately in service, he says, to his interpretation of Parmenides’ didactic poem, though he admits that the connection, much less the necessity of such a move, may

not be immediately obvious. When Heidegger returns to the same ode for a second sustained treatment in the 1942 course “Der Ister,” his turn to Sophocles is once again carried out with the express motive of shedding light on another; in this case, the poet Hölderlin. Is this merely incidental, or does it indicate an ambivalence on Heidegger’s part about the place of tragic poetry with respect to metaphysics and the truth of being?⁴

This ostensible ambivalence regarding tragedy is perhaps in part a reflection of an ambiguity inherent to tragic poetry itself, concerning its proximity to the inception of metaphysics. After declaring the founding poetry of being to be “tragic,” Heidegger adds that

perhaps the hitherto existing “tragic poems” are only entryways, because they poetize beingness in accordance with their belonging to Western metaphysics and only indirectly being.⁵

Oddly enough, although Heidegger declares the poetic founding of being to be essentially tragic, tragic poetry belongs to metaphysics and thus does not directly found being. Could it be that when Heidegger speaks of the tragic character of the “great,” “essential” poetry that founds being, he means a poetry more tragic than the Greek tragedies themselves, just as he asserts elsewhere that our thinking must be more Greek than the Greeks, more German than the Germans?

⁴ As Fóti notes in the essay, “Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Sophoclean Tragedy,” Heidegger’s interpretations of the choral ode from *Antigone* in the 1935 and 1942 lecture courses “are not puzzling if interesting digressions, but are crucial to his questioning.” And yet, while I agree with Fóti on this point and with her assertion that the 1942 discussion of *Antigone* “tends to marginalize the Hölderlinian text at issue,” what I find interesting and important to keep in mind is that these discussions, for all of their centrality or importance to Heidegger’s questioning, nevertheless do, consistently, have the avowed status of a digression, perhaps even a supplementarity to the stated topic at hand.

⁵ GA 66: 223. “Und vielleicht sind die bisherigen ,tragischen Dichtungen’ nur Vorhöfe, weil sie gemäß ihrer Zugehörigkeit zur Metaphysik des Abendlandes das Seiende dichten und nur mittelbar das Seyn.“

Tragedy and Truth

Despite the ambiguity surrounding its place in his thought, there are certain observations that we can make about the significance of tragedy for Heidegger. It is clear, for example, that tragedy for Heidegger is exclusively Greek, that it is closely tied to his readings of the Presocratics, namely Heraklitus and Parmenides, that it is almost exclusively concerned with Sophocles, and that it is mediated by, and indebted to, Hölderlin's engagement with Greek tragedy. But what is most striking about the significance of tragedy during the so-called turn in Heidegger's thinking is that it has to do with the transformation of the essence of *alētheia* in the first, Greek, beginning.

In a text labeled "first draft," included at the end of *Basic Questions of Philosophy* (1938), Heidegger explicitly gives tragic poetry a place within the development of *alētheia*. He includes it in a numbered list, a linear sequence of steps that describes the transformation of its essence:

The recollection of the first shining forth of *alētheia*, as we require it and which we hold to be possible only on the basis of the question of truth, may be articulated in five levels of reflection: 1) The unexpressed flaming up of *alētheia* in the pronouncements of Anaximander. 2) The first unfoldings of *alētheia*, though not ones explicitly directed to a foundation, in Heraklitus, Parmenides, the tragic poets, and Pindar. 3) The last glimmering of *alētheia* within the question of beings as the basic philosophical question in Plato and Aristotle. 4) The extinguishing of *alētheia* and its transformation into *homoiosis*. 5) The mediate and mediated transition from *alētheia* to *homoiosis* on the by-way over uncorrectness (*falsity-pseudos*).⁶

⁶*Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 186. In German as GA 45: 222. "Die Erinnerung an das erste Aufscheinen der *alētheia*, wie wir sie fordern und allein aus dem Fragen der Wahrheitsfrage für vollziehbar halten, läßt sich nach fünf Stufen der Besinnung gliedern: 1. Das unausgesprochene Aufleuchten der *alētheia* im Satz des *Anaximander*. 2. Die ersten, wenngleich nicht eigens auf eine Begründung gerichteten Entfaltungen der *alētheia* bei *Heraklit* und *Parmenides*, bei den Tragikern und *Pindar*. 3. Das

The fact that he presents this transformation here in such a narrative, linear format is surprising and indeed misleading. Its formulation as a chronological sequence makes it resemble a historiological—rather than historical—understanding of the history of being.⁷

From this list, we notice that tragic poetry is mentioned alongside Heraklitus, Parmenides, and Pindar as a site of a certain, rather equivocal unfolding of *alētheia* before its eventual collapse into and as metaphysics. From this we might gather that tragedy is the site for an experience of truth that is somehow “pre-metaphysical.” Yet this term can only serve as a place holder until we have a better word, since such a designation is metaphysical in its dependence on a historiographical and chronological understanding of time and history. In looking at this numbered list, Greek tragedy belongs to a certain liminal moment in the Greek experience of *alētheia*. It is a moment in which certain possibilities for experiencing truth as unconcealment were not yet completely foreclosed by its decisive transformation into *homoiosis*, and yet it is just on the verge of its decisive shift. Yet we would also notice that tragedy is just one site of this first unfolding of *alētheia* among other early Greek thinkers and poets.

letzte Aufleuchten der *alētheia* innerhalb der philosophischen Leitfrage nach dem Seienden (*ti to on*;) bei Platon und Aristoteles. 4. Das Verlöschen der *alētheia* und ihre Verwandlung zur *homoiosis* (Richtigkeit). 5. Der mittelbare-vermittelte Übergang von der *alētheia* zur *homoiosis* auf dem Umweg über die Unrichtigkeit (Falschheit-*pseudos*).

⁷This is a tension that is always present in Heidegger’s work, particularly in his return to the Greeks, including tragic poetry. Schürmann articulates precisely this tension when he observes that “The historical is always measured in Heidegger by the scale of being as it gives itself to and at the same time withholds itself from thinking. . . .The historiological is measured by a different scale, one that is just the converse of epochal concealing and unconcealing. Here, facts such as inventions, revolutions, and other seizures of power—the will of leaders, the consensus of rational agents, and so on—determine the periods of history. Thus, each time Heidegger ventures in subsequent writings to *date* the beginning (for instance, with Parmenides) and the end (for instance, ‘in three hundred years’) of the history of being’s self-withholding, there lurks a risk of succumbing to a second-order positivism, where acts, including philosophical acts, mark turning points in history.” Reiner Schürmann, “Riveted to a Monstrous Site,” 320.

There is another indication, in the form of an absence, which indicates that tragedy has a greater significance for Heidegger than that which it would seem to have on the basis of this list alone. For although he mentions tragedy alongside Pindar as though they were equivalent or of equal importance—something that he also does in the *Beiträge*—when we look more closely at the Heideggerian corpus we soon discover that Pindar’s poetry is not simply given equivalent status to tragic poetry in his thought. If Heidegger’s direct references to tragic poetry are relatively few in number, his discussions of Pindar are almost nonexistent. We see this most clearly illustrated in Heidegger’s lecture course on Hölderlin’s hymn, “Der Ister.” Heidegger introduces his remarks on Greek poetry by asserting that

especially in relation to the becoming homely and being homely of human beings in Hölderlin’s poetizing of the hymns, we repeatedly hear the resonance of poetic thoughts from Pindar and Sophocles.⁸

And yet, despite the repeated pairing of Pindar and Sophocles in his prefatory remarks which frame and justify his extended turn to Greek poetry, in a course ostensibly devoted to Hölderlin, Pindar falls out of consideration once he turns to the choral ode from *Antigone*. Furthermore, he goes on to speak of the “historical-poetic necessity” of the dialogue between Hölderlin and Sophocles; but Heidegger never makes such a claim with respect to Pindar.⁹

Thus there appears to be a level at which Heidegger wants to place tragedy and Pindarian poetry on an equal footing, despite the many indications in his work that belie

⁸ *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* 50. In German as GA 53: 61. “Daher kommt es, daß zumal im Bezug auf das Heimischwerden und Heimischsein des Menschen in Hölderlins Hymnendichtung immer wieder dichterische Gedanken des Pindar und Sophokles anklingen.”

⁹ *The Ister*, 56. See also p. 123.

this desire. We see this most clearly in instances such as the one cited in the list above, in which tragedy and Pindarian poetry are designated as those instances of Greek poetry that attest to the Greek experience of *alētheia* before its collapse into and as metaphysics. But the crucial difference is that tragedy is not only an instance of Greek poetizing that occurs just before the inception of metaphysics. Unlike Pindarian poetry, which glorifies athletes and heroes, tragedy has a uniquely complicated relation to metaphysics, insofar as what it poetizes is precisely going-under and collapse.¹⁰ This places tragedy, therefore, in the uncanny position of both preceding the collapse of *alētheia* into *homoiosis* and at the same time opening up the site for this collapse. Tragic poetry is thus implicated—in a way that Pindarian poetry is not—in its own decline, and in its place within the history of being. Yet it remains unclear from the texts whether Heidegger himself countenanced the full extent of tragedy’s ambiguous place in relation to the thinking of being. An important question that arises here, but which is outside of the scope of the present work, is whether this ambiguity belies an ambivalence on Heidegger’s part about the place that he wants to accord poetry generally within being’s history.

There is yet another reason why the place of tragic poetry in Heidegger’s work seems to exceed its narrow determination alongside Pindar and the Presocratics. When we cast our gaze over Heidegger’s work from this period—and in fact earlier, beginning with *Being and Time*—there seems to be an engagement with Greek tragedy that occurs on another, unspoken level, alongside and in relation to the explicit one. (It is also

¹⁰ This is made most explicit in texts such as *Besinnung* §69, in which he discusses the tragic as essentially a “going-under.”

perhaps in tension with it.) When we look at some of the key terms and concepts that appear in Heidegger's work during these years, such as resoluteness, finitude, *polemos*, strife, fate and destiny, decision, loss, necessity, catastrophe, suffering, decline or going-under, turning, and overturning, it would seem that even when not explicitly mentioned, Heidegger seems to be engaging the tragic, or its key concepts as they have been interpreted by the tradition, in his attempt to think being at the end of metaphysics.

Thus we might say that the role of tragedy in Heidegger's thought is two-fold: first, there are the relatively few, yet important, instances in which Heidegger speaks directly about tragedy and the tragic, either by citing and interpreting lines from the Greek tragedies, or by referring to a "tragic" experience of being.¹¹ Yet tragedy, and the Aristotelian tradition of its interpretation, has a tacit presence in Heidegger's work that exceeds these direct references. Insofar as tragedy and the tragic are intimately tied to his attempt to think being at the end of metaphysics it does far more work in Heidegger's thinking than it would seem on the basis of his direct remarks. This interplay between the explicit and the unacknowledged ways in which Heidegger draws upon Greek tragedy what I am referring to as its two-fold character in his work.

One of the difficult but perhaps telling aspects of the two levels at which tragedy is present in Heidegger's thinking is that there is so little middle ground to his approach. On the occasions where he interprets the tragic texts themselves, he fragments them, focusing on just a few lines or one *stasimon* with little regard to the work as a whole. The fact that he often acknowledges this explicitly in the course of his interpretation does

¹¹ GA 39: 118.

little to lessen the chagrin of some of his critics over what they regard as violently decontextualized appropriations of the poems. In contrast to this rather myopic and extremely focused approach to the tragic poems themselves, Heidegger's occasional remarks about the "essence of tragedy" and his evocative use of such terms as "destiny" and "collapse" are disorienting for the opposite reason; rather than being excessively focused, there is no ostensible mooring in the tragic texts at all.

Disavowal

It is this latter aspect of Heidegger's work—in which he employs concepts and phrases that invoke the dynamics of tragedy outside of any discussion of tragic poetry or art in general—that has led to the description of his thought as "tragic."¹² No one would argue on the basis of his interpretations of Sophocles that Heidegger has a developed theory of tragic poetry, and in that sense he is certainly not a thinker of tragedy. But could it be the case that Heidegger himself is a tragic thinker? This characterization of his thought seems to have been something with which Heidegger himself was familiar, for he goes to the trouble to reject it. He responds to the idea that his is a fundamentally "tragic philosophy" with this disavowal:

¹² See, for example, David Farrell Krell's introductory essay to *Early Greek Thinking*, in which he suggests that Nietzsche's "philosopher of tragic insight" might be a suitable designation for Heidegger himself. Dennis Schmidt makes this point more explicit when he observes that there is "a reliance upon an understanding of tragedy that is itself, by and large, unformulated" and yet "is powerful and runs deep in Heidegger's thought," concluding that "one might say of Heidegger that in him one finds a truly tragic thinker." Dennis Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, 229.

The designation “tragic” has however no special role in relation to this reflection, especially not in the sense that a “tragic philosophy” is being thought up.¹³

Indeed, Heidegger not only distances his thought specifically from the label “tragic,” but he draws attention to the problem of applying this term to thinking in general:

Because of the burdening of this word through “literary-historical” and “cultured” meanings, we are better off leaving it out of use. What the essential mark of the inception indicates (the already-decided coming of the going-under and with it the “inception”) can also be grasped and understood in the course of thinking without this word.¹⁴

With these remarks, Heidegger dismisses the term “tragic” as superfluous and even misleading when it comes to understanding his thought. The word “tragic” is used to characterize a thinking that attempts to overcome metaphysics, and to overcome it not by attempting to go beyond or to transcend the tradition, but rather by means of an undergoing. Heidegger is perhaps right to warn against using a term that has been so thoroughly overdetermined by the very same metaphysical tradition whose limit it is supposed to announce. In his remarks on tragedy elsewhere, he repeatedly mentions the danger of interpreting tragic poetry in terms of Christian morality, psychology, or “lived-experience.” As Heidegger observes in *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, tragedy is closed off to us for the same reason that a “real understanding” of anything essential to the Greek world is impossible: the world of those works has passed.

We are completely excluded from a real understanding of, e.g., Greek tragedy or the poetry of Pindar, for we read and hear of the Greeks in psychological, even in Christian terms.¹⁵

¹³ GA 66: 223.

¹⁴ GA 66: 224.

¹⁵ *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 140.

Therefore, because the “tragic” is a term whose meaning now reflects our own world rather than the Greek one from which it arose, it is better off left unsaid and unused. It is not essential. To label his philosophy “tragic” simply obscures rather than elucidates.

And yet Heidegger also gives another argument for the superfluity of the term “tragic philosophy” which seems to stand in direct opposition to the one given above. It is unnecessary not just because it misleads, but because it is tautologous:

If philosophy is the thinking of beyng in the sense of the questioning fore-thinking [*Vordenken*] in the grounding of the truth of beyng, then the name “tragic philosophy” says twice the same.¹⁶

According to this argument, the “tragic” is an unnecessary word to describe philosophy because it simply renders the phrase redundant. The word is inessential because it only repeats what is meant already by philosophy: thinking in the grounding of the truth of beyng—in other words, thinking its essence. Whereas in the first case it seemed that the “tragic” was too far away from us, here it is all too close—too close, because identical in meaning to a word already in play, “philosophy.”

Given such an insistence on the word’s unimportance, it may seem strange to base an inquiry on precisely the question of the significance of tragedy and the tragic in Heidegger’s thought. If we can grasp what is tragic about his thought without actually needing to call it such, and since this term may only hinder our understanding, perhaps we should let it be.

And yet Heidegger both does and does not take his own advice. On the one hand, despite his disavowal in *Besinnung*, Heidegger makes repeated references to Greek

¹⁶ GA 66:223

tragedy and the tragic—and he was unambiguous in his insistence that there is no other kind of tragedy than Greek tragedy¹⁷—in the years both before and after he wrote the remarks quoted above. Thus it would seem that tragedy as a theme and the word “tragic” itself do have some currency for Heidegger, while he nevertheless distances himself from those who would label him a “tragic thinker.”¹⁸ At the same time, however, perhaps the unformulated and unspoken presence that tragedy has in Heidegger’s thought, is due, at least in part, to the reasons that he outlines above: that it is possible and even desirable to engage in a thinking that is tragic without actually relying on this term. But it is still unclear whether tragic poetry is itself unnecessary or superfluous to grasping this dimension of this thought.

Tragedy and Metaphysics

We have seen that Heidegger gives tragic poetry a very specific place within the narrative that he tells about the unfolding and collapse of *alētheia* in the Greek beginning. It stands at the threshold of the inception of metaphysics, just preceding Plato and Aristotle and yet perhaps already belonging to the understanding of truth as correctness that is unfolded in their philosophy.

My primary argument regarding Heidegger and the question of tragedy is that tragedy is not only one site of the unfolding of *alētheia* in the first beginning. Based on its often tacit and unthematized presence in his work, as well as his stated understanding

¹⁷ “There is only *Greek* tragedy and no other besides it.” *Parmenides*, 90.

¹⁸ As I will discuss later, this is inherently related to the problem of the so-called “heroic rhetoric” in some of Heidegger’s texts and his insistence that he does not engage in a “heroic” philosophy.

of the tragic as an intertwining of the beginning and going-under or decline, it is clear that tragedy exceeds for Heidegger the rather circumscribed place that he tends to give it alongside the Presocratics and Pindar. Heidegger understands the attunement of his thinking at the end of metaphysics and in the crossing between the first and the other beginnings to be distinctively tragic.

But if what we take to be “tragic” is determined by the metaphysical tradition, as Heidegger worries that it is, then it would seem that any attempt to think the end and/or overcoming of metaphysics in terms of tragedy would already be doomed to failure, insofar as it would be governed precisely by that which it attempts to think in its overcoming.

And yet this is not simply Heidegger’s problem with respect to tragic poetry, but in fact points to the defining problem generally for an attempt to overcome metaphysics: as Heidegger recognizes, there is no exit, no way simply to step outside of metaphysics; no language that does not tend toward and perhaps inevitably succumb to representational thinking; therefore any attempt to overcome metaphysics will have to be from within it. It will have to be a turning that employs the language of representational thinking against itself, in such a way that it is transformed and opens up possibilities that are totally other to those given by metaphysics. Thus, if it is the case that Heidegger seeks to think the overcoming of metaphysics in terms of Greek tragedy, this means that Greek tragedy itself will also have to be placed in question, and our understanding of it will be just as subject to transformation as the metaphysical concepts that we cannot help but employ—are indeed bound to—in its interpretation.

Such a seemingly vicious circularity will already be quite familiar to who are acquainted with the movements of his thought. How can it be that Heidegger would attempt to think the end of metaphysics in terms of the tragic, when the so-called tragic is itself already determined by an aesthetic—and that means metaphysical—tradition of literary criticism whose ascendancy extends right on down to Heidegger’s (and perhaps still our) own time? Can it be that Heidegger himself didn’t know what he meant when he said the word “tragedy”?

Ascribing an Essence

We can see concretely the effects of this hermeneutical problem when we turn to the secondary literature on Heidegger and tragedy. One of the main problems that we encounter in the critical reception of this topic is that one who wants to speak to the significance of tragedy in Heidegger’s thought is almost forced at some point to speak for Heidegger and say what tragedy essentially is, since he only obliquely discusses it himself. We find this, for example, in Zimmerman’s approach to this topic, whereby, after quoting a passage from the lecture course on Hölderlin’s “*Germanien*” concerning the poet, destiny, suffering, struggle and creating, but which does not directly mention tragic poetry, Zimmerman says, “For Heidegger, the poet’s struggle with the originating stream was akin to the hero’s violent struggle with destiny, which is the essence of Greek tragedy.”¹⁹ This is one of the pitfalls of re-reading the tragic explicitly back into Heidegger’s texts: if we pay heed to the fact that Heidegger’s concern with the poet has

¹⁹ Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger and Modernity*, 118.

to do with a certain relation to being that is precluded by metaphysics, then we must be very careful not to repeat the metaphysical gesture of ascribing an “essence” to tragedy in our attempt to support the interpretation that the poet’s suffering is tragic. And yet, we find ourselves up against the circularity that is always at work when it comes to an *eidōs*: if we dare to interpret certain moments in Heidegger’s thought in terms of Greek tragedy, are we not in need first of all of an understanding of “what” tragedy “is” in order to make these interpretive claims in the first place? It would seem that the commentator has to assert a definition of Greek tragedy, since Heidegger himself does not, in order to provide a basis for the assertion that the tragic has a certain presence in Heidegger’s thought that exceeds his own remarks on the subject.

But in addition to the problem mentioned above of this essentialization of tragedy as a reinscription of metaphysics at the very place where its overturning is at stake, there is the additional problem that these assertions in the commentary about the essence of Greek tragedy, when they are articulated, are not themselves argued for, but are rather stated with the authority of self-evidence. We find this not only in the quote cited above that defines tragedy as the hero’s struggle with his destiny, but also in Zimmerman’s further remark that suicide or violent death are “prerequisites for tragedy.” In the face of such generalizations, which are made in the service of reading Heidegger in terms of the tragic, it seems important to point out that there are tragedies, such as *Iphigenia at Tauris*, which include neither suicide nor violent death.²⁰

²⁰ Michael Gelvin goes even further, however, in “Heidegger and Tragedy,” by making the focal point of his essay an interpretation of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, without even acknowledging that Heidegger refused to consider any kind of tragedy other than Greek.

Indeed, Heidegger would no doubt appreciate the fact that tragedy and the tragic are often treated as though they pointed to a common and self-evident essence, and yet this essence is identified differently by various interpreters. For example, Reiner Schürmann, in contrast to Zimmerman, understands the tragic element operative in Heidegger's work as the conflict of two incompatible normative demands made upon the hero. He identifies the tragic as a double bind that compels the hero to embrace one law at the expense of the other, which he refers to as "tragic denial." The tragic moment of vision comes, then, when the hero awakens to his denial:

Tragedy traces out something like a path of sight. The hero sees the laws in conflict. Then—this is the moment of tragic denial—he blinds himself toward one of them, keeping his gaze fixed on the other. Armies and cities have lived, and continue to live, within the shadow of this blindness. Then follows a catastrophe that opens his eyes: this is the moment of tragic truth. The vision of irreconcilable differing takes his sight away. ..and it singularizes the hero to the point that the city has no room for him any longer. From denial to recognition, blindness is transmuted. His orbits empty, Oedipus sees a normative double bind, i.e., tragic differing."²¹

Schürmann's account of the double bind and tragic denial as constitutive of tragedy leads him to assert that Agamemnon's predicament at Aulis shows more clearly than with any other hero the tragic double bind. One of the shortcomings of this formulation is that Heidegger never mentions Agamemnon, and in fact almost never engages Aeschylean tragedy at all—an important exception being the quote from *Prometheus Bound* in the Rectorial Address. This makes it rather difficult to take Agamemnon's choice as a model for Heidegger's understanding of tragedy. But the much more significant problem with this formulation is that the language of denial and recognition is quite foreign to

²¹ "Ultimate Double Binds," 248.

Heidegger's own lexicon. Such a formulation seems to belong much more to the Christian and psychologistic interpretations of tragedy that Heidegger repudiates rather than to that which speaks to his own thought. This is all the more surprising given its exceptional character; for Schürmann is one of the most sensitive and virtuosic commentators that can be found in the vast amount of secondary literature on Heidegger.

Indeed, Schürmann seems much closer to Heidegger's thought when he elaborates further on by saying that the tragic double bind is dissymmetrical and therefore yields neither dualism nor dialectical *Aufhebung*. Of the conflictual pairs that constitute the double bind, he says that "dissymmetrical otherness best describes tragic conflict, which remains paradigmatic for Heidegger."²² Setting aside for the moment the inherent difficulties in ascribing such a metaphysically charged term as "paradigmatic" to Heidegger's thinking of the tragic, it is not clear how this understanding of "dissymmetrical otherness" fits with the tragic narrative of double bind and denial that Schürmann outlines in the passage cited above.

The inconsistencies among and within the commentaries on Heidegger and the tragic that have been written so far perhaps indicate not so much a failing on the part of his readers but rather an intrinsic difficulty to such a project. Since Heidegger's own treatment of the tragic neither is nor intends to be a systematic, scholarly analysis of tragic poetry, any attempt to impose one upon his thought is likely to conceal more than it illuminates. At the same time, however, Heidegger's reading of Greek tragedy is undoubtedly influenced by the history of its interpretation. We find this not only in the

²² "Ultimate Double Binds," 255.

(limited) approbation that he gives to interpreters of Sophocles such as Karl Reinhardt, but, more subtly, in passages such as the one from section 74 of *Being and Time*, in which he discusses *dasein's* fate. When he says there that “fate does not first arise by the clashing together of events and circumstances,” he is invoking and criticizing an understanding of tragedy as such a collision. Heidegger’s later connection of tragedy to Heraklitean *polemos* and to the destining of being both recalls and yet is markedly different from the conception of fate that he criticizes.

Aristotle

With these dangers in mind, I want to turn to the definitive philosophical text on tragedy, Aristotle’s *Poetics*. I do this not simply to highlight the manner in which Heidegger’s treatment of tragedy, both in terms of its motivation and interpretation, is foreign to the *Poetics*. Rather, I want to argue that there are certain crucial ways in which Heidegger both appropriates and yet turns against some of the key concepts according to which Aristotle defines tragedy. Because Aristotle marks for Heidegger the definitive transformation of the Greek experience of *alētheia*, any appropriation of the Aristotelian conceptual apparatus for thinking tragic poetry must also be for him an expropriation, since his interest is in showing tragedy to be the site of an experience of the truth of being that is both the source and the ownmost impossibility of metaphysics.

In a way, Heidegger’s insistence that Greek poetry and thinking, though irreconcilably different, nevertheless attest equally to the Greek experience of being, and therefore speak of the Same, would seem to mark already a fundamental criticism of the

understanding of poetry developed in the *Poetics*. Whereas Heidegger often reads Greek poetry (particularly tragedy) and the Presocratic fragments alongside one another, arguing for their complementarity, Aristotle emphasizes that their similarities are only superficial. As he says in the *Poetics*, “Homer and Empedocles, however, have really nothing in common apart from their metre; so that, if the one is to be called a poet, the other should be termed a physicist rather than a poet.”²³ By placing Greek poetry on the same level as Heraklitus and Parmenides with respect to the unfolding of *alētheia*, Heidegger opposes the assumption, articulated by Aristotle but by no means particular to him, that early Greek poetry and thought “have really nothing in common.” He makes tragic poetry relevant to the truth of being; he regards it as a site for the opening of the Greek experience of *alētheia* as unconcealment, an experience that he says collapses with the Greek thinkers that follow. Furthermore, in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger emphasizes that tragedy is not an imitation or display of something that somehow resides outside the work:

In the tragedy, nothing is staged or displayed theatrically. Rather, the battle of the new gods against the old is being fought. In that the linguistic work arises from the speech of the people, it does not talk about this battle. Rather, it transforms that speech so that now every essential word fights the battle and puts up for decision what is holy and what unholy, what is great and what small, what is brave and what cowardly, what is noble and what fugitive, what is master and what slave (cf. Heraklitus, Frag. 53).²⁴

²³ 1447b.

²⁴ *Off the Beaten Track*, 22. *Holzwege*, 29. “In der Tragödie wird nichts auf- und vorgeführt, sondern der Kampf der neuen Götter gegen die alten wird gekämpft. Indem das Sprachwerk im Sagen des Volkes aufsteht, redet es nicht über diesen Kampf, sondern verwandelt das Sagen des Volkes dahin, daß jetzt jedes wesentliche Wort diesen Kampf führt und zur Entscheidung stellt, was heilig ist und was unheilig, was groß und was klein, was wacker und was feig, was edel und was flüchtig, was Herr und was Knecht (vgl. Heraklit, Fragm. 53).”

As is the case with Heidegger's understanding of the artwork generally, he emphasizes the way in which tragedy is an event, a happening of truth, and he dismisses the understanding of the tragic work as a presentation or performance. This claim stands in contrast to Aristotle's assertion in the *Poetics* that tragedy is mimetic.²⁵

In some ways, Heidegger's interest in tragedy lies precisely in its opposition to Aristotelian metaphysics generally. We see this articulated in the "Letter on Humanism," where Heidegger declares that

The tragedies of Sophocles—provided such a comparison is at all permissible—preserve the *ethos* in their sayings more primordially than Aristotle's lectures on "ethics."²⁶

Heidegger asserts that the beginning of what we understand to be philosophy proper, with Plato and Aristotle, is actually the concealed loss of something primordial that took place earlier. Thus tragic poetry, or the lapidary sayings of Heraklitus, preserve or shelter the Greek understanding of *ethos* more originarily than a founding text of the Western philosophical tradition such as the *Nichomachean Ethics*.

And yet it is impossible simply to approach tragedy, or the fragments of the early Greek thinkers for that matter, unhindered or uninhibited by the metaphysical concepts and constructs that the tradition has handed down. In the case of tragic poetry, the ascendancy and influence of the *Poetics* cannot be simply avoided or ignored. Even if it is the case, as I argue, that Heidegger understands the end of metaphysics in terms of tragic insight, he cannot get outside of the way in which tragedy and the tragic have been

²⁵ For an elaboration of this point, see John Sallis, "Poetics," in *Echoes*.

²⁶ *Pathmarks*, 269. *Wegmarken*, 184. "Die Tragödien des Sophokles bergen, falls überhaupt ein solcher Vergleich erlaubt ist, in irem Sagen das *ēthos* anfänglicher als die Vorlesungen des Aristoteles über 'Ethik'."

determined and understood by the metaphysical tradition. Hence the circle: the tragic is something that cannot be experienced from within metaphysics but only insofar as metaphysics is thought in its passing (and that also seems to mean that the tragic belongs, in a hidden and self-refusing way, to metaphysics' beginning, its essence), and yet we have no other means of access to the tragic except through the tradition of its interpretation. This is a problem that is operative in Heidegger's thinking not only with respect to tragedy but with metaphysics generally, as the *Beiträge* makes clear.

Although Heidegger does not offer us an extended commentary on the *Poetics*, we can glimpse certain moments in his discussion of tragedy when he makes reference to some of its key concepts and ideas. When we look, for example, at a short section from the Nietzsche volumes titled "Incipit Tragoedia," it becomes clear that it is as much a commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* as it is about Nietzsche:

The aspect of terror [*das Furchtbare*] does pertain to the tragic as such, but not as what arouses fear [*das Furchterregende*], in the sense that the tragic would actually allow one to circumvent terror by fleeing toward "resignation," by yearning for nothingness. On the contrary: terror is what is affirmed, indeed in its inextricable belonging to the beautiful. Tragedy is there, where terror is affirmed in its belonging to the beautiful in their inner contrariety.²⁷

Into this short passage is packed many of the central themes and problems that arise in Heidegger's engagement, explicit or no, with the tragic. First the distinction that Heidegger draws between terror and fear is a response to the famous claim in the *Poetics*

²⁷ GA 6: 248. "Zum Tragischen selbst aber gehört das Furchtbare, jedoch nicht als das Furchterregende in dem Sinne, daß es davor ausweichen läßt in die Flucht zur ‚Resignation‘, in die Sehnsucht zum Nichts; im Gegenteil: das Furchtbare als das, was bejaht wird, und zwar bejaht in seiner unabänderlichen Zugehörigkeit zum Schönen. Tragödie ist dort, wo das Furchtbare als der zum Schönen gehörige innere Gegensatz bejaht wird."

that the tragic effect is the arousal of “fear and pity” [*Furcht und Mitleid*] in the spectator. Here Heidegger modifies the idea that fear is proper to the tragic, replacing it instead with terror [*das Furchtbare*]. His assertion that tragedy consists of an oppositional unity of terror and beauty, and that this conflictual belonging-together must be affirmed [*bejaht*], is also a nod to Nietzsche. And yet it is not simply confined to the terrifying and the beautiful. As we will see, the thought of a tragic oppositionality appears again and again as Heidegger attempts to think the history of being.²⁸

Interwoven into this disagreement with Aristotle is also a critique of nihilism. The point of this contrast between fear and terror is at bottom a contrast between the tragic and the nihilistic, the latter being cast here as a resigned “yearning for nothingness.” This distinction between the tragic and the nihilistic is of central importance when it comes to the significance of the tragic in Heidegger’s work. Here we find compressed into this passage a crucial point of contact between Aristotle and Nietzsche for Heidegger. This is something that is developed in much greater detail in his essay, “Nietzsche’s Word: God is Dead,” in which he argues that Nietzschean nihilism is the culmination and hidden essence of metaphysics.

But aside from this oblique rejection of Aristotle’s assertion in the *Poetics* that tragedy arouses pity and fear in the spectator, there are two other important pieces of Aristotle’s analysis that Heidegger seems to have incorporated into his own thought in a more positive sense. These are *hamartia*, or “tragic ignorance” and *peripeteia*, reversal.

²⁸ I would go so far as to say that the thought of *Ereignis*, loosely translated as “appropriation” or “the event of appropriation” is the attempt to think a belonging-together that happens only as opposition, conflict, and impossibility.

As Gerald Else explains in his commentary on the *Poetics*, peripety is “the shift of the action towards the opposite pole” in accordance with the principles of probability or necessity.²⁹ In general, peripety refers to the shift in the tragic hero’s situation from good to bad; it marks his or her sudden descent into suffering. Furthermore, Aristotle says that the best complex tragic plot combines the elements of both reversal and discovery together, as in the case of Oedipus. This intertwining of reversal and discovery appears in various forms in Heidegger’s thought and is, I want to argue, one of the most important ways in which he takes up the tragic into the movements of his thought. The reversal and discovery with which Heidegger is concerned has to do chiefly with the relation of *dasein* to the truth of being. We see this in both the *Introduction to Metaphysics* and (even more profoundly) in the *Beiträge* in which *dasein*’s shattering against being, while destructive, is at the same time disclosive, *a-lethic*.

The meaning of the term “*hamartia*,” which Aristotle names as a functional element in a complex tragic plot, has long been the subject of controversy among commentators of the *Poetics*.³⁰ Traditionally it has been understood to mean that the protagonist must have some “tragic flaw.” Yet the general consensus now seems to be that *hamartia* refers not to a personal shortcoming but to a kind of justified ignorance. E. R. Dodds forcefully argues this point, explaining that

In the *Poetics* Aristotle means *hamartia* here as he uses *hamartema* in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (1135b12) and in the *Rhetoric* (1374b6) to mean an

²⁹ Gerald Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument*, 343.

³⁰ See *Poetics*, chapter 13.

offence committed in ignorance of some material fact and therefore free from *poneria* or *kakia*.³¹

Hamartia thus denotes a crime that is committed unknowingly; the tragic hero must suffer as the agent of the offence, for divine law is absolute and unequivocal, yet the guilt of the hero from the human perspective is mitigated by the mortal situation of imperfect knowledge and unavoidable ignorance. The tragic hero's suffering as the result of *hamartia* is caused by his or her transgression against the order of things. But it is a violation that is done not by a willing, self-certain subject, but is instead compelled by the hero's ignorance with respect to certain facts that he or she could not have been expected to have known before the act was committed. This understanding of *hamartia* resonates strongly with Heidegger's discussion of *dasein*'s violence in his 1935 interpretation of the choral stasimon from *Antigone*. But it is most closely tied to a topic that frequently arises in Heidegger's work, although rarely in direct conjunction with tragic poetry: human errancy.³²

In the essay, "On the Essence of Truth," Heidegger develops an understanding of errancy as the counter-essence of truth. Because it is the un-essential essence of truth, errancy is proper to truth and inseparable from it. Errancy refers not to the human propensity for making mistakes but is instead a fundamental aspect of their *dasein*.

The errancy through which human beings stray is not something that, as it were, extends alongside them like a ditch into which they occasionally stumble; rather, errancy belongs to the inner constitution of the *da-sein* into which historical human beings are admitted. Errancy is the free space

³¹ E.R. Dodds, "On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*," 179.

³² Dennis Schmidt remarks on this connection as well: "Errancy, which should be understood in a manner which brings to mind Aristotle's notion of *hamartia*, is the place and the fate of mortal life. Tragedy is the work of opening our eyes to the truth of such errancy. Metaphysics is the blindness, the tragic denial, to such truth." OGaOG, 244.

for that turning in which in-sistent ek-sistence adroitly forgets and mistakes itself constantly anew.³³

The disclosure of beings as such is at the same time the self-concealment, and therefore the oblivion, of being as such. This simultaneity of disclosure and concealing is the holding-sway of errancy, and is proper to the essence of truth. Like *hamartia*, errancy has the dual character of being both necessary and avoidable at the same time. Errancy's necessity comes from the fact that it belongs to the inner constitution of historical *dasein*; as Heidegger says in "The Anaximander Fragment," errancy is the realm of history. And yet errancy also denotes the possibility that human beings be able to experience this errancy as such, and to comport themselves resolutely to the self-concealment of being rather than fleeing it.

Heidegger's discussion of errancy in section seven of "On the Essence of Truth" is replete with language that evokes a tragic scenario. In addition to the resonance between *hamartia* and errancy, he also discusses the "disclosure of necessity," the "double constraint" of *dasein* by errancy on the one hand and the enigma of being on the other, and the "resolute openness" to the enigma that is both occasioned by errancy and from which it nevertheless turns away. And yet this is not to say that *errancy* is simply equivalent to *hamartia* in the Aristotelian sense. The principal difference is that *hamartia* seems to indicate an action committed in ignorance whose eventual recognition, although it destroys the one responsible, nevertheless leads to a restoration of order. Errancy, by contrast, seems to be a more radicalized understanding of the relation between humans

³³ *Pathmarks*, 150. *Wegmarken*, 92. "Die Irre, durch die der Mensch geht, ist nichts, was nur gleichsam neben dem Menschen herzieht wie eine Grube, in die er zuweilen fällt, sondern die Ire gehört zur inneren Verfassung des Da-seins, in das der geschichtliche Mensch eingelassen ist. Die Irre ist der Spielraum jener Wende, in der die in-sistente Ek-sistenz wendig sich stets neu vergißt und vermißt."

and the overwhelming order of being, because in the case of errancy there is no stable ground to be restored. Unlike *hamartia*, errancy does not refer to any specific deed, and yet it does refer to a kind of movement proper to *dasein*, “a peculiar turning to and fro.” Errancy refers to an abandonment of being, a fleeing-from, as *dasein* in-sists on particular beings, and therefore turns away from being—and yet is able to turn away only insofar as it ek-sists. Like *hamartia*, errancy refers to an unforeseeable and unavoidable ignorance in which one is nevertheless complicit, albeit unwittingly. For Heidegger, this is because “the question of the *being* of beings” is “essentially misleading.”³⁴ The experience of the oblivion of being as having catastrophic consequences for humanity, which is fully implicated in the eventuation of this oblivion, while at the same time experiencing that this tendency toward oblivion is proper to the event of being, is the tragic attunement that permeates Heidegger’s understanding of errancy.

Tragedy and the Political

The explicit references to tragedy that we do find in Heidegger’s work take place almost exclusively between the years 1932-1946, a period of time that is noteworthy not only because it encompasses a very dense and transformative period in Heidegger’s work, including the so-called “turn,” but because of course it also encompasses almost precisely the years of the rise and fall of the Third Reich, which occurred not only around Heidegger at the time, but in which he was, infamously, involved.

³⁴ “On the Essence of Truth,” 151. *Wegmarken*, 94. “Dieses Fragen denkt die wesentlich beirrende und daher in ihrer Mehrdeutigkeit noch nicht gemeisterte Frage nach dem Sein des Seienden.”

The temptation is therefore almost irresistible to infer some connection between Heidegger's thought in this period and the political atrocities that were occurring contemporaneously—to see Heidegger's understanding of tragedy as a response, either consciously or no, to what might be called the tragedy of his own life.³⁵ In other words, it is tempting to read back into Heidegger's remarks on tragedy a direct response to his failed political involvement with National Socialism. Some go so far as to see not only his understanding of tragedy as political, but the story of his political involvement as inherently tragic. There is an understandable fascination with the way in which Heidegger seems to fit his own interpretation of the Sophoclean paradox “hupsipolis apolis,” or “towering high above the site— forfeiting the site.” In some ways he does indeed seem to elicit the same uncanny admixture of fascination and repulsion as the tragic hero.

And yet, as rhetorically powerful as it is to equate tragedy and politics on multiple levels with respect to Heidegger, the tendency to read his life and political involvement with Nazism in terms of a tragic narrative is a temptation better left foregone. The political questions creep in nevertheless. This is due partly to the fact that Heidegger's references to Greek tragedy take place during the war years, beginning with the Rectorial address. But this is more so the case because his discourse on tragedy, sparse though it is, nevertheless seems bound to Heidegger's thought of the political—

³⁵ That this is a temptation is suggested by the frequency with which this trope is employed by those who write on the topic. See, for example, Schmidt's reference to “the tragedy of [Heidegger's] life,” Schürmann's claim that Heidegger's own “erring” repeats “the tragic denial by which the Greek hero chose *his* law,” and Wright's assertion that Heidegger's use of language is “perhaps the most tragic aspect about [*sic*] Heidegger's own existence and history.” Dennis Schmidt, OGaOG, 230. Reiner Schürmann, “A Brutal Awakening to the Tragic Condition of Being,” 91. Kathleen Wright, “Heidegger's Hölderlin and the Mo(u)rning of History,” 423.

that is, the political in terms of the Greek *polis*, of the destinal connection between Greece and Germany, and the fate of the West.³⁶ All of these themes are in play to various degrees in the texts on tragedy. And yet if we read in importance of tragedy and the tragic for Heidegger primarily in terms of the political, we risk losing sight of the way in which he turns to tragedy precisely in order to develop a non-metaphysical understanding of the polis and politics. Thus, in the spirit of the Heraklitean “backward-turning harmony,” or the Heideggerian “countertuning,” we may have to turn away from the question of politics in order to be able, ultimately, to address it in the context of Heidegger and the tragic.

I will begin in the following chapter by taking up the question of tragedy in terms of Heidegger’s politics because this is how it is most often understood. I intend to show how these politicized readings tend to err in their assumption that tragedy is primarily a vehicle for Heidegger’s participation in National Socialist rhetoric. When we look carefully at the ways in which tragedy and the tragic are invoked and interpreted in Heidegger’s texts, we find that it has to do not with German destiny per se but with his attempt to think in the crossing between the first and the other beginnings.

³⁶ As Dennis Schmidt says, “It is no accident that the text in which tragedy first wins a significant place in Heidegger’s work is an overtly political address to a wider audience.” OGaOG, 231.

Chapter 2

Heidegger's Heroism: From *Being and Time* to *Introduction to Metaphysics*

The *polemos* named here [in Heraklitus frag. 53] is a strife that holds sway before everything divine and human, not war in the human sense. As Heraklitus thinks it, struggle first and foremost allows what essentially unfolds to step apart in opposition, first allows position and status and rank to establish themselves in coming to presence. In such a stepping apart, clefts, intervals, distances, and joints open themselves up. In confrontation, world comes to be.³⁷

When we look at the last published reference to tragedy in Heidegger's work, in the 1946 essay "The Anaximander Fragment," we notice that *dasein* is mentioned only in passing.

The temporally ecstatic character of *dasein* is invoked only as "the most readily experienced correspondence" to the epochal character of being.³⁸ *Dasein* is invoked here only as a point of reference, and is not thematized in the essay as such.³⁹ The "trace of the essence of tragedy" that Heidegger discovers in the Anaximander fragment is the essential form [*Wesensart*] of the Greek experience of the beings in their being.⁴⁰

Although human beings are, to be sure, implicated in this experience, the tragic dynamic

³⁷ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 65. GA 40: 66. "Der hier genannte *polemos* ist ein vor allem Göttlichen und Menschlichen waltender Streit, kein Krieg nach menschlicher Weise. Der von Heraklit gedachte Kampf läßt im Gegeneinander das Wesende allererst auseinandertreten, läßt Stellung und Stand und Rang im Anwesen erst beziehen. In solchem Auseinandertreten eröffnen sich Klüfte, Abstände, Weiten und Fugen. In der Aus-einandersetzung wird Welt."

³⁸ *Early Greek Thinking*, 27. In German as *Holzwege*, 338: "die für uns zunächst erfahrbare Entsprechung zum epochalen Charakter des Seins."

³⁹ As Karin de Boer remarks, "The difficulty of *The Anaximander Fragment* text is partly due to the fact that Heidegger seeks to articulate something about beings as such without differentiating between, for instance, human and non-human beings." Karin de Boer, "Giving Due," 157.

⁴⁰ EGT, 44. *Holzwege* 357-8. *The Anaximander Fragment* is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 of the present work.

that Heidegger identifies there is no longer focused on dasein in the way that it is in the 1930s.

For when we look at the 1934 lecture course *Introduction to Metaphysics*, tragedy enters in precisely as a way to elucidate the relation of Greek being to dasein. While he claims that it is in Parmenides' saying that "the decisive determination of being-human is first accomplished," he relies heavily on tragic poetry for "help and instruction" in hearing this.⁴¹ He says that the proper counterpart to the poetizing thinking of Parmenides and Heraklitus is the thinking poetry of Greek tragedy because it is there where "Greek being and dasein [a dasein belonging to being] were authentically founded."⁴² In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, tragedy brings to light the conflictual relation of being and appearing as it occurs in Greek dasein. While this oppositional unity is a conflict proper to being, Heidegger's interpretations of Sophoclean tragedy in *Introduction to Metaphysics* highlight the way in which Greek dasein is the site for this conflict.

The connection between dasein and tragedy that Heidegger articulates in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, along with the politically charged character of its language, has led some interpreters to see the role of tragedy in his thought to be primarily the espousal of a politico-philosophical heroism. Because this is frequently the lens through which the tragic is understood in Heidegger's thought, I want to begin by examining it

⁴¹ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 155-6. GA 40: 155. "Denn in ihm vollzieht sich doch erst die entscheidende Bestimmung des Menschseins."

⁴² IM, 154. GA 40: 153. "in dem das Sein und [das zugehörige] Dasein der Griechen sich eigentlich stiftete."

directly. We will enter the question of tragedy, therefore, through the problem of heroism.

Heidegger's Heroism

The title “Heidegger’s heroism” is deliberately problematic, if not ironic, since heroism seems to be precluded in any positive sense from Heidegger’s thought. This is due not only to the significant differences among Heidegger’s remarks about heroism over the years, but more importantly because there is general agreement that Heidegger himself was decidedly unheroic in his response to the National Socialist party before, during, and after the war. What is it, then, to speak of “Heidegger’s Heroism”?

If we look to the scholarship, we find it frequently asserted that Heidegger’s texts from the thirties engage in a rhetoric of heroism; the Rectorial Address, one of his most overtly political texts, is a frequently invoked example. Often the passages having to do with heroism are identified by Heidegger’s commentators as the espousal of a philosophy—and by extension a politics—of militancy, self-assertion, violence, and above all self-sacrifice, which in turn are identified as indications of Heidegger’s complicity with, or indulgence in, the bellicose rhetoric of National Socialism. That is, the stakes could not be higher when it comes to identifying and understanding this strain within his thought. Yet it is curious that the same commentators who criticize Heidegger for what they regard as a “heroic pathos” at work in his texts are the same ones to register their disgust at his marked lack of heroism in the political sphere. It would seem then that the issue is not heroism per se, but rather the right kind.

If we look to Heidegger's own words for an indication, we only multiply the difficulties before us. We must reckon with, on the one hand, his 1933 encomium to the Freiburg student Albert Leo Schlageter, killed in the war, who Heidegger called "a young German hero," and on the other hand, his disparaging remarks five years later in the *Beiträge* about today's "noisy heroism." And then of course there is the infamous passage in *Being and Time* about *dasein* choosing its hero, to which I will turn later.

Yet in contrast to the shifting and perhaps even contradictory nature of Heidegger's remarks concerning heroism, in the scholarship one finds a near-univocity of opinion with regard to this issue. Despite the varied backgrounds and agendas of the interpreters, certain themes and narratives concerning Heidegger's heroism are repeated in the scholarship as though they were conventional wisdom. To these readers, Heidegger's heroism means his espousal during the Nazi period of a certain militaristic, polemical stance with regard to being. For example, in his reading of the Rectorial Address, de Beistegui observes:

To endure beings as a whole and the force of being that agitates it, to suffer the slings and arrows of destiny, far stronger than any will, without averting one's eyes or submitting: here is what existing or knowing, in other words questioning, will have meant for Heidegger. He wanted to build the university of transcendence and of finitude, the university of the meta-physical ground in which all disciplines are rooted. Yet this ground is precisely that which opens onto the groundlessness of its own transcendence, or of its freedom. It is precisely here, at the very heart of transcendence, that Heidegger's heroic pathos comes to take shape: his counter-bourgeois philosophy puts on the costume of hardness and heaviness, of virility and of confrontation.⁴³

⁴³ Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, 49.

We see that the heroic pathos identified here is connected to a constellation of values concerning endurance and suffering, a steadfast, resolute undergoing of destinal forces, even a certain masculine ideal of pugilism and toughness.

Kathleen Wright identifies a similar rhetoric of the hard, long-suffering, warrior-hero in Heidegger's early texts on Hölderlin, which she regards him as later attempting to cover up. She traces this in the development of Heidegger's understanding of poetic dwelling:

The essence of poetry—excessively intense concentration—is now [in the 1934-5 lecture courses on Hölderlin] linked to the all-decisive battle, *Kampf*, after Heraclitus's *polemos* (GA 39:125). And poetic dwelling is understood by Heidegger to be a heroic readiness to be both victor and victim at the forefront of this battle that will decide the future of the German people and Western history (GA 39:134, 287-94). . . Here we should note, however, that the later quietistic version of the essence of poetry as composed concentration covers over the earlier version. After the war, the Nazi period is bracketed and elides/covers up his earlier and militantly political version of poetry's essence.⁴⁴

Heidegger's heroic rhetoric is understood to be a feature—indeed, a nefarious sign—of his political commitments in the early 1930s, and something that he quite un-heroically attempts to hide or downplay. In this case, the commentator draws an implicit distinction between the militant, heroic pathos according to which Heidegger understands the essence of poetry in the early 30s and the “later quietistic version of the essence of poetry” that presumably results from his disillusionment with and cowardice concerning his previous commitments to the Nazi party. This quietistic essence of poetry as composed concentration “is intimately connected with *Gelassenheit*, that kind of serene poetic dwelling (*dichterishes Wohnen*) which Heidegger proposes as a way out of the

⁴⁴ Kathleen Wright, “Heidegger and the Authorization of Hölderlin's Poetry,” 165-6.

danger of technicity (*Technik*).”⁴⁵ In other words, the development in Heidegger’s thought of the essence of poetry from violence to *Gelassenheit* is regarded with a jaundiced eye as a decidedly unheroic retreat by Heidegger from his militaristic strain, in which he tries to deceive the public by disavowing his prior militancy and championing instead a pacifistic, laissez-faire understanding of the essence of poetry—which he then tries to pass off, through the unchronological ordering of his essays in *Elucidations*, as having been his position all along.⁴⁶

This story—of Heidegger’s retreat from a certain heroic rhetoric—is echoed again by Lacoue-Labarthe, who observes that

In the 1930s, however, [the pathos of attachment to the native soil, peasant life etc], which will assume a quite benign form after the war, is accompanied by an ‘heroic’ pathos, Nietzschean in style, which sets the tone not only of his political proclamations but also of his teaching (an example would be the paragraph devoted to the ‘figures of the worker and soldier’ in the Lectures of 1941 on the *Grundbegriffe*, *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 51, pp.35-9. It will be recalled that it was this heroic tone and this radicalism of argument that had struck Hannah Arendt at Marburg.⁴⁷

We see in all of these remarks a common story developing: that the heroic belongs to the polemical, war-time Heidegger, a side which is subsequently mollified and modified later by his works that seem to champion the serene and quietistic.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Wright, 165.

⁴⁶ One of the things that I find remarkable is that this accusation itself elides that fact that *Gelassenheit*, letting-be, is already set forth in the 1930 version of “On the Essence of Truth.”

⁴⁷ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, 25. I must say that I find Lacoue-Labarthe’s citation of the passages from the *Grundbegriffe* remarkable, since it seems clear to me that Heidegger’s discussion there of the figures of the worker and soldier is offered critically, as a facetious reference to the politics of his day and of the culmination of modernity in Nietzschean nihilism. If this is true, then I do not see how it could possibly be an example of “heroic pathos” in his teaching, but instead is a criticism of that very pathos.

⁴⁸ Derrida rehearses a version of this story succinctly when he notes that “whereas after the war, in 1955, Heidegger says of the logos that it is friendship itself, in 1935, right in the Nazi period, the author of the

The heroic in Heidegger is persistently invoked as a trapping of his pre-disillusionment phase of his commitment to the Nazi party. The hero is read as a polemic figure, as the taciturn warrior who fights, suffers, and sacrifices himself for the sake of some cause. Yet this emphasis on the hero as the exemplary figure of authentic existence in the form of unflinching self-sacrifice actually conceals what is at issue, and what is genuinely problematic, about Heidegger's heroism. This all-too-quick understanding seems to be both taken from the Nazi rhetoric of heroism, and, in viciously circular fashion, taken in turn to be proof that Heidegger engaged in Nazi rhetoric. I am not denying that indisputable fact. However, I do want to argue that the identification of a 'heroic pathos' in Heidegger's writings often ignores the extent to which the hero appears in Heidegger's thought—as it does, not coincidentally, in Attic tragedy—as a problem.

Let us return, then, to one of the places in Heidegger's texts where the hero is explicitly mentioned. In section 74 of *Being and Time*, the hero makes a rather sudden and unanticipated entrance. In the course of laying out the constitution of dasein's historicity in fate, we are told that

The authentic repetition of a possibility of existence that has been—the possibility that dasein may choose its hero—is grounded existentially in anticipatory resoluteness; for it is in resoluteness that one first chooses the choice which makes one free for the struggle of loyally following in the footsteps of that which can be repeated.⁴⁹

Rectorate Discourse, two years after his resignation, declares war again. He says without embarrassing himself about the same logos that it is not friendship but polemos. Referring to the same logos, declares war before the war and at the apogee of Nazism. Then after the war and the end of Nazism, there he goes declaring peace, multiplying the declaration of love and friendship, singing unity, the *hen panta* of being that gathers in concord, harmony, and homological correspondence." "Heidegger's Ear: Philopolemology," 197.

⁴⁹ *Being and Time*, 437. *Sein und Zeit*, 385. "Die eigentliche Wiederholung einer gewesenen Existenzmöglichkeit—daß das Dasein sich seinen Helden wählt—gründet existenzial in der vorlaufenden

According to Victor Farias, this means that *dasein* should choose heroism as its model [*Vorbild*] of authentic existence.⁵⁰ And yet to understand the hero or the heroic as a *Vorbild*, a paradigm or ideal to be followed and imitated, seems to me to miss the point of the passage entirely. It is precisely a matter of *dasein*'s *not* emulating an ideal set before it that is at issue here. To follow a model that is external to oneself is utterly incompatible with what authentic repetition is—*dasein*'s handing down to itself of its own possibilities for existence explicitly as having been. Finally, the fact that *dasein* can choose its hero problematizes the very structure of the hero as *Vorbild* and in fact marks *dasein*'s wresting free from the emulation of a paradigm, since it means that *dasein* places itself as it were always before the hero that it chooses. This freedom to choose the hero marks the fact that in such a choice—even one that appears factually as loyal following—*dasein* will have always first of all chosen itself.

This last point brings me once again to my deliberate use of the genitive and its multiple senses in my title, “Heidegger’s Heroism.” The question of the hero is indissociably bound with the genitive, in the most fundamental sense, since *dasein*'s authenticity (the *Eigentlichkeit* of *dasein*, which already is in each case mine), is the existential ground of choice and the free appropriation of *dasein*'s fate. Thus the possibility of *dasein* choosing its hero is given by and named in the anticipatory resoluteness that names *dasein*'s choosing to choose, that is, its authentic (*eigentlich*) appropriation of the proper, of the possibility of the proper and authentic belonging. It is

Entschlossenheit; denn in ihr wird allererst die Wahl gewählt, die für die kämpfende Nachfolge und Treue zum Wiederholbaren frei macht.”

⁵⁰ “Die ‘gewesene’ Existenz, die das *Dasein* sich zum *Vorbild* wählen soll, ist die heldische.” Victor Farias, *Heidegger und der Nazional Sozialismus*, 112.

a matter here of *dasein*'s taking over its own inheritance, of what has in a sense *engendered* it and which, as *dasein*'s thrownness, it can never get behind. *Dasein* appropriates explicitly that which as already appropriated it; hence it is a repetition that is at the same time a beginning.

But we do not seem to be any closer to discovering why the hero appears in this passage. Let us depart from the text of *Being and Time* for a minute and think about those heroes whose fate consists precisely in the paradoxical convergence of heritage and free choice: Oedipus, Eteocles, and Antigone all suffer the curse of the house of Atreus and nevertheless bear the responsibility of their choices. Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus all suffer under the defilement caused by the transgressions of their ancestor Thyestes, and yet continue to add to this defilement by their own horrendous acts. These tragic heroes take up their choices both in terms of and despite their dreadful inheritance, placing themselves at the intersection of human and divine determinations. They are the sole origin and responsible party for their actions and at the same time the hapless victim of the gods' retribution for a criminality that they were born or trapped into.

I want to argue that if there is something like a rhetoric of heroism at work in Heidegger's texts, then it is a tragic heroism. Yet simply to name his heroism "tragic" does not free us from misconceptions regarding Heidegger's so-called "heroic pathos."

This is the difference that I want to mark between the commentators mentioned above and Heidegger's heroism as I read it: even though some may even specify it as "tragic," I maintain that the usual understanding of the heroic in Heidegger's texts is based on the model of epic heroism, that is, the set of values and norms exemplified by

the warrior heroes of epic poetry. Yet the tragic hero belongs to a world and is, paradoxically, the site of this world's opening, in which everything is thrown radically into question, and in which, therefore, the very possibility of the hero as a model, a *Vorbild*, is shown to be a problem.⁵¹ If Odysseus, the Greek model of heroic endurance, is the man of many twists and turns, who is *polutropos*, and thereby *pantoporos*, then the tragic hero is the one who is *pantoporos aporos*—whose many routes and ways also beget his having no way out, and are in fact one and the same.⁵² It is this paradoxical dynamic that the uncanniness of the tragic hero shows, which, I want to maintain, is the uncanniness of historical human *dasein*.

The Passion for Unconcealment: *Oedipus Rex*

I want to begin to approach the question of heroism in Heidegger by revisiting two passages from the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, both of which concern Greek tragedy and the tragic hero. My choice of text is also informed by the fact that this volume, based on a lecture course given in 1934-5, is often read and commented upon with an eye to its

⁵¹ Vernant traces this movement from epic to tragic heroism: “we find that, with the development of what may be called a tragic consciousness, man and his actions were presented, in tragedy’s own peculiar perspective, not as stable realities that could be placed, defined, and judged, but as problems, unanswerable questions, riddles whose double meanings remain enigmatic however often decoded. Epic, which provided drama with its themes, characters, and the framework for its plots, had presented the great figures of the heroes of former times as models. It had exalted the heroic values, virtues, and high deeds. Through the interplay of dialogue and the clash between the major protagonists and the chorus, and through the reversals of fortune that occur in the course of the drama, the legendary hero, extolled in epic, becomes a subject of debate now that he is transferred to the theatrical stage.” Jean-Pierre Vernant, “The God of Tragic Fiction,” in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, 186.

⁵² IM, 168. GA 40: 166.

political significance.⁵³ The first passage takes up the preeminent characteristic of the epic hero, *doxa*, or glory. It appears in the section on the antagonistic belonging-together of being and seeming, which that occurs within the Greek experience of being as *phusis*, or appearing [*Erscheinen*].

Doxa in the sense of glory does not name for the Greeks, as it does for us today, a kind of empty celebrity that can come and go with respect to an individual. I would add that the same applies to the concept of heroism. *Doxa* is not, therefore, a positive valuation of someone who already stands before us to be valued and judged. Nor can glory be worked for and achieved. *Doxa* names, rather, the respect [*Ansehen*] in which a being stands, the aspect that it gives of itself as it steps forth in appearing. “Glory, for the Greeks, is not something additional that someone may or may not receive; it is the way of the highest being [*die Weise des höchsten Seins*].”⁵⁴ Being, experienced as *phusis*, that is, as appearing, making manifest, stepping forth into the light, has truth as unconcealment as an essential possibility. A being steps forth in its being as what it always already is, and thereby shows itself in its constancy, that is, in its truth. Such a stepping-forth into the light as what a being originally and authentically is, that is, in its being, is the fundamental characteristic of nobility. It is only the noble who have *doxa*, who stand in themselves in the brilliance and glory of repute. *Doxa* in this exalted sense is for the Greeks “the highest possibility of human being.” In other words, *doxa* names the glory of the hero. The human relates to the heroic as its highest possibility—but this does not

⁵³ As William McNeill puts it succinctly, it is regarded as one of Heidegger’s “Nazi” texts. See “Porosity: Violence, and the Question of Politics in Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics*,” 185.

⁵⁴ IM, 108. GA 40: 110. “Ruhm ist für die Griechen nichts, was einer dazu bekommt oder nicht; er ist die Weise des höchsten Seins.”

mean that the hero is human. By the Attic period, which is later than the time of the hero cults, the dead were elaborately praised at their funerals as heroes, despite having been in life ordinary citizens. This suggests then that heroism as the highest possibility of the human being was only attained and applicable once the human being ceased to be. The highest possibility is also the ownmost possibility; heroism is proper to the human being yet always beyond him or her.

Doxa is the glory of repute in which one appears and stands, and is thereby a view that is offered. Part of the power of *doxa*'s eminence is precisely its connection to reputation, to a view that is opened up and offered for others to apprehend and to recognize, if we can use that word. But it is precisely this standing in the open, this stepping forth into the light and offering an aspect [*Ansehen*] that makes possible the concealed and thereby imperceptible passage to the other polarity of *doxa*: glory or brilliance is the aspect in which a being stands, but as this aspect or look (*eidos*) that a being gives, the possibility of multiple looks and aspects arises. From this multiplicity of viewpoints arises the possibility of distortion, mere semblance, and the contingency of the viewpoint from which an aspect is apprehended, and from these multiple perspectives to the arbitrariness and insubstantiality of *doxa*, opinion. We have somehow turned a corner with *doxa* and moved from the brilliance of the highest way of being to the passing impressions formed by the man on the street. We have moved from an appearance whose aspect or respect compels the respect of all who apprehend it to an appearance that is less offered by the thing than casually imposed upon it. And this passage among the ostensibly polarized meanings of *doxa* is itself given by the Greek experience of being:

Because being, *phusis*, consists in appearing, in the offering of a look and of views, it stands essentially, and thus necessarily and constantly, in the possibility of a look that precisely covers over and conceals what beings are in truth—that is, unconcealment. This aspect in which beings now come to stand is seeming in the sense of semblance. Wherever there is unconcealment of beings, there is the possibility of seeming, and conversely: wherever beings stand in seeming, and take a prolonged and secure stand there, seeming can break apart and fall away.⁵⁵

We have seen that *doxa*, as brilliance or glory, means stepping forth into the light, and thereby showing itself in its constancy. This self-showing in its constancy is the connection between being as *phusis* and unconcealment. But what does it mean that being as appearing [*Erscheinen*] also stands constantly in the possibility that what it offers is just the opposite: the inconstancy of mere semblance or *Schein*? In other words, it stands constantly in the possibility of inconstancy. The unconcealment of being conceals the possibility of concealment that belongs to it essentially, and it stands in this possibility because concealment, seeming, conceals itself as such. Seeming, *schein*, appears (*erscheint*) as appearing (*Erscheinen*).

We have seen how *doxa* can mean brilliance and glory, standing in unconcealment, as well as semblance, mere opinion, distortion, and concealment. The multivalent denotations of *doxa* belong together and can pass from one to the other, while at the same time having a certain polarity. The question arises whether the slippage from one sense of *doxa* to another indicates a certain continuity among its various meanings.

⁵⁵ IM, 110. GA 40: 111-12. “Jetzt sind wir dort, wohin wir streben. Weil das Sein, *phusis*, im Erscheinen, im Darbeiten von Aussehen und ansichten besteht, steht es wesensmäßig und somit notwendig und ständig in der Möglichkeit eines Aussehens, das jenes, was das Seiende in Wahrheit ist, d. h. in der Unverborgenheit, gerade verdeckt und verbirgt. Dieses Ansehen, worein das Seiende jetzt zu stehen kommt, ist der Schein im Sinne des Anscheins. Wo Unverborgenheit des Seienden, da besteht die Möglichkeit des Scheins und umgekehrt: Wo Seiendes im Schein steht und darin seit langem und sicher seinen Stand hat, kann der Schein zerbrechen und zerfallen.”

This amounts to asking, moreover, whether the passage of the hero from glory to debasement is a continuous trajectory, like links in a chain, or if, despite the tragic hero's passage, there is nevertheless an abyssal difference between these senses of *doxa*, a certain incommensurability, that is opened up by the tragic hero.

Oedipus

Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* begins with Oedipus, the savior and lord of the state, standing in the openness of brilliance: "*Er steht in der Offenbarkeit des Glanzes.*"⁵⁶ He stands, openly and evident to all, in the brilliance of his eminent repute; he has *doxa* in the highest sense. And it is precisely because of this glory, the public repute that Oedipus has as the city's savior, that he sets out "with the passion of one who stands in the openness of brilliance and who is a Greek" to uncover the murderer of Laius.⁵⁷ It is Oedipus's glory, his *doxa*, that not only gives him the passion to unveil what is concealed on behalf of the city, but in fact conceals him as the guilty party, from himself more than anyone else. From his own putative stance of unconcealment, he attempts to wrest the murderer from concealment. It is the openness of the glory in which he stands that in fact conceals him—and conceals that it conceals him.

This passion to unveil recoils upon Oedipus, as he places himself "step by step" into unconcealment as the murderer of his father and the defiler of his mother.⁵⁸ And yet,

⁵⁶ IM, 112. GA 40: 114.

⁵⁷ IM, 112. GA 40: 114. "Mit der Leidenschaft dessen, der in der Offenbarkeit des Glanzes steht und Grieche ist."

⁵⁸ IM, 112. GA 40: 114. "Schritt für Schritt."

his unveiling “hurls” Oedipus out of seeming. He is both hurled out of his glory and placed (by himself) into unconcealment “step by step.” The way in which Oedipus’s self-unveiling unfolds therefore has a dual character: on the one hand, it appears as a gradual progression toward the truth, and yet it also happens (for Oedipus) as a sudden, violent throw from his glory as savior of the state and first among men to being revealed as the most lowly, the *pharmakos* who must be expelled. He saves the state once again only by revealing himself to himself as the source of its defilement. The tension between the progressive character of Oedipus’s unveiling and its sudden violent force shows that the abyssal gap between being and seeming, concealment and unconcealment, are also held together and constitute a unity in the Greek experience of being as *phusis*, appearing.

Oedipus is both more and less than a man: he is the savior of the state, the solver of riddles, and yet his transgression of familial and generational taboos places him among the wild animals. But this is still to measure Oedipus against the standard of man. His relation to unconcealment cannot, ultimately, be understood in these terms:

in Oedipus we must grasp that form of Greek dasein in which this dasein’s fundamental passion ventures into what is wildest and most far-flung: the passion for the unveiling of being—that is, the struggle over being itself.⁵⁹

Oedipus’s passion to know, to question, (despite the vehement protests of the people around him—Tiresias, Iokasta, the shepherd), is not a cause that he enters into self-sacrificially. He doesn’t know that his determination to unveil the murderer will point back right at him, be his own unveiling, and will thereby destroy him. The kind of

⁵⁹ IM, 112. GA 40: 114. “wir müssen in Oedipus jene Gestalt des griechischen Daseins begreifen, in der sich dessen Grundleidenschaft ins Weitesten und Wildesten vorwagt, die Leidenschaft der Seinsenthüllung, d. h. des Kampfes um das Sein selbst.”

struggle that Greek dasein is drawn into to wrest being from seeming is not a struggle that dasein enters like soldier, ready to fight and die for truth. This is not something that the hero undergoes knowingly as though it were a task, like one of the labours of Herakles. The brilliance of Oedipus's glory both impels him toward unconcealment and at the same time conceals the extent to which he implicates himself in that struggle. He is both the unveiler and the unveiled, and yet, it is the concealed unity of this very relation that Oedipus cannot see—and, when he does, can only endure by veiling himself once more from the light by gouging out his eyes. This conflictual unity of victory and defeat, savior and scapegoat, salvation and catastrophe, compulsion-towards and shattering-against, concealment and unconcealment, grounding and ungrounding, is the heart of the tragic dynamic that Heidegger identifies in Sophoclean poetry.

Between Being and the Human Being: Antigone.

But what compels Greek dasein to endure the struggle against seeming and inconstancy? What makes Greek dasein stand steadfast against it? What drives the Greeks in this “great age” to undergo the struggle [*Kampf*] to bring beings into constancy and unconcealment in the midst of and in light of this ever-present possibility and danger of distortion and semblance? What impels the “unique, creative self-assertion [*Selbstbehauptung*] amid the turmoil of the multiply intertwined counterplay of the powers of being and seeming?”⁶⁰ It would almost sound as though this struggle [*Kampf*]

⁶⁰ IM, 111. GA 40: 113. “eine einzige schöpferische Selbstbehauptung in der Wirrnis des vielverschlungenen Gegenspiels der Mächte: Sein und Schein.”

amounted to fighting for a cause—the cause against seeming. But we must ask precisely what sort of self [*Selbst*] is being asserted here. The responses to these questions are more fully elaborated in Heidegger's second turn to tragedy in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, in which he offers the first of his well-known interpretations of the second choral ode from Sophocles' *Antigone*. Whereas his reading of *Oedipus Rex* takes up the question of the human being's essential relation to being and seeming, in this second turn to tragic poetry, Heidegger hones in more sharply on the human being and the dynamic of its relation to *dasein*.

From Violent Ground

Nowhere is the *Introduction to Metaphysics* more clearly a meditation on power—political, poetic, and ontological power—than in Heidegger's determination of *to deinon*, the uncanny, as the violent (*das Gewaltige*). The violence of *to deinon* names the relation of being to beings as a whole. Human *dasein* is the happening of this relation: the *da* is the openness in which being is set to work in beings, so that beings appear as such. The uncanny aspect of this violence is that *to deinon* points both to the violence of the being of beings, or the “overwhelming sway,” and at the same time to the counter-violence that the overwhelming sway engenders.

Heidegger announces at the outset of his interpretation that the three essential moments of the chorus in their unity “shatter from the outset all everyday measures of

questioning and determining.”⁶¹ This means that the poem takes part in the violent shattering of which it speaks. Just as the uncanny names that which throws one out of the accustomed and familiar, the poem itself, in its unfolding of the uncanny, enacts this same uncanny movement of displacing. Our everyday measures are to be violently displaced by poetic meter (*to metron*).⁶² These three moments in the stasimon that he refers to are the oppositional unities indicated by the phrases *to deinotaton*, *pantoporos aporos*, and *upsipolis apolis*. Each of these three moments is an unfolding of the Greek encounter, through language, of the “opposed con-frontations of being.”⁶³ We can see in these characteristically paradoxical Sophoclean formulations the dynamic of a concealed polemic unity.

This shattering of our everyday measures means a loss of our resources (*poroi*) for questioning, determining, making sense, and finding our way. This disorientation is further underscored by the ensuing destruction of our ordinary sense of violence:

Here we are giving the expression ‘doing violence’ an essential sense that in principle reaches beyond the usual meaning of the expression, which generally means nothing but brutality and arbitrariness. Violence is usually seen in terms of the domain in which concurring compromise and mutual assistance set the standard for *dasein*, and accordingly all violence is necessarily deemed only a disturbance and offense.⁶⁴

⁶¹ IM, 158. GA 40: 158. “alle alltäglichen Maßstäbe des Fragens und Bestimmens zerbricht.”

⁶² According to the Liddell-Scott lexicon, *to metron* means measure or rule, limit, proportion, as well as verse. As the latter, it is opposed to *melos* (tune) and *rhuthmos* (time) by Aristotle and Plato. This seems particularly significant since Heidegger says that what is at issue in the poem is humanity up against its most extreme limits.

⁶³ IM, 159. GA 40: 158. “die gegenwendigen Aus-einander-setzungen des Seins durchmißt.”

⁶⁴ IM, 160. GA 40: 159. “Wir geben hier dem Wort Gewalt-tätigkeit einen wesenhaften Sinn, der grundsätzlich über die gewöhnliche Bedeutung des Wortes hinausreicht, gemäß der es meist soviel wie bloße Roheit und Willkür meint. Die Gewalt wird dann aus dem Bereich her gesehen, in dem die Verabredung auf Ausgleich und gegenseitige Versorgung den Maßstab des Daseins abgibt und demgemäß jede Gewalt notwendig nur als Störung und Verletzung abgeschätzt ist.”

Violence, therefore, is normally understood as a transgression, a deviation from the norm. Everydayness is a normatively non-violent realm; hence, violence is a “disturbance and offense” against the tranquility of the established order. Heidegger’s understanding of humanity’s violence as occurring “from the ground up” rather than as a mere aberration—both in its exposure to violence but also in its doing violence—means that “concurring compromise and mutual assistance” can no longer be taken as the standard and measure for *dasein*.⁶⁵ It also means that the poem’s violent shattering of our everyday standards for questioning and determining at the same time takes away our ordinary resources for determining what counts *as* violence. What does it mean to say that *dasein* is violent in its very ground? What does it mean to think the ground as violent?

The determination of violence in Heidegger’s interpretation is disruptive to the conventional understanding of violence as disruption and offense to the order of things. The unfolding of *to deinon* as “the violent” means that violence can no longer be understood as a transgression of order, so that it is defined in terms of that which it disrupts. In other words, the uncanny aspect of violence means that it can no longer be a matter of naming a relation between violator and violated, disorder and order, destruction and structure.

⁶⁵ And this is perhaps where Heidegger seems perilously close to sanctioning political violence in the ontic sense. It seems to imply that everyday standards for civic harmony are inauthentic and mark a falling-away from the violence of being.

Uncanny Violence

The interpretation begins by focusing on the first two lines, and specifically on the word *deinon*, which, in its ambiguity, holds together disparate and even opposed meanings: wonderful, terrible, marvelous, terrifying, strange, powerful, awe-ful. Heidegger translates *deinon* as “uncanny” while noting that the word itself, with its multiple, opposed meanings, exhibits the very qualities that its meaning indicates. For just as the rendering of “*deinon*” as *das Unheimliche* points to certain conjoined or blended opposition, viz. an elusive foreignness that is also deeply familiar, the word itself has meanings that are opposed yet blended into one another. Hence *to deinon*, the uncanny, is uniquely suited to name the reciprocal belonging-together of opposites, since it not only means the “uncanny,” but it shares in an uncanny ambiguity. “The Greek word *deinon* is ambiguous in that uncanny ambiguity with which the saying of the Greeks traverses the opposed con-frontations of being.”⁶⁶ Because the word *deinon* itself carries opposed meanings, it is uniquely suited to the Greek saying of being in its differential, polemic aspect. And already we can see that its ambiguity hints at the disruption of representational thinking, because the word is not indifferent in its function as a sign—but rather it belongs to and takes part in the very experience that it supposedly names.

Heidegger’s use of the word “*Unheimlich*” to translate the Greek *deinon* is particularly suggestive in light of its resonance with some of his other texts. The most obvious connection is the famous discussion of *das Unheimliche* in *Being and Time*,

⁶⁶ IM, 159. GA 40: 158. “Das griechische Wort *deinon* ist in jener unheimlichen Zweideutigkeit zweideutig, mit der das Sagen der Griechen die Gegenwendigen Aus-einander-setzungen des Seins durchmißt.”

whose continuity with Heidegger's retrieval of this term for his present interpretation of the choral ode could be shown—particularly in light of its importance to resoluteness and being-toward-death, which reappears in the second phase of his interpretation as the human shattering against death.⁶⁷

But also, more subtly, and perhaps more importantly, Heidegger's focus on the term *Unheimlich*, with its privative prefix and its ambiguous meanings—even as it names an experience of ambiguity—resonates with his determination of truth as *a-letheia*. We note, for example, that *das Unheimliche*, the uncanny, does not mean the opposite of *Heimlich*, which in ordinary German usage means “secret, hidden, concealed.”⁶⁸ Its privative prefix notwithstanding, *das Unheimliche* does not mean the un-hidden or un-concealed. Rather the prefix *un* marks a qualitative intensification rather than a negation of the hidden or secret. *Das Heimlich* also has a secondary meaning of “cosy, snug,” which overlaps with *das Heimische*, which means “domestic, native, familiar.” *Das Unheimliche* would seem to mean something more like *das Unheimische*: for the uncanny names the weird, the strange, the unfamiliar—the opposite of cosy, snug, domestic comfort.⁶⁹

Yet the foreignness or unfamiliarity that *das Unheimliche* names is not just simply a negation or absence of the home-like or homely; it is rather an unfamiliarity that is at the same time eerily familiar—a sudden encounter with that which is foreign by virtue of

⁶⁷ See *Being and Time* §40.

⁶⁸ See also Freud's famous essay, “*Das Unheimliche*,” in which he makes similar observations regarding the double meaning of the word.

⁶⁹ Heidegger often uses *heimlich* and *heimische*, *unheimlich* and *unheimische* interchangeably. And as we will see in the “Der Ister” course, he focuses almost exclusively on the “*heim*” root in his discussion of the *Unheimlich* or uncanny.

its having been for the most part concealed rather than simply absent. This is where the two, disparate meanings of *das Heimlich* as “concealed” and “cosy” actually dovetail and conjoin—in the (ostensible) negation of *Heimlich* as *Unheimlich*. For if we take the uncanny, *das Unheimliche*, to mean literally that which is both un-home-like and un-hidden, then we can appreciate its similarity to the experience of truth as *alētheia*: for the uncanny names that which is *un-familiar precisely in its having been un-concealed*. *Das Un-heimlich*, the un-hidden un-familiar, thereby names a disclosure that at the same time displaces, throws us out of what is secure and familiar. “We understand the un-canny as that which throws one out of the ‘canny,’ that is, the homely, the accustomed, the usual, the un-endangered. The unhomely does not allow us to be at home.”⁷⁰ Once we become aware of this dual sense of *das Unheimliche* as both the un-concealed and the un-familiar, we realize that this displacement out of the homely names a transformation of it. It is not that the uncanny throws us out of our home in the sense of an expulsion from which we might eventually return; rather, the *Un-heimlich* names the unconcealment of what had formerly been known and familiar to us. This is therefore a displacement from home that forecloses on the possibility of return.

This understanding of the un-canny as the “un-hidden un-familiar” helps to elucidate the dual aspect in which this term for *deinon* “applies most intensely and intimately to human Being.”⁷¹ For the uncanny names a displacing disclosure that makes

⁷⁰ IM, 161. GA 40: 160. “Das Un-heimliche verstehen wir als jenes, das aus dem ‘Heimlichen,’ d. h. Heimischen, Gewohnten, Geläufigen, Ungefährdeten herauswirft. Das Unheimische läßt uns nicht einheimisch sein.”

⁷¹ IM, 161. GA 40: 159-60. “das *deinon* in der höchsten Steigerung und Verkoppelung vom Sein des Menschen gesagt wird.”

what was formerly hidden to humanity, unhidden. At the same time, it points to the *heimlich* aspect of the human being, who is cosy and secure in the familiar, the homely, but who is, in this homeliness, at the same time hidden from itself. The experience of the uncanny names the exposure of the human being, its disclosure and displacement from its own essential hiddenness. This is what Heidegger means when he says that Oedipus's passion to unveil what is concealed requires him at every step to place *himself* in a barely endurable unconcealment.

Doubly Violent

Ostensibly, the choral odes' opening line, *polla ta deina*, ("many are the wonders") says that many things can properly be called *deinon*. Following his translation, *vielfältig das Unheimliche* ("manifold is the uncanny"), Heidegger takes a different approach and instead focuses on the word '*deinon*' itself and the manifold aspects of its naming. This does not mean that he thereby rejects the more conventional reading of the line, or that his interpretation is incompatible with it, but his focus on the word and on the power of its naming does indicate an important shift of focus, which for Heidegger is a shift to the essential power of language, which the poem both names and exemplifies. This dual aspect of language's power is in tension with itself—a tension which is therefore *deinon*.

And yet, as Heidegger unfolds the various determinations of *to deinon*, rather than finding an ordering and clarification of its manifold aspects, we discover instead that the tensions and the complications are only magnified. On the one hand, *deinon* names the

overwhelming sway, the frightful, excessive prevailing of being as the being of beings, as *phusis*. As such, the overwhelming sway (*das überwältigende Walten*), is violent (*das Gewaltige*). In ordinary German, the verb ‘*walten*’ means to rule, to dominate, to govern. And yet, by interpreting the Greek experience of *phusis* as *das über-wältigende Walten*, he suggests that its *Gewalt* or violence consists in a certain excess of dominance. We can see then that the German phrase which we translate as “overwhelming sway” already implies a certain inner tension between the gathering of the prevailing or sway (*Walten*), and the excessive character of this sway.⁷²

The human being is the other side of this first determination of *to deinon*.

Humanity meets and counters the violence of beings as a whole with violence of its own. It has this violence not as a possibility that it can choose to deploy; rather, humanity is violent “from the ground up” in its confrontation with beings as a whole. And yet this dual aspect of *deinon*, as both the violence of the overwhelming sway and the violence of humanity against it, is further complicated by the fact that humanity does not stand merely stand outside of the overwhelming sway that it violently (en)counters.

Humanity is *deinon*, first, inasmuch as it remains exposed to this overwhelming sway, because it essentially belongs to being. However, humanity is also *deinon* because it is violence-doing in the sense we have indicated.⁷³

Human being, insofar as it *is*, belongs to being; it is part of the overwhelming sway, and at the same time it *is* only insofar as it struggles against the overwhelming sway. Once

⁷² McNeill’s essay “Porosity” provides a helpful articulation of this point.

⁷³ IM, 160. GA 40: 159. “Der Mensch aber ist *deinon* einmal, sofern er in dieses Überwältigende ausgesetzt bleibt, weil er nämlich wesenhaft in das Sein gehört. Der Mensch ist aber zugleich *deinon*, weil er der Gewalt-tätige in dem gekennzeichneten Sinne ist.”

again, we find that the *deinon*, as it applies to humanity, indicates an internal tension in which human dasein is a struggling of being against itself. This violence is fundamental to dasein and its relation to being; therefore this violence cannot be understood simply as the disruption or transgression of a previously existing order.⁷⁴ This marks the difference between an ontological sense of violence in contrast to an ontic one.

Heidegger then reintroduces the significance of the homely for dasein's dually violent essence as *to deinotaton*, the most *deinon*. Human beings are in the paradoxical position of both living in the midst of the uncanny, of that which throws them out of the homely, and of constantly transgressing the limits of the homely themselves:

Human beings are the uncanniest, not only because they spend their lives essentially in the midst of the uncanny understood in this sense [of the overwhelming], but also because they step out, move out of the limits that at first and for the most part are accustomed and homely, because as those who do violence, they overstep the limits of the homely, precisely in the direction of the uncanny in the sense of the overwhelming.⁷⁵

We can see in this passage that Heidegger wants to hold together the ostensibly opposed senses of dasein's uncanniness: they are both thrown out of the homely and actively transgress its limits. This is perhaps easier to understand when we recall that *das Unheimliche* also names that which is un-hidden. In their drive, like Oedipus, to wrest being from seeming, to unveil what is *heimlich* or concealed, human beings are violent in the face of the overwhelming; they transgress the limits of the *heimlich* and suffer the

⁷⁴ As McNeill puts it, "the violent is to be determined as the decisive characteristic of the human's relation to being itself in the prevailing of beings as a whole, and not simply one's relation to other beings. "Porosity," 190.

⁷⁵ IM, 161. GA 40: 160. "Der Mensch aber ist das Unheimlichste, weil er nicht nur inmitten des so verstandenen Un-heimlichen sein Wesen verbringt, sondern weil er aus seinen zunächst und zumeist gewohnten, heimischen Grenzen heraustritt, austrückt, weil er als der Gewalt-tätige die Grenze des Heimischen überschreitet, und zwar gerade in der Richtung auf das Unheimliche im Sinne des Überwältigenden."

violence of this exposure as at the same time a *self*-exposure. Heidegger alludes back to his interpretation of *Oedipus Rex* when he says that

The saying “the human being is the uncanniest” provides the authentic *Greek* definition of humanity. We first press forward fully to the happening of un-canniness when we experience the power of seeming together with the struggle against seeming in its essential belonging to *dasein*.⁷⁶

Human being is thus in the strange position of both seeking to make a home for itself and expelling itself from its home in one and the same movement, and this duality or inner tension is constitutive of *dasein*.

Heidegger expands on this dynamic by turning to the second phrase in the ode that shares in the strange ambiguity of *deinon*: *pantoporos aporos*. Humanity’s character as *pantoporos* is another way of talking about its making a home for itself amidst the overwhelming sway. Other animals have only one single route (*poros*). They have their place within the sway: a circumscribed ambit in which they live and are, one is tempted to say, at home. They fit into the overwhelming sway; they are *gefügt*. In contrast, humanity has no single route: it makes many routes for itself and makes its multiple incursions into the domains of beings precisely because it is not given its own route.

Yet it would be a mistake to understand the contrast between animals and humans as simply the difference between those who have a home and those who are un-homely, that is, constantly thrown out of their home. For although this appears to be the case, and to mark the difference between animal life and human beings, this distinction becomes

⁷⁶ IM, 161-2. GA 40: 160. “Der Spruch: ‘der Mensch ist das Unheimlichste’, gibt die eigentliche griechische Definition des Menschen. Zu dem Geschehnis der Un-heimlichkeit dringen wir erst ganz vor, wenn wir zugleich die Macht des Scheins und den Kampf mit ihm in seiner Wesenszugehörigkeit zum *Dasein* erfahren.”

more complicated when we notice that, for Heidegger, animals do not, properly speaking, have a home or *heimat*. Or, to borrow a phrase from his later work, animals do not *dwell*. *Heimat* or the *heimisch* must therefore name something other than having a single route and being fitted into the sway. It means that the designation of the human as the *unheimlich* or *un-heimisch* is not simply privative. The human being as *to deinotaton* indicates not so much a lack of home but rather a relation to the *heimisch* and to *Heimat* that is nevertheless defined by deprivation.⁷⁷ And this relation, as the prefix *un-* shows, is a counter-turning: the human being turns against and away from the homely, and yet this violent counter-action is also what binds the human being all the more strongly to the *heimisch*.

Its constant endeavor to make itself at home bespeaks humanity's essential lack of home:

Everywhere humanity makes routes for itself; in all the domains of beings, of the overwhelming sway, it ventures forth, and in this very way it is flung from every route. Thus the whole uncanniness of the human, the uncanniest, first opens itself up; it is not just that humans try what is, as a whole, in its un-canniness, not just that *as* violence-doing they drive themselves in this way beyond what is homely for them, but in all this they first become the uncanniest, because now, as those who on all ways have no way out, they are thrown out of all relation to the homely, and *ate*, ruin, calamity, overtakes them.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ This aspect of the uncanny is unfolded in much more detail in the “Der Ister” course.

⁷⁸ IM, 162. GA 40: 161. “Überallhin schafft der Mensch sich Bahn, in alle Bereiche des Seienden, des überwältigenden Waltens wagt er sich vor und wird gerade hierbei aus aller Bahn geschleudert. Dadurch erst eröffnet sich die ganze Un-heimlichkeit dieses Unheimlichsten; nicht nur, daß er das Seiende im Ganzen in seiner Un-heimlichkeit versucht, nicht nur daß er dabei *als* Gewalt-tätiger über sein Heimisches sich hinaustreibt, er wird in all dem erst das Unheimlichste, sofern er jetzt als der auf allen Wegen Ausweglose aus jedem Bezug zum Heimischen herausgeworfen wird und die *ate*, der Verderb, das Unheil über ihn kommt.” Although Heidegger disavows the idea that the determination of being-human that we find in Greek tragedy has anything to do with heroic personality (see IM, 159), it is nevertheless difficult in these final lines of this paragraph not to hear a reference to the catastrophe that befalls the tragic hero—such as Creon, Oedipus, Klytemnestra, who are overtaken by ruin and calamity, and who are caught in a

Humanity's venturing forth into the domains of beings is both a making-homely and a violence-doing at the same time. For while it is an attempt to make familiar, to make a home, it is at the same time a transgression and a further entrenchment of humanity's homelessness rather than an overcoming of it. One of the crucial points to understanding the uncanny aspect of this dynamic is that humanity does not *first* encounter the overwhelming sway as such, and *then* seek make to itself at home within it. Quite the contrary: *dasein* has always already found itself within one of its accustomed routes. This is the significance, the pull of the familiar—it is easy to become ensnared in the familiar because, as what is homely and accustomed, there is nothing—or perhaps, Nothing—to compel one to look for a way out of it. This is why humanity is *aporos* in its being *pantoporos*: the lack of a way out is not some external limit that one reaches as the exhaustion of all resources and devices, but is rather intrinsic to its being “everywhere underway.”⁷⁹

The violence-doing that begets the routes within which humanity makes its home is also what gives rise to the concealment of the originally violent ground of the familiar and accustomed. Human beings

are continually thrown back on the paths that they themselves have laid out; they get bogged down in their routes, get stuck in ruts, and by getting stuck they draw in the circle of their world, get enmeshed in seeming, and thus shut themselves out of being. . . The violence-doing, which originally creates the routes, begets in itself its own un-essence, the versatility of many twists and turns, which in itself is the lack of ways out, so much so

double bind, so that they too have no way out. It also foreshadows his discussion of the creator, the thinker, the poet, the ruler who seem also to belong to this tragic dynamic—whereby the very same creative drive that makes them founders of the *polis* also means that they have no *polis*.

⁷⁹ IM, 168. GA 40: 166. “überallhin unterwegs”

that it shuts itself out from the way of meditation on the seeming within which it drifts around.⁸⁰

This is how humanity becomes enmeshed in seeming: it takes for granted the paths that it violently lays out into beings because it fails to hold in view the violent struggle with the overwhelming sway that first creates the routes. Thus, the very paths that are originally created by the struggle are also what give rise to the tendency for humanity to fall away from the struggle with the being of beings as a whole. The violence-doing by which human beings lay out their routes and break into the overwhelming sway is what actually makes possible the breaking-in of the overwhelming sway against them.

The phrase *pantoporos aporos* stands in tension with itself, as an oppositional unity that itself traverses—that is, counters and en-counters—the “opposed confrontations of being.” Just as in the case of the uncanny, *to deinotaton*, this phrase shares in the ambiguity that it names. For this phrase, which turns against itself, also names a certain necessary failure of the human being to remain in this counter-turning, unifying opposition to the overwhelming sway. For, as *pantoporos*, the human being succumbs to its own *Vielwendigkeit*, or “versatility of many twists and turns,” a reference to Odysseus’s boundless resourcefulness.⁸¹ But this *Vielwendigkeit*, or *polutropeia*, is at the same time the un-essence, the counter-essence to human resourcefulness because it renders the human being *aporos*. This means that the lack of ways or resources is never

⁸⁰ IM, 168. GA 40: 166-7. “stets auf die von ihm selbst gebahnten Wege zurückgeworfen wird, indem er sich auf seinen Bahnen festfährt, sich im Gebahnten verfängt, sich in dieser Verfängnis den Kreis seiner Welt zieht, sich im Schein verstrickt und sich so vom Sein aussperrt. Dergestalt dreht er sich vielwendig im eigenen Kreis. Er kann alles in bezug auf diesen Umkreis Widrige abwenden. Er kann jede Geschicklichkeit an ihrem Platz anwenden. Die Gewalt-tätigkeit, die ursprünglich die Bahnen schafft, erzeugt in sich das eigene Unwesen der Vielwendigkeit, die in sich Ausweglosigkeit ist und das so sehr, daß sie sich selbst von dem Weg der Besinnung über den Schein aussperrt, worin sie sich selber umtreibt.”

⁸¹ IM, 168. GA 40: 167.

some external limit that humans run up against in their violent incursions against the overwhelming:

For when human beings are everywhere underway in this sense, their having no way out does not arise in the external sense that they run up against outward restrictions and cannot go any farther.⁸²

This limit, this lack of resource in the struggle against seeming that is begotten by human porosity stands in marked contrast—that is, counter to—that other, singular limit against which human resourcefulness shatters: death. Death is the ultimate limit against which all human violence shatters; it is the absolute uncanny insofar as it “sets us simply and suddenly out from everything homely once and for all.”⁸³ Thus there is also an uncanny ambiguity between these two senses of being *aporos*. In both cases, human violence shatters against a limit that is not external to *dasein* but is internal to it. Yet in the case of death, this lack of resource belongs to *dasein* constantly and essentially, and is constitutive of its being-there. By contrast, the lack of resource that is begotten by human resourcefulness is the un-essence of resourcefulness. The ambiguity of these two kinds of *aporosity* consists in the fact that they are not identical, and yet they are not separable from one another, either.

The power—indeed, the truly violent character—of the uncanniness that pervades *dasein* in being *pantoporos aporos* is that these limits against which *dasein* violently shatters are essentially concealed from it. The unity of being everywhere underway and of having no way out does not appear as such. At the beginning of the

⁸² IM, 168. GA 40:166. “Denn der Mensch wird, dergestalt überallhin unterwegs, nicht ausweglos in dem äußerlichen Sinne, daß er an äußere Schranken stößt und daran nicht weiter kann.”

⁸³ IM, 169. GA 40: 167. “schlechthin und zumal aus allem Heimischen endgültig hinaussetzt”

fourth section of *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger says that this is the case for all four of the oppositional unities according to which being is understood. We see the complicated dynamics of this concealed unity encapsulated in the translation of *to deinotaton* as the ‘uncanniest.’ *Heimlich* means secret, concealed, and cosy, familiar. Dasein’s sense of familiarity, in which it finds shelter from the overwhelming sway, is at the same time dasein’s own concealment from itself. This is because its sense of familiarity is predicated on breaking into the overwhelming sway, of needing to use violence against it so as to create routes and inroads and to open up beings so that they show themselves as what they are.

But this un-concealing, this violent opening up of beings in the midst of the uncanny—which is something that dasein needs to do—does not eradicate concealment or the incipient violence of the overwhelming sway, but in fact only intensifies it. Dasein takes over the powers of language, mood, passion, understanding and building in order to break into the various domains of beings. Human beings violently take over these powers as their own and as who they are. Yet, despite the violent human appropriation and disposition of these pervasive powers, and their use in opening up routes into the overwhelming sway, their reciprocal counter-violence against the human is not tamed but simply intensified:

This pervasive sway becomes no less overwhelming because humans take up this sway itself directly into their violence and use this violence as such. This merely conceals the uncanniness of language, of passions, as that into which human beings as historical are disposed [*gefügt*], while it seems to them that it is *they* who have them at their disposal [*verfügt*]. What they yield to humans immediately is merely the inessential, and thus they drive humans out and keep them out of their own essence. In this way, what at bottom is still more distant and more overwhelming than sea

and earth becomes something that seems to humans to be the nearest of all.⁸⁴

The violence of these powers, which belong to the overwhelming sway, and which pervade *dasein*, is only intensified in their seeming familiarity rather than neutralized.

The excessively violent character of the overwhelming sway, that is, the being of beings, takes place not in an outward display of force, but by its withholding of the essential while yielding a seeming intimacy and transparency. The overwhelming sway appears as something that must be surmounted, but the very act of surmounting it only intensifies its overwhelming, excessive violence.

By taking these powers to be at their disposal and nearest of all, human beings do not realize that they are actually distancing themselves further from these powers:

The extent to which humanity is not at home in its own essence is betrayed by the opinion human beings cherish of themselves as those who have invented and who could have invented language and understanding, building and poetry. How is humanity ever supposed to have invented that which pervades it in its sway, due to which humanity itself can *be* as humanity in the first place?⁸⁵

In what we might call an Oedipal fashion, *dasein* tries to take hold of, or take credit for, its own origin. It takes itself to be at home in these powers because humanity uses them to open up beings, without realizing that humanity itself is first opened up—and thereby

⁸⁴ IM, 166-7. GA 40: 165. “Dieses Durchwaltende verliert dadurch nichts von seinem Überwältigenden, daß der Mensch es selbst unmittelbar in seine Gewalt nimmt und diese als solche braucht. Dadurch verbirgt sich nur das Unheimliche der Sprache, der Leidenschaften als jenes, worein der Mensch als geschichtlicher gefügt ist, während es ihm so vorkommt als sei *er* es, der darüber verfügt. Die Unheimlichkeit dieser Mächte liegt in ihrer scheinbaren Vertrautheit und Geläufigkeit. Sie ergeben sich dem Menschen unmittelbar nur in ihrem Unwesen und treiben und halten ihn so aus seinem Wesen heraus. Auf diese Weise wird ihm zu einem scheinbar Allernächsten, was im Grunde noch ferner und überwältigender ist als Meer und Erde.”

⁸⁵ IM, 167. GA 40: 165-6. “Wie weit der Mensch in seinem eigenen Wesen uneinheimisch ist, verrät die Meinung, die er von sich hegt als demjenigen, der Sprache und Verstehen, Bauen und Dichten erfunden habe und erfunden haben könnte. Wie soll der Mensch das ihn Durchwaltende, auf Grund dessen er erst selbst als Mensch überhaupt *sein* kann, je erfinden?”

exposed by and to—these same powers. The terrifying implication of Heidegger’s interpretation is that the seemingly intimate and familiar is on a fundamental level, concealed violence—the very opposite of what we take the *heimlich*, the homely, to be.

Excessive Gathering

We have seen how *dasein*’s breaking up and breaking forth into the domains of beings is both an opening-up and a withdrawal. The uncanniness of this dynamic consists in the reciprocal unity of disclosure or unconcealment of beings with a simultaneous concealment or withdrawal of the essential. Over a decade later, Heidegger reiterates this dynamic in his 1946 essay “Anaximander’s Fragment,” with the repeated refrain, “As it reveals itself in beings, being withdraws.”⁸⁶ Some of the central ideas of that essay, such as the determination of the Greek *dike* as fittingness or jointure (*Fug*), are foregrounded in his interpretation of tragic poetry in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

Toward the end of his reading of the Sophoclean *stasimon*, Heidegger renames the two-fold violence of *deinon*, which had unfolded as the overwhelming sway and the human need to use violence. These two moments in the oppositional unity of *to deinon* are now configured as the tension between *dike* and *techne*. Human resourcefulness or ‘porosity’ is now articulated as the fundamental kind of knowing called *techne*.

Knowing, in the genuine sense of *techne*, means initially and constantly looking out beyond what, in each case, is directly present at hand. In different ways and on different routes and in different domains, this being-out-beyond sets to work in advance that which first gives to what is

⁸⁶ EGT, 26. *Holzwege*, 357. “Das Sein entzieht sich, indem es sich in das Seiende entbirgt.”

already present at hand its relative justification, its possible determinateness, and thus its limit.⁸⁷

Technē is thus the Greek word for the violence that the human being needs to use amidst the overwhelming sway. It names the setting forth and breaking up that human beings are compelled to do in making routes for themselves. This violent setting out, understood in terms of *technē*, is the setting into work of being in beings. It is violent insofar as it is a transgression of limits, a disruption and attempted surmounting of the overwhelming sway, and yet at the same time it is this very transgression of limits and movement toward the uncanny that first gives limit, domain, and measure. This recalls Heidegger's earlier assertion in his interpretation that the violent human activity of "breaking forth, breaking up, capturing and subjugating is in itself the first opening of beings *as sea, as earth, as animal.*"⁸⁸ Strangely, the first opening of beings as what they are is at one and the same time their violation. Beings are delimited only insofar as their limits are transgressed. That which appears as present at hand conceals the violent opening up and holding open that its appearance as such requires.

The overwhelming sway, which is another term for the Greek experience of beings as a whole as *phusis*, is the other pole into which the essence of *to deinon* is gathered. Heidegger translates this as *dike*, rejecting any juridical translation of the Greek and insisting instead that it be understood more fundamentally in terms of the archaic German word *Fug* or fittingness. The overwhelming sway is expressed by the

⁸⁷ IM, 169-70. GA 40: 168. "Dieses ist im echten Sinne der *technē* das anfängliche und ständige Hinaussehen über das je gerade Vorhandene. Dieses Hinaussein setzt in verschiedener Weise und auf verschiedenen Bahnen und in verschiedenen Bereichen das zuvor ins Werk, was dem schon Vorhandenen erst sein verhältnismäßiges Richt, seine mögliche Bestimmtheit und damit seine Grenze gibt."

⁸⁸ IM, 167. GA 40: 166. "Dieses Ausbrechen, Umbrechen, Einfangen und Niederzwingen ist in sich erst die Eröffnung des Seienden *als Meer, als Erde, als Tier.*"

term *dike* insofar as it refers to the originary gatheredness of the sway, “the enjoining structure which compels fitting-in and compliance.”⁸⁹

From this determination we can begin to see more clearly that throughout the interpretation this two-fold, tensional sense of *to deinon* has been unfolding as a tension between originary gatheredness (*logos*), and excess. The overwhelming sway names a seemingly contradictory excess of gathering. As *phusis*, as the sway, it both compels fitting-in and order, and at the same time its excessive gathering needs to use another kind of excess: the violence, the disruption that breaks out against it, and which first opens it up. Ultimately, we must see that *both* the gathering *and* the excess are violent and uncanny in their own ways. The human being names nothing other than this reciprocal relation between the gathering and the excess, *dikē* and *technē*, which stand over against each other in a violent strife that holds them together at the same time that they are driven to their limits. The human, as *to deinotaton*, is the site of this strife that opens and unfolds as history. Yet, just as death belongs essentially to the individual human being and is not just an external limit that is reached on some occasion, so too does the unhistorical, the *mē kalon*, belong just as essentially to the oppositional relation of *dikē* and *technē*:

Insofar as he dares the surmounting of being, he must risk the assault of un-beings, the *mē kalon*, disintegration, un-constancy, un-structure, and unfittingness. The higher the peak of historical *dasein* rises, the more gaping is the abyss for the sudden plunge into the unhistorical, which then

⁸⁹ IM, 171. GA 40: 169. “das fügende Gefüge, das Einfügung und Sichfügen erzwingt.”

only flails around in a confusion that has no way out and at the same time has no site.⁹⁰

Once again we see that the violent interaction of the overwhelming sway and the human being that attempts to surmount it is both the happening of history and the begetting of history's un-essence: the unhistorical, the simply *aporos* and *apolis*, perdition. For Heidegger, the tragic dynamic consists precisely in the holding-together of the historical and the un-historical while at the same time avowing their fundamental opposition and mutual exclusivity. In other words, the tragic insight into history is that the historical begets its own un-essence.⁹¹

The phrase that Heidegger uses often in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, "human dasein" would seem to imply that we could take human dasein to be a stable unity, that insofar as the human being is dasein and dasein is the human being, the phrase is almost redundant in its specificity. But here we find that through tragic poetry, Heidegger puts this into question and examines the unfolding of the difference or differing between the human being and dasein. It is one thing to acknowledge that the human being and dasein are not identical, but quite another to try to specify just what that means. Heidegger understands human dasein to be a tragic relation: as much as they belong to each other,

⁹⁰ IM, 172. GA 40: 170. "Indem er die Bewältigung des Seins wagt, muß er es dabei auf den Andrang des Un-seienden, *mē kalon*, auf das Auseinanderbrechen, die Un-ständigkeit, das Un-gefüge und den Unfug ankommen lassen. Je ragender der Gipfel des geschichtlichen Daseins, um so gähnender der Abgrund für den plötzlichen Absturz in das ungeschichtliche, das nur noch in der ausweglosen und zugleich stätte-losen Wirrnis dahintreibt."

⁹¹ This is an idea that is also crucial to Heidegger's understanding of the dynamic structure of truth in the essay "On the Essence of Truth." Although tragedy is nowhere mentioned in that piece, I would contend that a distinctively tragic dynamic with respect to truth and un-truth unfolds there, and that this reading of the *Introduction to Metaphysics* helps to highlight that aspect of Heidegger's understanding of truth as *alētheia* from this period.

they are also mutually incompatible. This means that the human being and dasein are neither one nor two. The happening of this ambiguity takes place in tragic poetry.

Earlier we asked whether the struggle of Greek dasein to wrest being from beings is something that we should understand as a cause, a goal for the sake of which the hero sacrifices himself and goes down. But this is to understand the polemic relation between being and beings as somehow outside of and antecedent to the being who undergoes the struggle. Furthermore, this relation to being is not something willed; it is not a sacrificial offering on the part of the human being for the sake of something greater than itself. The human being is urged, forced, compelled into being-there, da-sein:

But this necessity of shattering can subsist only insofar as what must shatter is urged [*genötigt*: forced, pressed, compelled] into such being-here [*da-sein*]. But the human being is urged into such being-here, thrown into the urgency of such being, because the overwhelming as such, in order to appear in its sway, requires the site of openness for itself. The essence of being-human opens itself to us only when it is understood on the basis of this urgency that is necessitated by being itself. Historical humanity's being-here means: being-posed as the breach into which the excessive violence of being breaks in its appearing, so that this breach itself shatters against being.⁹²

The essence of being-human opens itself to us only when it has been forced beyond itself—that is, when the human being no longer is human. Being needs the human as the site of its appearing, but this opening up of the site of dasein through the human being is also the shattering of the human against the overwhelming, beings as a whole:

⁹² IM, 173-4. GA 40: 171-2. “Diese Notwendigkeit des Zerbrechens kann aber nur bestehen, insofern das, was zerbrechen muß, in ein solches Da-sein genötigt wird. Der Mensch ist aber in ein solches Da-sein genötigt, in die Not solchen Seins geworfen, weil das Überwältigende als ein solches, um waltend zu erscheinen, die Stätte der Offenheit für es *braucht*. Von dieser durch das Sein selbst ernötigten Not her verstanden, eröffnet sich uns erst das Wesen des Menschseins. Da-sein des geschichtlichen Menschen heißt: Gesetzt-sein als die Bresche, in die die Übergewalt des Seins erscheinend hereinbricht, damit diese Bresche selbst am Sein zerbricht.”

The uncanniest (the human being) is what it is because from the ground up it deals with and conserves the familiar only in order to break out of it and to let what overwhelms it break in. Being itself throws humanity into the course of this tearing-away, which forces humanity beyond itself, as the one who moves out to being, in order to set being to work and thus to hold open beings as a whole.⁹³

The compulsion of the human being into *dasein*, that is, into being-there, pushes humanity beyond itself in such a way that as *dasein* humanity is both more and less than what it previously was. The human being is destroyed, it goes under, and it is only in this shattering against the overwhelming that the human essence is first opened up as the place in which being appears. But if we understand this shattering as a heroic self-sacrifice on the part of humanity, then we are precisely misunderstanding what is at stake in Heidegger's heroism. For it is precisely in humanity's blind resistance to the overwhelming, it is precisely in its attempt to control and contain it that the necessity of its shattering has its inception. We have to understand that the tragic hero's entrance into the violent struggle as a function of his or her ignorance and self-concealment, not as a pugilistic lust for battle. Heidegger's striking insight is that this blindness is what is constitutive of all great knowing, that is, questioning.

Perhaps one of the hardest things for us to grasp about this vision of heroism is that it cannot refer to the actions of an individual, or even of a community, because the tragic hero is nothing and nobody, but is rather the site of being using the human in its turning against itself:

⁹³ IM, 174. GA 40: 172. "Das Unheimlichste (der Mensch) ist, was es ist, weil es von Grund aus das Einheimische nur betreibt und behütet, um aus ihm auszubrechen und das hereinbrechen zu lassen, was es überwältigt. Das Sein selbst wirft den Menschen in die Bahn dieses Fortrisses, der ihn über ihn selbst hinweg als den Ausrückenden an das Sein zwingt, um dieses ins Werk zu setzen und damit das Seiende im Ganzen offenzuhalten."

As the breach for the opening up of being in beings—a being that has been set to work—the dasein of historical humanity is an incident [*Zwischen-fall*], the incident in which the violent powers of the released excessive violence of being suddenly emerge and go to work as history.⁹⁴

By calling historical human dasein a *Zwischen-fall*, an incident, we see once again this idea that dasein is a between, a breach or cleft. It is not a bridge that connects two pre-existing present things, but is rather the between into which what it is between first appears. Dasein is a violent site—given by, and giving violence—a strange giving—in which the confrontation of gods and men first opens up and is made possible. If the epic hero is a divine man or a humanized god, and resides between gods and men in that sense, the tragic hero marks a transformation of that relation of betweenness, in which it is not a figure of continuity along the spectrum of the divine and the mortal, but is the site of the abyssal gap between them—and thus also the site of their mutual belonging.

Looking backwards, one can certainly trace out a continuity between Heidegger's interpretation of the *Antigone* stasimon in *Introduction to Metaphysics* and his discussion of anticipatory resoluteness and being-toward-death in *Being and Time*. The uncanniness of human dasein is developed in *Introduction to Metaphysics* with a view toward its essential violence. What is crucial in understanding the tragic character of this violence is that it is not calculated or willed by a human subject. Rather, Heidegger aims to show the hidden violence that constitutes the possibility of anything like human subjectivity to appear in the first place. As we will see in the following chapter on the *Beiträge zur*

⁹⁴ IM, 174. GA 40: 172. “Als die Bresche für die Eröffnung des ins Werk gesetzten Seins im Seienden ist das Dasein des geschichtlichen Menschen ein *Zwischen-fall*, der *Zwischenfall*, in dem plötzlich die Gewalten der losgebundenen Übergewalt des Seins aufgehen und ins Werk als Geschichte eingehen.”

Philosophie, this two-fold and conflictual character of *dasein* is shifted even further away from human beings, as Heidegger emphasizes the bifurcated essence of *alētheia*. In the later writings it becomes a matter of understanding human beings' implication in the oblivion of being in a way that is prior to the concepts of guilt and innocence, calculation or ignorance with which we are so familiar.

Chapter 3

Tragic Attestation: Beiträge zur Philosophie

We must also concede that the beginning will show itself, if it shows itself at all, only with our contribution [Zutun].⁹⁵

In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger's interpretation of tragic poetry complements and helps to elucidate the experience of being that he seeks to recover in the poetizing thinking of the Presocratics. As we have seen, this complementary belonging-together of Parmenides and Heraklitus with tragic poetry belongs to the second stage of the unfolding of *alētheia*, before it is decisively transformed into *homoiosis*. And yet, insofar as Heidegger understands this transformation of *alētheia* as itself a tragic dynamic proper to being, tragedy is not simply an instance of a "pre-metaphysical" experience of *alētheia* in the first beginning. As we have seen, Heidegger goes so far as to say that the "tragic" is synonymous with philosophy. Tragedy occupies two places at once: tragic poetry, particularly Sophoclean poetry, is a specific moment in the unfolding of *alētheia* soon before its metaphysical determination. Yet from his own liminal standpoint at the end of metaphysics, Heidegger understands the whole of the history of being as having a tragic necessity and inevitability.

This two-fold role of tragedy in Heidegger's thought is perhaps most in force in the *Beiträge*, where Heidegger says almost nothing explicit about tragedy. The absence of interpretations of tragic poetry does not inhibit Reiner Schürmann from making the

⁹⁵ *Parmenides*, 19. GA 54: 28. "Zugestehen müssen wir auch folgendes: Der Anfang zeigt sich, wenn er sich überhaupt zeigt, gewiß nicht ohne unser Zutun."

striking if not hyperbolic claim that “the *Beiträge zur Philosophie* attests to the tragic as does no other philosophical document of our century.”⁹⁶ This naturally leads to the question of just what it is that is identifiably tragic about the thinking that happens in that work, and what is to be gained from such a designation. Keeping Heidegger’s caveat in mind, that we are better off leaving the term “tragic” out of use, I will structure my reading of the *Beiträge* around those two places in the text where Heidegger, though refraining from the use of the term “tragic,” does mention tragedy explicitly. On the basis of these two references and their contexts we may be able to judge to what extent the *Beiträge* consists of an attestation, in deed if not in word, to the tragic.

Tragedy and Truth

Tragedy, however, is an imitation not only of a complete action but also of incidents arousing pity and fear. Such incidents have the very greatest effect on the mind when they occur unexpectedly and at the same time in consequence of one another. (*Poetics*, 1452a).

In the interpretations of tragedy given in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, we find it variously linked with downfall, decline, disaster, and shattering. In the *Beiträge*, tragedy is connected explicitly to collapse—the collapse of *alētheia*. In *Besinnung*, Heidegger’s most direct formulation of his understanding of the tragic, he calls it an *Untergang*, a going-under or decline. Tragedy seems always to name a certain kind of loss or passing-away. And yet what is strange about the conjunction of these ostensibly negative events with tragedy is that Heidegger seemingly rejects just such a traditional interpretation. In

⁹⁶ Reiner Schürmann, “A Brutal Awakening to the Tragic Condition of Being,” 90.

his lectures on Nietzsche, he cites with approval Nietzsche's departure from the traditional interpretation of the tragic, particularly that stemming from Aristotle:

The usual idea of the tragic, even where it reaches higher, sees in it only guilt and decline [*Untergang*] and end and hopelessness. Nietzsche's concept of the tragic and of tragedy is another, essentially deeper.⁹⁷

How do we make sense of the fact that Heidegger seems to use the very terms and concepts to understand the tragic that he elsewhere rejects? Ultimately his thought of the tragic, while deeply indebted to Nietzsche, seeks to go even farther. The common thread between the terms mentioned above is a kind of negation, and what is at stake for Heidegger is to think and to experience this negation in a way that is not—or does not lead to—nihilism.

As the “Echo” joining highlights, the *Beiträge* attempts to think within the experience of a most fundamental loss and refusal: the abandonment of being. This task is made all the more difficult by the fact that “abandonment of being is strongest at that place where it most decidedly hides itself.”⁹⁸ Pity and fear do not attune this experience of loss, but terror: the abject terror of a sudden recognition that beings have long been abandoned by being. This abandonment leads to the forgottenness of being, in which beings are manifest while being conceals itself in this manifestness. This joined unconcealment-concealment is the truth of being, experienced but never grounded in the Greek experience of *alētheia*. Heidegger identifies the collapse of *alētheia* with the experience of loss and abandonment of and by being: “To this abandonment belongs

⁹⁷ GA 44: 65.

⁹⁸ GA 65: 110. “52. *Die Seinsverlassenheit* ist am stärksten dort, wo sie sich am entschiedensten versteckt.”

forgottenness of being and at the same time the *disintegration of truth*. Both are basically [im Grunde] the same.”⁹⁹ These are two different ways of pointing to the same event.

In the *Beiträge* Heidegger attempts to prepare to think that which governed the understanding of being in the metaphysical tradition, but which that tradition itself was necessarily unable to think: the truth of being and the being of truth.¹⁰⁰ As Heidegger says, “Now that has become a question which could not become a question in the first beginning: *truth* itself.”¹⁰¹ Because it is a matter of truth as such going unthought and unquestioned in the first beginning, a central point of focus for Heidegger is the transformation of the essence of *alētheia*. This transformation, which is constitutive of metaphysics and its experience and positing of the truth of beings, is referred to in the *Beiträge* as its “collapse” [*Einsturz*] or “disintegration” [*Zerfall*].

Continuity and Collapse

The first of the two direct references to tragedy in the *Beiträge* appears in section 233, which touches briefly on the transformation in the meaning of *alētheia* that Heidegger locates in Plato’s cave allegory. This interpretation is worked out at length in Heidegger’s essay, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth.” In referring to his own reading of the

⁹⁹ GA 65: 113. “54. *Seinsverlassenheit* Zu ihr gehört die *Seinsvergessenheit* und imgleichen der *Zerfall der Wahrheit*. Beides ist im Grunde das selbe.”

¹⁰⁰ The archaic spelling “being” indicates an event anterior to the metaphysical separation of being and beings.

¹⁰¹ GA 65: 183. “jetzt ist jenes zur Frage geworden, was im ersten Anfang nicht Frage werden konnte, die *Wahrheit* selbst.”

allegory, Heidegger asks, “Why is this interpretation historically essential?” And he answers that it is

Because still here, by an extended mindfulness, it becomes manifest how *alētheia* continues essentially to carry and guide the Greek questioning of *on* [being], while at the same time, *alētheia* collapses precisely through this questioning, i.e., by setting up *idea*.¹⁰²

Heidegger’s interpretation discloses a two-fold and ambiguous status that belongs to *alētheia* in the Greek beginning. The experience of *alētheia* as unconcealedness results in truth initially having an ambiguous double locus, whereby truth resides both in the beings that show themselves as what they are, in their whatness, and in the happening of this disclosure. Insofar as *alētheia* is experienced as the unconcealedness of beings, as the *idea* or “look” of a being that allows it to be apprehended as such, then the truth of being is lost and forgotten. The essence of *alētheia* is transformed with the priority given to the *idea*, yet this tendency for truth’s locus to shift to beings—thereby displacing itself out of its essential ambiguity—is a movement that is proper and essential to truth as unconcealment-concealment. Insofar as the Greek experience of *alētheia* is a wresting from concealment, truth *is* essentially as a displacing.¹⁰³ Thus the so-called collapse of *alētheia* is a transformation that hides and denies itself as such. Heidegger remarks in the 1943 essay, “Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God is Dead,’”

in the history of Western thinking, right from the beginning, beings have been thought in regard to being, but the truth of being has remained unthought. Indeed, not only has the truth of being been denied to thinking

¹⁰² GA 65: 359-60. “Warum diese Auslegung geschichtlich wesentlich? Weil heir noch in einer ausgeführten Besinnung sichtbar wird, wie *zugleich* die *alētheia* noch wesentlich das griechische Fragen nach dem *on* trägt und führt und wie sie doch gerade durch dieses Fragen, Ansetzung der *idea*, zum Einsturz gebracht wird.”

¹⁰³ This becomes even more clear in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” written at around the same time as the *Beiträge*.

as a possible experience, but Western thinking itself (precisely in the form of metaphysics) has specifically, though unknowingly, masked the occurrence of this denial.¹⁰⁴

The understanding of the tradition that emerges here is one in which Western thinking has been hitherto unknown to itself. Its legacy is not only the denial of the experience of the truth of being, but it has even denied itself the experience of this denial. Heidegger asserts, remarkably, that metaphysics is the history of an unwitting yet systematic concealment of itself from itself. Metaphysics is not the history of an error; it is history as errancy.¹⁰⁵ The conjunction of the denial's specificity with its essential ignorance recalls the inextricable mingling of extreme culpability and innocence that one finds in the tragic heroes. One thinks in particular of Oedipus's knowing ignorance regarding his origins and his unwitting yet not accidental fulfillment of the terrible prophecy foretold for him. Is metaphysics' ignorance of itself with respect to the unthought truth of being an Oedipal self-concealment? Are the distress and terror that are experienced at the recognition of this double denial at the end of metaphysics akin to Oedipus's horrific self-revelation?

One of the things that speaks for this parallel is the dynamic of simultaneous continuity and collapse with respect to *alētheia* that Heidegger identifies in the passage

¹⁰⁴ *Off the Beaten Track*, 159. In German as "Nietzsches Wort 'Gott is Tot'" in *Holzwege*, 195-6. "in der Geschichte des abendländischen Denkens zwar von Anfang an das Seiende hinsichtlich des Seins gedacht wird, daß jedoch die Wahrheit des Seins ungedacht bleibt und als mögliche Erfahrung dem Denken nicht nur verweigert ist, sondern daß das abendländische Denken selbst und zwar in der Gestalt der Metaphysik das Geschehnis dieser Verweigerung eigens, aber gleichwohl unwissend verhüllt."

¹⁰⁵ See "On the Essence of Truth," §7, in which Heidegger explains that "errancy belongs to the inner constitution of the da-sein into which historical human beings are admitted." *Pathmarks*, 150. Cf. his claim in "The Anaximander Fragment" that "Error is the space in which history unfolds. . . Without errancy there would be no connection from destiny to destiny: there would be no history." *Early Greek Thinking*, 26.

from the *Beiträge* cited above. This paradoxical relation is a key aspect of the discussion of Oedipus's downfall in *Introduction to Metaphysics* as well.¹⁰⁶ On the one hand, it seems absurd to say that truth went unquestioned in the first beginning, since being is understood consistently throughout the tradition in terms of truth. Yet this carrying and guiding of the questioning of being by *alētheia* serves to hide *alētheia*'s own self-refusal and loss. *Alētheia* carries the Greek questioning of being yet for this reason remains itself unquestioned. Its essential ambiguity and questionableness is covered over precisely because of its ascendancy.

We are asked to reflect upon the collapse of *alētheia* as occurring at the same time as and precisely through its carrying of the being-question. This means that our presuppositions about continuity and collapse are already disarmed, since we are required to understand them as conjoined into an uncanny unity. But perhaps this insight, although ironic, is not so unfamiliar to us. We think of the Sophoclean irony whereby Oedipus fulfills the fate prophecied to him in the very attempt to avoid it. Or, perhaps closer to home, we think of *dasein*'s submersion in everydayness as only heightening the anxiety from which it flees. Perhaps we are already well-versed in recognizing and appreciating this paradoxical mechanism, even if we still find ourselves unwittingly caught by it now and then in our own lives.

Yet when we look further at this dynamic with respect to *alētheia*, and ask what it is, exactly, that collapses, a new problem arises. If we say that *alētheia* collapses, aren't we saying that there was first something stable—a ground, perhaps—that then gave way

¹⁰⁶ For further discussion of this point, see the section on Heidegger's Heroism.

under force or pressure of some kind? Heidegger anticipates this query when he adds immediately afterwards in *Beiträge* section 233 that

looking further back, it becomes manifest at the same time that the collapse is not one of something established and expressly grounded at all. Neither the one nor the other was accomplished in inceptual Greek thinking, in spite of the *polemos*-statement of Heraklitus and the fragment of Parmenides. And yet, everywhere in thinking and poetizing (tragedy and Pindar), *alētheia* is essential [*wesentlich*].”¹⁰⁷

Ostensibly the focus of this passage is not tragic poetry, but the collapse of *alētheia*. Tragedy, after all, is mentioned here only in a parenthetical aside as an example of inceptual Greek poetizing. As we have already seen, tragic poetry in this restricted sense is a site for the unfolding of *alētheia*, but no more so than the fragments of Heraklitus and Parmenides, not to mention the odes of Pindar. And yet, it plays a much more significant role in this analysis of the collapse of *alētheia* than is belied by its apparent status here as *exemplum gratis*. This is underscored by the fact that tragedy is thought alongside and in conjunction with Heraklitean *polemos*. For Heidegger’s understanding of *polemos* is not limited to his interpretation of that thinker, but appears as a central trope in his thought throughout the thirties especially, for example, in his thinking of essential strife, the strifing of earth and world, and the *Aus-einander-setzung* of, among other things, the first and other beginnings.

Similarly, we can infer from this passage that tragedy has an ambiguous position in the narrative of *alētheia*’s collapse that Heidegger limns here in the faintest outlines.

On the one hand, tragic poetry stands immediately before the decisive transformation of

¹⁰⁷ GA 65: 360. “Zugleich zeigt sich weiter zurück: Der Einsturz ist nicht der eines Errichteten und gar eigens Gegründeten. Weder das eine noch das andere wurden im anfänglichen griechischen Denken geleistet, trotz des *polemos*-Satzes des Heraklit und des Lehrgedichtes des Parmenides. Und dennoch, überall im Denken und Dichten (Tragödie und Pindar) ist die *alētheia* wesentlich.”

alētheia into *homoiosis* in Plato and Aristotle. In this sense, tragedy is simply (along with the Presocratic thinkers) one of the last sites of a “pre-metaphysical” experience of truth. On the other hand, tragedy is not simply confined by Heidegger to this place in the history of *alētheia*, but has a far wider-ranging significance. The disclosure or unconcealment of *alētheia*’s (hitherto hidden) ungroundedness in the first beginning is, in a sense, a recoiling of unconcealment upon itself, in which unconcealment is unconcealed, but precisely in its concealing aspect, its refusal. Heidegger reads the dynamic of this transformation of *alētheia*, its collapse, and its disclosure as such at the end of metaphysics as a fundamentally tragic one. In this sense the tragic exceeds the place given to it within the history of being and instead characterizes the dynamic of this history as such. The question is, what relation do these two determinations of tragedy and the tragic have to one another? What resemblance or relation does this larger sense of tragedy bear to the phenomenon of tragic drama that flourished for little more than a century in Attic Greece, and then passed away?

Ungrounded Loss

In the passage cited above, Heidegger makes the remarkable statement that along with the manifestation of the collapse of *alētheia*, it also appears “at the same time” that this collapse is in fact not of something firm and established. Initially, we gain the recognition of a loss: *alētheia* was essential/fundamental (*wesentlich*) in tragic poetry and in early Greek thinking, but that this experience of truth as unconcealment passed away with the positing of truth as inhering in the *idea*. And yet this experience of loss is

transmuted, transformed as we learn that this is a loss of something that was, in a sense, never fully there. “Neither the one nor the other,” he says—that is, neither the establishment nor the express grounding of *alētheia* were accomplished in the first beginning. What sort of attunement is called for in the face of such a strange passing? How do we mourn this loss that is at the same time no loss at all, because never fully unfolded? How do we even know, then, what we have lost?

In this strange recognition of both the collapse of *alētheia* and of its never having been grounded, one begins to see that the recognition of the loss—of the abandonment of being, and the disintegration of truth—is itself a movement of grounding. But this is a grounding that is at the same time abyssal, ungrounding. As Heidegger remarks in the fourth numbered set of remarks in this section:

If we prospectively and retrospectively survey the history of *alētheia* from the simile of the cave, which holds such a key position, then we can indirectly reckon what it means to install, in thinking, truth as *alētheia* and to unfold and ground it in its essence—what it means that this not only did not occur in metaphysics heretofore, but also did not—and could not—occur in the first beginning.¹⁰⁸

If we are to experience *alētheia* differently, and essentially, then we must grasp the impossibility of its having occurred in such a way in the first beginning. This points to the strange double loss that we mentioned above: it is not just a matter of experiencing the formerly hidden collapse of *alētheia*, but of experiencing the refusal of this loss, the

¹⁰⁸ GA 65: 360. “4. Übersehen wir die Geschichte der *alētheia* vom Höhlengleichnis aus, das so eine Schlüsselstellung hat, nach rückwärts und vorwärts, dann kann mittelbar ermessen werden, was es besagt, die Wahrheit als *alētheia* erst denkerisch aufrichten, im Wesen entfalten und begründen. Daß dies in der bisherigen Metaphysik und auch im ersten Anfang nicht nur nicht geschah, sondern nicht geschehen konnte.”

recognition that at the end of metaphysics what is made manifest is not only this collapse, but the terrifying realization that it is a collapse of something that was never there.

As a side note, I must add that it is this latter insight that precludes those readings of Heidegger that would have him say that “the Greeks shall inherit the earth.” For it is not as though the return to the first beginning intends to resurrect an understanding of truth that once had ascendancy but was then lost and covered over by the metaphysical understanding of truth as correctness. What was lost was not something grounded, but rather the *possibility* for bringing *alētheia* to its ground. Thus, the experience of loss at the closure of metaphysics and the crossing to the other beginning, is an experience of the collapse and loss of an essence of *alētheia* that was never established and has not yet been. It is a matter, then, not of resurrecting the dead, but of recovering that which only ever was as possibility. This is why Heidegger’s relation to the Greeks, as he always insists, is governed by a future need.

Necessity

The failure of *alētheia* to have been essentially grounded is not due to some inadequacy on the part of the early Greek thinkers and poets. As Heidegger explains in *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, written at the same time as the *Beiträge*,

that the Greek thinkers did not raise the question of the essence and the ground of *alētheia* itself is not due to an incapacity of their thinking but,

on the contrary, derives from the overpowering force of the primordial task: to speak for the first time of beings themselves as such.¹⁰⁹

Because the early Greeks did not and could not question truth along with beings, their experience of *alētheia* was not grounded despite their inceptual experience of it. This lack of ground led to the collapse of *alētheia* into *homoiosis*. One way in which this collapse connects to the tragic is its being the result of a kind of necessity rather than an inadequacy on the part of the early Greeks. The dynamic according to which *alētheia* collapses and is lost in the first beginning, and the way in which this loss is necessarily hidden and denied by metaphysics, thereby redoubling the denial, is something that can only become manifest once metaphysics has exhausted all of its possibilities under this denial. The inception of metaphysics consists in this impossibility of thinking the truth of being. What is at stake in revisiting this transformation in the essence of *alētheia* is the necessary hiddenness of metaphysics' origin from itself.

The End of Metaphysics

When Heidegger says that his interpretation of Plato's allegory is "*geschichtliche wesentlich*," we have in effect two historically essential moments: the hidden collapse of *alētheia* in the first Greek beginning, and the manifestation of this hidden collapse at the end of metaphysics, in the crossing to the other beginning. And yet, ultimately, these moments are not simply two; the collapse of *alētheia* and its manifestation as such are not

¹⁰⁹ *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic,"* 175. In German as GA 45: 205-206. "Daß die griechischen Denker die Frage nach dem Wesen und Grund der *alētheia* selbst nicht stellten, beruht nicht auf einem Unvermögen ihres Denkens, sondern auf der Übermacht der allerersten Aufgabe: vom Seienden selbst als solchem erstmalig zu sagen."

two independent events, separated in time by two thousand years of Western thought, but in fact constitute an uncanny unity. The uncanniness consists in the fact that these two events are fundamentally irreconcilable and incompatible and yet at the same time belong together in a mutual dependence, such that the making-manifest of the hidden collapse of *alētheia* is actually the final and most extreme moment of the collapse, rather than simply its unmasking or overcoming.

In following the transformation of the essence of *alētheia*, Heidegger shows that the continuity of the tradition stemming from the early Greeks is also in fact a hidden destruction. Metaphysics is shown to have been essentially ignorant of itself, to have hidden its guiding question from itself. At the end of metaphysics and the turn to this guiding-question, we are able to witness for the first time the strange unity of continuity and collapse that occurs in the history of the first beginning. But, at the moment when this becomes manifest, we are confronted with another kind of loss, more terrifying than before: once we gain the recognition of the loss of the essence of *alētheia* that is constitutive for the metaphysical questioning of beings, we also experience for the first time the impossibility of metaphysics. Metaphysics, the history of the first beginning, comes into its own only at the moment when it is impossible. The grounding-question of metaphysics, the truth of beyng, is not possible within metaphysics but nevertheless governs it. The disclosure of metaphysics in its essence, in its very beginning, is

therefore at one and the same time its end: “to understand [metaphysics] within the thinking of the crossing means to transpose what is understood into its impossibility.”¹¹⁰

This movement of thought that dares to ask the question that went necessarily unasked and unacknowledged in the first beginning is an *Übergang*, a crossing over from the first beginning to the other beginning. The other beginning is, in a sense, nothing other than the hitherto hidden essence of the first, made manifest in its self-refusal. Thus the overcoming of metaphysics is therefore not a progression beyond it, but rather a more originary grasping:

Historically grasped, this crossing [*Übergang*] is the overcoming [*Überwindung*]¹¹¹—and indeed the first and first possible overcoming—of all “metaphysics.” “Metaphysics” now first becomes recognizable in its essence [*Wesen*]; and, in thinking in the crossing, all talk of “metaphysics” becomes ambiguous. . . . What it makes manifest as determination of “metaphysics” is already no longer metaphysics, but rather its overcoming.¹¹¹

The crossing is both the disclosure of metaphysics in its essence and at the same time its overcoming. Metaphysics cannot be manifest in its essence and at the same time be possible as metaphysics; the grasping of its essence is also the closing off of any further possibility for it. This is the other side of the acknowledgement that the hiddenness of metaphysics’ origin is precisely what carries and guides it.

¹¹⁰ GA 65: 172. “Übergänglich denkerisch begreifen heißt: das Begriffene in seine Unmöglichkeit versetzen.”

¹¹¹ GA 65: 171-2. “Dieser Übergang ist geschichtlich befallen die Überwindung und zwar die erste und erstmögliche *aller* ‚Metaphysik‘. Die ‚Metaphysik‘ wird jetzt erst in ihrem Wesen erkennbar, und im übergänglichen Denken kommt alle Rede von ‚Metaphysik‘ in Zweideutigkeit. . . . Was sie als Bestimmung der ‚Metaphysik‘ sichtbar macht, das ist schon nicht mehr die Metaphysik, sondern ihre Überwindung.”

And yet, the overcoming of metaphysics, its end, does not happen as an opposition or a having-done-with. The other beginning is not a second or new beginning; it is not a discarding of past mistakes and a starting-over:

The talk of the end of metaphysics should not mislead us into believing that philosophy is finished with “metaphysics.” On the contrary: In its essential impossibility metaphysics must now first be played-forth into philosophy; and philosophy itself must be played over into its other beginning.¹¹²

The end of metaphysics is thus its (hidden) beginning. But how do we understand this beginning as determined by impossibility? What is it that begins in the crossing to the other beginning, if we are both shut out of metaphysics and yet at the same time not finished with it, but in fact only first experiencing it in its essence? It is this seemingly paradoxical situation that makes the overcoming [*Überwindung*] of metaphysics in the crossing [*Übergang*] at the same time a going-under, an *Untergang*.

The hidden collapse of *alētheia* is a decline, a loss of a more originary experience of *alētheia* that was experienced by the thinking and poetry of the early Greeks but not grounded. But the experience of this loss is deferred until the *Untergang*, the going-under, in the *Übergang*, the crossing, to the other beginning. This going-under is the manifestation of the hidden collapse of *alētheia* that is constitutive of the history of metaphysics. But whereas overcoming is understood within the history of metaphysics as transcendence, a going-beyond (*meta*), the overcoming of metaphysics is not a passing-beyond, but a more originary undergoing of it.

¹¹² GA 65: 173. “Die Rede vom Ende der Metaphysik darf nicht zur Meinung verleiten, die Philosophie sei mit der ‚Metaphysik‘ fertig, im Gegenfall: diese muß ihr jetzt erst in ihrer Wesensunmöglichkeit zugespielt und die Philosophie selbst so in ihren anderen Anfang hinüberspielt werden.”

Untergang and Overcoming

Heidegger asks, “But how is the metaphysical renunciation of beings, i.e., renunciation of metaphysics, possible without falling prey to the ‘nothing’?”¹¹³ “Falling prey to the ‘nothing’” means falling into nihilism, to giving up on truth and values. Perhaps the answer to the question lies in the word “renunciation.” For Heidegger, the nihilistic renunciation of metaphysical certitude is not an end to metaphysics but in fact its fulfillment. Thus the attempt to question the truth of being is not a renunciation of beings, although it does attempt to think being apart from them. Yet although the truth of being must be thought from out of itself, and the familiar comportment to beings must be abandoned, this does not amount to a pessimistic renunciation of beings—for that would still preserve the dependence on them. This is why, when it comes to the questioning of the truth of being, it is a matter not of renunciation, but of going-under. This difference is one of the ways in which Heidegger wants to mark the difference between a more ordinary awareness of the abandonment of being and that given by Nietzschean nihilism. Ironically, however, the term “*Untergang*” which marks for Heidegger a tragic rather than nihilistic moment in thinking at the end of metaphysics is taken directly from Nietzsche, particularly from *Zarathustra*. This highlights the deliberately precarious closeness of Heidegger’s thinking to Nietzsche, and the degree to which the danger of falling prey to the nothing is not an idle or rhetorical question: nihilism cannot be simply overcome or refused.

¹¹³ GA 65: 170. “Wie aber ist der metaphysische Verzicht auf das Seiende und d. h. der Verzicht auf die Metaphysik möglich, ohne dem ‚Nichts‘ anheimzufallen?”

In the chapter of the *Beiträge* entitled “The Ones to Come,” Heidegger announces that “*Our hour is the epoch of going-under [Untergang].*”¹¹⁴ This statement is ambiguous. On the one hand, when we understand *Untergang* in its more colloquial sense of “decline,” the statement could be read simply as an expression of the pessimism that Heidegger associates with a certain vulgar nihilism; viz., the diagnosis that the West has fallen into intractable decline and decadence. Furthermore, the thought of going-under resonates unmistakably with Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, and by extension with the Nietzschean nihilism that Heidegger takes to be the fulfillment of metaphysics. This declaration would seem, then, to be the recognition that our era is characterized by its bearing witness to—while at the same time executing—an end or death of the tradition.

And yet, on the other hand, as Heidegger makes clear, this *Untergang* is not to be thought simply as cessation and degeneration:

Taken in its essential sense, going-under means going along the path of the reticent preparing for those who are to come, for the moment, and for the site, in all of which the decision of the arrival and staying-away of Gods falls. This going-under is the very first of the first beginning.¹¹⁵

Decay and decease are the un-essence of the *Untergang*. The passing-away of going-under is not primarily a relation to the past, to what is gone by. Rather, it is essentially an under-going of what is futural, a willing to go beyond, which is at the same time a retrieval of the hidden essence, the “very first,” of the first beginning.

¹¹⁴ GA 65: 397. “*Unsere Stunde ist das Zeitalter des Untergangs.*”

¹¹⁵ GA 65: 397. “*Unter-gang, im wesentlichen Sinne gemeint, ist der Gang zur verschwiegenen Bereitung des Künftigen, des Augenblicks und der Stätte, in denen die Entscheidung über Ankunft und Ausbleib der Götter fällt. Dieser Untergang ist erstester Anfang.*”

The discussion of going-under that takes place in this section of the *Beiträge* concerns chiefly *those* who go under, the “few and the rare,” the “ones to come” who create the possibility for *dasein*’s becoming historical by sheltering truth in beings. And yet, this *Untergang* applies not just to those few, misunderstood individuals, but is definitive of our age as a whole: it is the “epoch” of going-under, and it is “ours.” In the unpublished 1937-38 text titled “*Besinnung*,” Heidegger further connects the temporality of going-under to the history of *beyng* and the play between the first beginning and the other beginning. He interprets this *Untergang*, and by extension the historicity of *beyng*, as essentially tragic:

If we see the essence of the “tragic” thus, that the beginning is the ground (*Grund*) of the going-under, but going-under not as “end,” rather as the completion/fulfillment of the beginning, then the tragic belongs to the essence of *seyn*. . . The knowledge of the beginning as the ground of the going-under that fulfills it is alone essential. If we speak of “end” out of the thought of the beginning, that means neither the cessation and deterioration, but rather the completion, developing out of the beginning and yet at the same time dependent/declining [*verfallene*], of that which the beginning, leaping over its history, sets and decides as possibilities.¹¹⁶

But how is this tragic? This connection between tragedy and decline recalls Heidegger’s quotation, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, of a passage about decline spoken by the chorus from *Oedipus Rex*.¹¹⁷ But whereas the focus in the latter is on the intertwining of

¹¹⁶ GA 66: 223. “Sehen wir das Wesen des ‚Tragischen‘ darin, daß der Anfang der Grund des Untergangs, Untergang aber nicht ‚Ende‘, sondern das Rund des Anfangs ist, dann gehört zum Wesen des Seyns das Tragische. . . Wesentlich ist allein das Wissen vom Anfang als dem Grund des ihn rundenden Untergangs. Sprechen wir aus dem Denken des Anfangs vom ‚Ende‘, dann meint dieses nie das bloße Aufhören und Nachlassen, sondern das dem Anfang gewachsene und doch ihm verfallene Vollenden dessen, was der Anfang, vorspringend seiner Geschichte, als Möglichkeiten setzt und entscheidet.”

¹¹⁷ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 114. Heidegger translates verses 1189ff. as “Who then, which man, bears more/ controlled and fitting *dasein*/ than what suffices to stand in seeming/ in order then—as one who seems—to decline?/ (namely, from standing-there-straight-in-himself)” GA 40: 115-16. “Welcher denn, welcher Mann bringt mehr/ des gebändigt—gefügtens *Daseins* bei/ denn so viel, daß er im Schein steht,/ um dann—als ein scheidender—abzubiegen?/ (nämlich aus dem Gerade-in-sich-dastehen)”

being and seeming, in the passage cited above Heidegger is concerned with the tragic tension between decline and the beginning. The fulfillment of the beginning is curiously both a completion and a depletion at one and the same time. This movement, although the “very first of the first beginning,” nevertheless indicates an end, an exhaustion of the possibilities opened and grounded by the beginning. The beginning itself is never reducible to the going-under that it grounds. Nevertheless, it is only in this going-under of what follows from the beginning that the beginning in its insurpassability is disclosed.

In a movement that recalls the analysis of being-towards-death in *Being and Time* vis-à-vis dasein, the beginning is only disclosed from out of its impossibility. The *Untergang* that Heidegger speaks of here is indeed the decline of metaphysics, but it is a decline that, so long as metaphysics has not exhausted its possibilities, remains necessarily hidden:

The first history of being, from *phusis* to the “eternal return,” is a beginning that goes under. But this history remains hidden in its course, the scene for beingness and of its presentation and production does not once know this history as background. Because the inception can only be inceptually experienced, therefore that inception and its history will only come into the open—yet never into the public—out of the other beginning of the history of being.¹¹⁸

Heidegger reads the history of metaphysics as one of hidden decline. Its hiddenness consists in the fact that this decline is at the same time a rich and great tradition. Insofar as he regards this trajectory of the understanding of being from the ancient Greeks to Nietzsche as one of going-under or decline, he is in accord with those thinkers, such as

¹¹⁸ GA 65: 223. “Die erste Geschichte des Seins, von der *phusis* bis zur ‚ewigen Wiederkehr‘, ist ein untergehender Anfang. Aber diese Geschichte bleibt in ihrem Verlauf verborgen, der Schauplatz für das Seiende und dessen Vor- und Herstellung kennt sie nicht einmal als Hintergrund. Weil der Anfang nur anfänglich erfahren werden kann, wird auch erst aus dem anderen Anfang der Seynsgeschichte jener erste und seine Geschichte ins Offene—doch nie ins Öffentliche—kommen.”

Spengler, who regard the present age as one of collapse or falling-away from the greatness of the beginning.¹¹⁹ And yet at the same time his understanding of metaphysics as an essentially tragic movement proper to the history of being marks a transformation of the nihilistic interpretation. It has to do with a certain affirmation of the negative, which frees the *Untergang* from any sort of pessimistic valuation, and places it in the domain of the tragic, which Heidegger locates as beyond and anterior to the distinction of pessimism or optimism.

The preparation for the other beginning is the attempt to think the refusal of being; to think in and through its withdrawal, and to understand its self-concealing as the truth of being. In other words, it is a matter of grasping the nothing more originarily than Nietzsche was able to do; it is a matter of retrieving the nothing from its determination as non-being, as the negative and the nihilating. “But what counts above all is grounding the *truth* of being. Only then do we take the nihilating from the insidious word *nothing* and give it the power of pointing to the ab-ysse [*ab-grund*] dimension of being.”¹²⁰ We are confronted here with two ironic, if not paradoxical, ideas. First, only when the abyssal character of being is intimated does the nothing loses its character as nihilative; and second, it is this dimension of being as abyss [*Ab-grund*] that in fact constitutes the grounding of truth. The grounding of the truth of being, which marks the overcoming of metaphysics and the crossing to the other beginning, is in fact

¹¹⁹ See “The Anaximander Fragment” where Heidegger remarks that Spengler predicted the decline of the West from Nietzsche’s philosophy, though “(all too coarsely understood).” EGT, 17.

¹²⁰ GA 65: 245. “Erst aber gilt es, die *Wahrheit* des Seyns zu gründen. Nur dann nehmen wir dem verfänglichen Wort ‚Nichts‘ das Nichtige und leihen ihm die Kraft des Hinweises auf die *Ab*-gründigkeit des Seyns.”

the exposure of its essential lack of ground, its abyssal dimension. Grounding thus has an altogether different sense than the metaphysical sense of ground as a stable, self-evident foundation. And yet the encountering of *beyng's* abyssal dimension, its essential lack of ground, is a grounding nonetheless—it makes available a more originary sense of ground than was hitherto available within metaphysics. It is this improbable jointure of grounding-ungrounding that marks a transformed character of the nothing from that of negation and lack to the essential swaying of *beyng*.

A Two-fold Unity

In the second reference to tragedy in the *Beiträge*, we note that once again it is mentioned in the context of *alētheia*. Greek tragedy is mentioned explicitly in the chapter on Ground, in section 239, “Time-Space (preparatory consideration).” In his consideration of the question of the unity of space and time, Heidegger asks about the “and,” the word that designates their belonging-together and their difference. It seems to be a matter of the between, and the ambiguity of the cleft that the between both is, and marks. He says that

the ‘and’ is in truth the ground of the essence of both [time and space]: the displacement into the boundless and presence and stability-building open, but without it itself being experienceable and groundable. Compare the simultaneous collapse of *alētheia* and the modification into *homoiosis* (correctness).

Because the experiencing-projection does not happen here in the direction of representing a general essence (*genos*), but rather in the originary-

historical entry into the site for the moment of da-sein. To what extent such a thing in Greek tragedy?¹²¹

This second reference to Greek tragedy takes place within the context of a discussion of time-space as abyss. The abyss, grasped as time-space, is “the originary essence of ground, of its grounding, *of the essence of truth*.”¹²² In the first pair of sentences quoted above, Heidegger identifies the “and” or the jointure, the belonging-together of time and space, as an originary ground, a ground that effects an essential displacement whereby space and time are placed into the open, while at the same time their ground, as belonging-together, withdraws and refuses to give itself as ground.

This impossibility of experiencing or grounding time-space itself, which occurs in its very grounding of both time and space as presence and as the open, respectively, is akin to the collapse of *alētheia* through its transformation into *homoiosis*. In both cases, the ground grounds in such a way that it shuts itself out from what it grounds: time-space is the originary root that gives the separation of time and space and yet is thereby concealed in its giving; that is, time-space gives its own impossibility by grounding the separation of time and space. Space and time both become “framing representations” for thinking and yet time-space, their shared root, is not itself representable. Similarly, the essence of *alētheia* as the jointure of unconcealment-concealment, gives and at the same time, and in its very giving, shuts itself out from the transformation of its essence as the

¹²¹ GA 65: 374. “Das ‚Und‘ in Wahrheit der Grund des Wesens beider, die Verrückung ins umgrenzende und Anwesung und Bestand bildende Offene, aber ohne daß dieses selbst erfahrbar und begründbar wurde. Vgl. Den gleichzeitigen Einsturz der *alētheia* und Umbildung zur *homoiosis* (Richtigkeit). Denn der erfahrende Entwurf geschieht hier nicht in der Richtung des Vorstellens eines allgemeinen Wesens (*genos*), sondern im ursprünglich-geschichtlichen Eingang in die Augenblicksstätte des Da-seins. Inwiefern solches in der griechischen Tragödie?”

¹²² GA 65: 379. “Der Ab-grund ist aber auch zuvor das ursprüngliche Wesen des Grundes, seines Gründens, *des Wesens der Wahrheit*.”

correct apprehension of the idea. This dynamic is the abyssal character of grounding, the staying-away of ground that, precisely in its self-refusal, first grounds as the openness of the t/here [*Da*].

Time and space, which already seem to be the most generalized frameworks for representing and calculating beings, are to be first understood from out of their origin, time-space. But this origin is not a further generalization to some third framework that designates what is common to each. As Heidegger explicitly states, there is nothing common to space and time, and yet, paradoxically, that is precisely what constitutes their originary unity:

Space is fundamentally different from time. . . from the ground up each has its ownmost essence—and only by virtue of this utmost difference do they refer back to their origin, time-space. The more purely the essence of each is preserved and the deeper the origin lies, the more successful is the grasping of their essence as time-space, which belongs to what is ownmost to truth as clearing ground for concealing.¹²³

Time and space are fundamentally different, from the ground up. This means that they cannot even belong to each other complementarily, in the unity of opposites. The essential jointure of space and time consists purely in their differing, that is, in their disjointure. The historical necessity of their breaking apart in the first beginning into space and time, is what also leads, ironically, to their being understood and defined in terms of one another in metaphysics. And yet this rejoining of space and time only

¹²³ GA 65: 377. “Der Raum ist von der Zeit grundverschieden. . . von Grund aus eigensten Wesens, und nur kraft dieser äußersten Verschiedenheit weisen sie zurück in ihren Ursprung, den Zeit-Raum. Je reiner das Eigenwesen beider gewahrt ist und je tiefer der Ursprung gelegt wird, um so eher glückt das Fassen ihres Wesens als Zeit-Raum, zugehörig dem Wesen der Wahrheit als lichtendem Grund für die Verbergung.”

further conceals their shared origin, their mutual belonging in the essential sway of time-space:

Time-space as essencing of truth (essencing of the un-grounding [*ab-gründigen*] ground) first comes to knowing-awareness in the enactment of the other beginning. But before that it continues to be concealed—and necessarily so—in the shape of the ungrasped but accustomed way of naming “space” and “time” together.¹²⁴

The onefold of time-space is also, always, two. One could say that its onefoldness consists in its being two, that is, its unity consists precisely in its essentially fractured, fissured character. It is an origin that gives to each what is ownmost to it, but which can be grasped as origin only when what is ownmost to each is brought into starkest contrast in its difference (and differing) from the other; in other words, in essential strife. As Heidegger says in section 9 of the *Vorblick*,

Time-space—the site for the moment of strife, (beyng or non-being).
Strife—the strife of earth and world, because truth of being only in sheltering, sheltering as grounding the ‘between’ in beings: The confrontation [*Auseinander*] of earth and world.¹²⁵

This means then, that time-space does not designate a particular strife. Rather, as the site for the moment of strife, the differing that occurs as time-space names a strifing that opens up the space within which strife occurs. Perhaps what is most difficult to think here is that the differing of time-space comes before and indeed makes possible any representation of time or space. But this means that in no way is there first time and space, separately, which then somehow collide with one another.

¹²⁴ GA 65: 375. “Der Zeit-Raum als Wesung der Wahrheit (Wesung des ab-gründigen Grundes) kommt erst ins Wissen im Vollzug des anderen Anfangs. Vordem aber bleibt er und zwar notwendig verhüllt in der Gestalt der unbegriffenen aber gewohnten Zusammennennung von ‚Raum‘ und ‚Zeit‘“.

¹²⁵ GA 65: 29. “Der Zeit-Raum die *Augenblicks-stätte* des Streites (Seyn oder Nichtsein). Der Streit als der Streit von *Erde und Welt*, weil Wahrheit des Seyns nur in der Bergung und diese als das gründende ‚Zwischen‘ im Seienden. Auseinander von Erde und Welt.“

The strifing of time-space thereby further determines this origin which “corresponds to the uniqueness of beyng as appropriation [*Ereignis*].”¹²⁶ The unity and onefold of time-space as the origin consists in its being the site for the moment of strife, in which time and space come into their own precisely within and as countering. But this means that appropriation (*Ereignis*), as the essencing (*Wesung*) of beyng, names a condition that is fundamentally at odds with itself. The event of appropriation is also, fundamentally, ex-propriation: “Appropriation remains the most estranging.”¹²⁷ This is why the concepts of time and space belong to their origin, time-space, the more foreign they are to it, the more they dissemble and disjoin themselves from it.

The onefold of time-space names the unity of its disparate pulls toward temporalization and spatialization, whose tension with and against one another springs not from some stable ground that they share but which is itself, as abyss [*Abgrund*], the concealed ground of what we have come to designate as those fundamental structures, space and time. “Abyss is the originary onefold of space and time, that unifying onefold that above all lets them go apart [*auseinandergehen*] into their separatedness.”¹²⁸ The emptiness of time-space, “the originary gaping open” that bespeaks its differing pulls, is most certainly not the emptiness of infinite extension or the “standing now” of infinite flux. That is, the emptiness of time-space could not be further from the emptiness according to which we conceptualize its derivatives, space and time. It is an emptiness, rather, that is an opening, the site for the moment of the t/here (*Da*). This emptiness that

¹²⁶ GA 65: 375. “Dieser Ursprung des Zeit-Raumes entspricht der Einzigkeit des Seyns als Ereignis.“

¹²⁷ GA 65: 27. “Das Ereignis bleibt das Befremdlichste.“

¹²⁸ GA 65: 379. “Der Abgrund ist die *ursprüngliche Einheit* von Raum und Zeit, jene einigende Einheit, die sie erst in ihre Geschiednis auseinandergehen läßt.“

occurs in and as the differential pulls of time-space is the grounding of da-sein, which as the “between” abides in this emptiness and holds it open, sheltering being in beings. As the site for the moment of da-sein, it is an originary strife which opens up the moment for the strifing of world and earth that da-sein is.¹²⁹

Selfhood and Sacrifice

“We cannot pass through the Who-question untouched.”¹³⁰

In the fourth chapter or jointure of the *Beiträge*, Heidegger characterizes the grounding of the truth of being as a leap [*Sprung*], a daring plunge into the abyssal fissure of being and beings. The leap is, provisionally speaking, a response to the abandonment of being, in which man himself as it were repeats this abandonment by himself leaping away from beings, from all that is familiar, abandoning beings in one single transformative motion that is both *Sprung* and, as the grounding of da-sein, *Ursprung*. In section 115, Heidegger says that the leap, which is “the most daring move in proceeding from ineptual thinking, abandons and throws aside everything familiar, expecting nothing

¹²⁹ It bears mentioning that the word da-sein itself already has this jointure of time and space inscribed within it, and it may be that time-space is just another way of determining da-sein as such: viz., da, t/here=space, and sein=time, temporalizing. Daniella Vallega-Neu makes the important connection between the hyphenation of da-sein and the development of its meaning in Heidegger’s thought: “The hyphenation of Da-sein in *Contributions* marks a shift of the meaning of the meaning of the word with respect to *Being and Time*. It no longer marks primarily human being, but the historical disclosure of the truth of being, the ‘turning point in the turning of enowning’ (C219, B311), the ‘in-between’ of humans and gods. The hyphen draws the attention of the reader to what resonates literally in this word: the ‘Da-’ which designates the opening, the t/here of the truth off being, and the ‘-sein’ which refers to the ‘abiding-in,’ the *being* of humans *in* this opening, a being out of which they first find their own essence (*Wesen*).” Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction*, 82.

¹³⁰ GA 65: 49.

from beings immediately.”¹³¹ Thus the leap is an act of daring, a sudden plunge into the unknown and uncertain, a departure from the familiar for the sake of a decisive immersion in the unfamiliar, the uncanny.

It sounds as though such a leap cannot but be an act of heroic sacrifice, accomplished by “the few and the rare.” Such a daring act is carried out only by those uncommon visionaries who bravely and courageously “go under” for the sake of grounding another relation between beyng and beings, a relation characterized by creative sheltering rather than abandonment and forgottenness. This reading of the leap into the crossing to the other beginning as an act of visionary daring, a heroic sacrifice for the sake of the other beginning, might be supported by passages such as the one found in section 19, in which we find that

whoever sacrifices himself to this preparation stands in the crossing and has grasped far ahead and thus ought not to expect any immediate understanding—as immediately urgent as that might be—from those of today. Rather he ought to *expect* resistance.”¹³²

It sounds almost as though this leap is the self-sacrifice of the romantic hero: the solitary, misunderstood visionary whose heroism is compounded by the fact that he is never recognized in his own time. And yet, immediately after this passage, we read that

Mindfulness as self-mindfulness, as it becomes necessary here following the question of the essence of beyng, is far removed from that *clara et distincta perceptio* in which the *ego* rises and becomes certain. Because selfhood—the site for the moment of the call and the belongingness—

¹³¹ GA 65: 227. “das Gewagteste im Vorgehen des anfänglichen Denkens, läßt und wirft alles Geläufige hinter sich und erwartet nichts unmittelbar vom Seienden. . .”

¹³² GA 65: 52. “Wer dieser Vorbereitung sich opfert, steht im Übergang und muß weit vorausgegriffen haben und darf vom Heutigen, so unmittelbar dringlich dies sein mag, kein unmittelbares Verstehen, allenfalls nur Widerstand erwarten.”

must first be set up for decision, the one who is in the crossing cannot know what comes unto him.¹³³

What happens to the romantic paradigm of heroic self-sacrifice when there is beforehand no stable self to sacrifice, no definite cause to sacrifice oneself for, and no knowledge of a sacrifice being made by the one who sacrifices himself? What, then, would be left to our understanding of either “self” or “sacrifice”? How do we understand the leap, if not as the act of a willing subject?

The three attunings that name the grounding-attunement of thinking in the other beginning, *das Erschrecken*, *die Verhaltenheit*, and *die Scheu* (terror, reservedness, and shyness) do not seem to be particularly heroic attunements; quite the contrary. As Heidegger acknowledges, they give over easily to their misinterpretation as a form of “frightful weakness. Thus,” he notes, “would the noisy ‘heroism’ judge it.”¹³⁴ In terms of the conventional understanding of heroism and heroic values, the grounding-attunement of thinking in the other beginning seems utterly incompatible; a manifestation of weakness and inadequacy.

The self-sacrifice of *da-sein* in the crossing is not a calculated act, and therefore it is not compatible with the conventional understanding of heroism. It is a projection that

unfolds the thrower and at the same time seizes him within what opens up. This seizure that belongs to the essential projection is the beginning of the grounding of the truth that has been achieved in the projection. What and

¹³³ GA 65: 52. “Die Besinnung als Selbst-besinnung, wie sie heir aus dem Fragen nach dem Wesen des Seyns notwendig wird, ist fern von jener clara et distincta perception, in der das *ego* aufgeht und gewiß wird. Weil erst die Selbstheit—die Augenblicksstätte des Zurufs und der Zugehörigkeit—zur Entscheidung gestellt werden muß, kann im Übergang nicht begriffen werden, was auf ihn zukommt.”

¹³⁴ GA 65: 14. “Für die Einheit dieser Stimmungen fehlt das Wort, und doch wäre es nötig, das Wort zu finden, um dem leichten Mißverständnis zu wehren, als sei hier alles auf eine feige Schwäche gestellt. So mag der lärmende ‚Heroismus‘ urteilen.”

who the thrower “is” is graspable only from within the truth of the projection, while at the same time it is also concealed.¹³⁵

The projection of da-sein in inceptual thinking is not the projection of a calculating self.

It is not even quite the same as the thrown-projection of dasein in *Being and Time*.¹³⁶

The projection of da-sein in the *Beiträge* is a throwing that throws the thrower. The leap

is the enactment of the projection of the truth of beyng in the sense of shifting into the open, such that the thrower of the projecting-open experiences itself as thrown—i.e, as ap-propriated [*er-eignet*] by beyng. . . . But thrownness is attested to only in the basic occurrences of the hidden history of beyng and indeed for us especially in the need/distress [*Not*] of the abandonment of being and in the necessity of decision.¹³⁷

The leap, then, is not a bold foray into the unknown; it is not a heroic act for the sake of some cause or goal. Rather, the leap, as projecting-open, is experienced as a being-thrown, as a displacement and a being-owned-over-to beyng. It is an experience of need/distress and compulsion that lies outside of dichotomies such as necessity and contingency, guilt and innocence, knowledge and ignorance.

We saw in the previous chapter that Heidegger’s interpretation of the *Antigone* stasimon brought out the two-fold character of dasein—a duality whose tragic character

¹³⁵ GA 65: 56. “Der Entwurf entfaltet den Entwerfer und fängt ihn zugleich ein in das durch ihn Eröffnete. Dieser zum wesentlichen Entwurf gehörige Einfang ist der Anfang der Gründung der im Entwurf errungenen Wahrheit.”

¹³⁶ GA 65: 318. “Thrownness will be experienced above all from within the truth of beyng. In the first pre-liminary interpretation (*Being and Time*) thrownness still remains misunderstandable in the sense of man’s accidentally appearing among other beings.” “Die Geworfenheit wird erst erfahren aus der Wahrheit des Seyns. In der ersten Vordeutung (Sein und Zeit) bleibt sie noch mißdeutbar im Sinne eines zufälligen Vorkommens des Menschen unter dem anderen Seienden.”

¹³⁷ GA 65: 239. “[Der Sprung] ist der Vollzug des Entwurfs der Wahrheit des Seyns im Sinne der Einrückung in das Offene, dergestalt, daß der Werfer des Entwurfs als geworfener sich erfährt, d. h. er-eignet durch das Seyn. . . . Die Geworfenheit aber bezeugt sich und bezeugt sich nur in den Grundgeschehnissen der verborgenen Geschichte des Seyns und zwar für uns zumal in der Not der Seinsverlassenheit und in der Notwendigkeit der Entscheidung.”

consists in the way that this belonging-together happens conflictually. This understanding of *dasein* is further developed in the *Beiträge*, in which Heidegger thinks *dasein* as the tensional “between,” the space in which gods and humans are first set apart and together. It is clear, then, that *dasein* is no longer simply identical with the human being, as it tends to be spoken of *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

In the *Beiträge*, this two-fold oppositionality is now understood in terms of the truth of *beyng* and the grounding of *dasein* in that truth. We find its iteration in various forms throughout the text: the joining of space-time, the ambiguous duality of *alētheia*, the event of appropriation [*Ereignis*] as at the same time an expropriation. The dual role of tragedy in Heidegger’s thought is in play throughout these iterations of conflictual unity. Perhaps Reiner Schürmann is right in identifying the profound degree to which the *Beiträge* attests to the tragic—performs it—although tragic poetry is hardly ever mentioned there. Heidegger does not direct us to this attunement, but leaves it to the reader to experience the “terror,” “distress,” “need,” and “loss” of which he speaks, in a way that eschews both nihilistic resignation and nostalgic longing for a stable foundation.

Chapter 4

The Negative as Counterturning: *Parmenides* and *Der Ister*

The metaphysics that begins with Plato within Greek thinking itself was not up to the essence of the 'negative.'¹³⁸

The *Polis*

The *Beiträge* is driven by a sense of the necessity for thinking the truth of being. Heidegger repeatedly brings out the way that this thinking entails a suffering confrontation with the two-fold, conflictual essence of *alētheia*. In two lecture courses from the early forties, *Parmenides* and *Der Ister*, Heidegger connects this two-fold character of *alētheia* to the Greek *polis*, stating that “the essence of the Greek *polis* is grounded in the essence of *alētheia*.”¹³⁹ In the *Parmenides* and *Der Ister* texts, the discussion of *dasein* as the conflictual site of human being's relation to being is reconfigured in terms of the Greek *polis*.

In contrast to his brief discussion of the *polis* in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, in the *Parmenides* text Heidegger unequivocally rejects the conventional understanding of the Greek *polis* as city-state.¹⁴⁰ Here the *polis* names the site of the destinal sending of the Greeks into historicity. It is the pole, the domain in which beings as a whole are

¹³⁸ *The Ister*, 77. GA 53: 95. “Die im griechischen Denken selbst mit Platon beginnende Metaphysik blieb dem Wesen des ‚Negativen‘ nicht gewachsen.”

¹³⁹ *Parmenides*, 89. GA 76: 132. “Dieser Bezug gilt schon deshalb, weil das Wesen der griechischen *polis* im Wesen der *alētheia* gründet.”

¹⁴⁰ In *Introduction to Metaphysics* he is not so extreme, saying merely that the understanding of *polis* as city-state “does not capture the entire sense.” IM, 162.

unconcealed, and yet, because of the conflictual belonging together of concealment and unconcealment is also a concealment, it is also the site of oblivion and distortion. It is an open space which is not itself an origin, but is the site where beings as such appear, thereby concealing their origin. The *polis* is thereby essentially related to being, though this relation is necessarily conflictual:

Because the *polis* lets the totality of beings come in this or that way into the unconcealedness of its condition, the *polis* is therefore essentially related to the being of beings. Between *polis* and “being” there is [*waltet*] an inceptual relation.¹⁴¹

The *polis* is thus determined in these texts as the site of errancy: it is the site in which being happens historically in various constellations of presencing. This inceptual relation between the *polis* and being entails that the human being be fitted into this site. The *polis* is the entry of the human being into history and thereby also the beginning of the oblivion of being.¹⁴² As the abode of historical human being, the *polis* is the site of an essential displacement, an *alethic* displacement in which humanity is shifted into its relation to beings as such, and thereby turns away from being.

Heidegger once again invokes the formulation of man as *hupsipolis-apolis*, from the *Antigone* stasimon, in order to show how the *polis*, as the abode of historical human being, places and displaces humanity into *alētheia*'s conflictual essence. This abode, therefore, is no *chez nous*:

¹⁴¹ *Parmenides*, 90. GA 54: 133. “Weil die *polis* jeweilen das Ganze des Seienden so oder so in das Unverborgene seiner Bewandnis kommen läßt, deshalb ist die *polis* wesenhaft auf das Sein des Seienden bezogen. Zwischen *polis* und ‚Sein‘ waltet ein anfänglicher Bezug.”

¹⁴² Although Heidegger does not make this connection explicitly, his analysis of the *polis* in *Parmenides* and *Der Ister* accords with his discussion of errancy in “On the Essence of Truth” §7 and “The Anaximander Fragment.”

The *polis* is the abode, gathered into itself, of the unconcealedness of beings. If now, however, as the word indicates, *alētheia* possesses a conflictual essence, which appears also in the oppositional forms of distortion and oblivion, then in the *polis* as the essential abode of man there has to hold sway all the most extreme counter-essences, and therein all excesses, to the unconcealed and to beings, i.e., counter-beings in the multiplicity of their counter-essence. Here lies concealed the primordial ground of that feature Jacob Burckhardt presented for the first time in its full bearing and manifoldness: the frightfulness, the horribleness, the atrociousness of the Greek *polis*. Such is the rise and fall of man in his historical abode of essence—*hupsipolis-apolis*—far exceeding abodes, homeless, as Sophocles calls man.¹⁴³

The Greek *polis* is therefore a violent, overwhelming place into which humanity is fitted. But the violence and excesses that are proper to this site bespeak the conflictual essence of *alētheia* in which the *polis* is grounded. The *polis* is the site in which beings as such are disclosed to man, and yet this disclosure is also essentially a refusal and concealment. Man is delivered over, destined to this site of disclosure and oblivion. As man's essential abode, the *polis* drives humanity to the limits of its essential possibilities.

In a way that recalls the *Zerklüftung* of *dasein* in the *Beiträge*, this site rends historical humanity asunder, driving it to two extremes at once. The *polis* names the pole around which beings are gathered. In sense, this pole is nothing other the event of man's standing in the midst of beings as a whole.¹⁴⁴ Yet this standing-in-the-midst-of is in fact

¹⁴³ *Parmenides*, 90. GA 54: 133-4. "Die *polis* ist die in sich gesammelte Stätte der Unverborgenheit des Seienden. Wenn nun aber, wie das Wort sagt, zur *alētheia* das streithafte Wesen gehört, und wenn das Streithafte auch im Gegensätzlichen der Verstellung und der Vergessung erscheint, dann muß in der *polis* als der Wesensstätte des Menschen alles äußerste Gegenwesen und darin alles Un-wesen zum Unverborgenen und zum Seienden, d. h. das Unseiende in der Mannigfaltigkeit seines Gegenwesens, walten. Hier ist der anfängliche Grund für jene Erscheinung verborgen, die in ihrer vollen Tragweite und Mannigfaltigkeit zum ersten Mal Jacob Burckhardt dargestellt hat: es ist die Furchtbarkeit, das Grauenhafte, das Unheil, was zur griechischen *polis* gehört. Das ist der Aufstieg und Absturz des Menschen in seiner geschichtlichen Wesensstätte—*upsipolis-apolis*—hochüberragend die Stätte, verlustig der Stätte nennt Sophokles (*Antigone*) den Menschen."

¹⁴⁴ *The Ister*, 81. "The essentially "polar" character of the *polis* concerns beings as a whole. The polar concerns beings in that around which such beings, as manifest, themselves turn. The human being is then

a constant displacement: humanity is fitted into the *polis* only insofar as it is essentially driven both above and below it. As Heidegger says in the *Der Ister* course regarding this Sophoclean formulation,

It is the essence of the *polis* to thrust one into excess and to tear one into downfall, and in such a way that the human being is destined and fitted into both these counterturning possibilities and thus must be these two possibilities themselves.¹⁴⁵

In accordance with the human being's two fold, conflictual essence, the *polis* is the abode of man only insofar as it drives him to these two possibilities. The *polis* is the site of human *tolma* or daring, in which man's relation to beings as such thrusts him high above the site and at the same time destroys him, driving him out of it. It is the field in which the violent encounter with beings comes to pass. Man's relation to the *polis* is essentially always an opposition to it: either above it (*hupsi-*), or deprived of it (*a-*), man's abode consists in a counterturning relation.

related in an exceptional sense to this pole, insofar as human beings, in understanding being, stand in the midst of beings and here necessarily have a "status" in each case, a stance in their instances and circumstances." GA 53: 100. Das wesenhaft ‚Polare‘ der polis geht das Seiende im Ganzen an. Das Polare betrifft das Seiende in dem, worum es, das Seiende als das offenbare, sich dreht. Auf diesen Pol ist dann der Mensch in einem ausgezeichneten Sinne bezogen, sofern der Mensch, das Sein verstehend inmitten des Seienden steht und hier notwendig jeweils inen ‚status‘, einen Stand mit seinen Zuständen und Umständen hat."

¹⁴⁵ *The Ister*, 86. GA 53: 107. "das Wesen der *polis* ist es, in die Übersteigerung zu drängen und in den Sturz zu reißen, so, daß der Mensch in beide gegenwendigen Möglichkeiten geschickt und gefügt wird und dergestalt beide Möglichkeiten selbst sein muß."

Tragedy and the *Polis*

Heidegger remarks on his reference to Sophocles' formulation of man as *hupsipolis-apolis* by referring Greek tragedy back to the essence of *alētheia*, just as he does with the Greek *polis* generally:

It is not by chance that man is spoken of in this way in Greek tragedy. For the possibility and the necessity of "tragedy" itself has its single source in the conflictual essence of *alētheia*. There is only *Greek* tragedy and no other besides it. Only the essence of being as experienced by the Greeks has this inceptual character that "the tragic" becomes a necessity there.¹⁴⁶

Heidegger's description of man's relation to the *polis* recalls the fate of Oedipus, whereby he remains the savior of Thebes from its plague only insofar as he is also its *pharmakon*—cast out and impure. We might also think of Creon's insistence on the ascendancy of law, and the way in which the very enactment of his lordship over the state is the source of his undoing. Tragic poetry reveals the way in which the *polis* is founded on the conflictual essence of *alētheia*. The Greekness of tragedy and the tragic is due to the distinctively Greek experience of being in the first beginning. But if tragedy and "the tragic" are essentially Greek, and belong to an experience of being that is lost in Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics, then can the loss of this experience also be understood as tragic? How do we account for our sense that Heidegger understands the end of metaphysics and the crossing to the other beginning according to a tragic necessity, if the

¹⁴⁶ *Parmenides*, 90. GA 54: 134. "Nicht zufällig fällt dieses Wort über den Menschen in der griechischen Tragödie. Denn aus dem einzigen Grunde des streithaften Wesens der *alētheia* entspringt die Möglichkeit und Notwendigkeit der ,Tragödie' selbst. Es gibt nur die *griechische* Tragödie und keine andere außerdem. Nur das Wesen des griechisch erfahrenen Seins hat die Anfänglichkeit, das ,das Tragische' hier zur Notwendigkeit wird."

necessity and possibility of tragedy belong to the first beginning? What does tragedy have to do with Heidegger's own time and place, not to mention politics?

In order to begin to approach this question, we must look in more detail at his interpretation of tragedy in his course on Hölderlin's "Der Ister." For there, his turn to tragic poetry takes place precisely within the context of the relation between Greece and Germany, in the mutual disclosure that occurs in the relation between Sophocles' and Hölderlin's poetry. This mutual disclosure is related to the disclosure of the first beginning from out of the other beginning that Heidegger attempts to prepare in the *Beiträge*.

The Politics of the Uncanny

The fact that Heidegger returns, in his 1942 lecture course on Hölderlin's hymn, "Der Ister," to the same choral ode from *Antigone* that he discusses at length in *Introduction to Metaphysics* has made it a natural point of comparison for some commentators. It is an opportunity to use the later interpretation as a gauge for the changes in Heidegger's thought during the war years, and some have read the differences between the interpretations as chiefly significant for their bearing on the question of Heidegger and the political. Fóti, for example, reads tragedy as the site of Heidegger's encrypted confrontation with National Socialism, and notes that "it remains somewhat strange that an intellectual confrontation with a genocidal ideology and regime should

proceed through Greek tragedy with its focus on the undoing of an individual.”¹⁴⁷ It remains an open question whether Heidegger’s remarks on tragedy are primarily a vehicle for his challenge to National Socialism. But to criticize Heidegger for failing to heed Greek tragedy’s “focus on the undoing of an individual” does not speak to the problem. Such an understanding of tragedy is Aristotelian, and is for Heidegger, therefore, precisely the sort of metaphysical determination of tragedy that he resists and rejects.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the two interpretations that commentators with an eye to the political have seized upon is the change from, as Fóti puts it, “a rhetoric of power to a rhetoric of alienation.”¹⁴⁸ Whereas the 1935 interpretation stresses the violent character of the uncanny, the later interpretation emphasizes the way in which the *unheimlich*, the uncanny, is the *unheimisch*, the unhomelike. Yet as we have already seen in Heidegger’s discussion of the *polis* in the *Parmenides* course, he continues to emphasize the way in which the the essential abode of man, is a uniquely inhospitable place.

In comparison to his earlier discussion of *Antigone*, in the 1942 interpretation Heidegger gives much more attention to the closing lines of the *stasimon* which banish the unlawful or uncanny one from the hearth. Michael Zimmerman connects the shift of emphasis in the *Antigone* interpretations from masculine violence to the feminine space of hearth and home to Heidegger’s “changing vision of Germany’s tragic destiny.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Fóti, “Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Sophoclean Tragedy,” 165.

¹⁴⁸ Fóti, 173.

¹⁴⁹ Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity*, 118.

Kathleen Wright sees the interpretations of Hölderlin in the forties as part of an attempt at covering up and eliding the earlier, “militantly political version of the essence of poetry and poetic dwelling.”¹⁵⁰ She regards these shifts in his thinking about the essence of poetry as indicative of a “quietism” on Heidegger’s part that parallels his political failings. Those commentators who look to Heidegger’s texts on the essence of poetry primarily for indications of his political commitments are often rewarded for their efforts. While the political is certainly in play and at stake, as is evident from the remarks on the *polis* in the *Antigone* interpretations, their criticisms are often based on a distinctively modern understanding of the political. The irony is that Heidegger’s texts on poetry, insofar as they are “political,” seek to challenge and problematize the very same understanding of the ethical and political realm that some of his critics unquestionably assume in making their arguments.

Detour through the Uncanny

Earlier we raised the question of the relation between tragedy, which Heidegger regards as essentially Greek, and its relevance to Heidegger’s own time, to the end of the metaphysical tradition, and the fate of the West. We can begin to address this by turning to the 1942 interpretation of *Antigone*, which is imbedded in a discussion of Hölderlin’s river hymns. I say imbedded, and yet, as is often the case with these ostensible detours and digressions by Heidegger, his interpretation threatens to overshadow the stated subject matter: the material devoted to Sophocles in the lecture course makes up over a

¹⁵⁰ Kathleen Wright, “Heidegger and the Authorization of Hölderlin’s Poetry,” 165.

third of the whole. Whereas in *Introduction to Metaphysics* tragic poetry serves as an aid to understanding Parmenides, in the second case a special connection between Hölderlin and Sophocles is the stated reason for turning (and returning) to the same *stasimon*.

It is not just that Hölderlin is profoundly influenced by Sophocles, and by this choral ode in particular. What is at issue for Heidegger in Hölderlin's river hymns is the relation to the foreign, and the necessity of journeying through the foreign so as to come home to one's own. This journey is played out on several levels at once: not only within the hymns, in the figure of the river Ister which comes from the east and flows backwards, but in the German poet's encounter with the Greek tragedian, which is for Heidegger also then the site of a destinal connection between Germany and Greece. Hölderlin's engagement with "a singular poetic work of a singular poet" is the site of the very relation to the foreign that Hölderlin, in turn, poetizes in his river hymns.

[Hölderlin's] poetizing is itself the historical being of Western human beings as historical. Such poetizing must therefore remain in historical dialogue with those foreign poets who, in their own way, poetized the essence of human beings with respect to this becoming homely. The pure fulfillment of this poetic necessity in the foreign land of the Greeks is a choral song in the *Antigone* tragedy by Sophocles.¹⁵¹

The poetic meditation on becoming homely by passing through the foreign thus demands that this mediation itself partake in such a passage. Thus it is not surprising that Heidegger himself not only follows but even attenuates this detour in his own lecture course. Although it is true, as others have noted, that the section on the *Antigone* tends to

¹⁵¹ *The Ister*, 64-5. GA 53: 79. "Das Dichten dieses Dichters ist selbst das Geschichtlichsein des geschichtlichen abendländischen Menschen. Dieses Dichten muß daher in der geschichtlichen Zwiesprache mit jenen fremden Dichtern bleiben, die das Wesen des Menschen in der Hinsicht auf sein Heimischwerden in ihrer Weise gedichtet haben. Die reine Erfüllung dieser dichterischen Notwendigkeit im fremden Lande der Griechen ist ein Chorgesang in der *Antigone*-Tragödie des Sophokles."

dominate the lecture course, this seems to be, as it were, internally justified.¹⁵² For it is only fitting that the passage through the foreign threaten to engulf and overtake those who risk the journey, lest such a passage devolve into mere tourism. The encounter with the foreign is a leap, an abandonment of the familiar, and a coming-to-be-at-home only through the utter loss of home. Thus it is not surprising that the discussion of Sophocles in the lecture course not only seems to leave the Hölderlinian text behind, but in fact threatens to dominate the whole: that is precisely the experience of the foreign that Heidegger is trying to draw out in Hölderlin's hymns. We can see at work an instance of the "counterturning" that Heidegger speaks of so often in this text, in the *Beiträge*, and elsewhere. By not "doing justice" to Hölderlin's poems, by marginalizing them and digressing from them perhaps to excess, he is in a sense giving heed to them in a more essential way than if he were to remain in the role of the dutiful literary critic. By turning away from the hymns, he also turns back to them in a manner that echoes the counterflow of the Ister.¹⁵³

Uncanny ground

Another way in which the discussion of *Antigone* in the "Der Ister" course differs from its predecessor is that Heidegger does not simply confine himself to the first

¹⁵² Fóti notes, for example, that the discussion of *Antigone* in the "Der Ister" course "tends to marginalize the Hölderlinian text at issue." "Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Sophoclean Tragedy, 165.

¹⁵³ This is also why the charges of interpretive violence against Hölderlin that commentators such as Wright and Fóti make against Heidegger strike me as earnest yet misguided. For not only does Heidegger readily acknowledge such violence, or at least the appearance of it, in his interpretations, but it is also clear—and Fóti and Wright are certainly aware of this, yet persist in the approach anyway—that Heidegger is not interested in demonstrating a loyalty to the text, if loyalty be measured by any sort of literary critical standards, i.e., what the poems "really" say, what Hölderlin "really" meant, or didn't, etc.

stasimon, but draws upon material from the rest of the drama—for example, the dialogue between Antigone and Ismene. Nevertheless, he continues to focus on the same three paradoxical Sophoclean formulations around which he organizes his 1935 interpretation: *to deinotaton*, *pantoporos aporos*, and *hupsipolis apolis*. To this he adds a fourth, the banishment from the *hestia* (hearth).

One could say, however, that the interpretation never really leaves the first line of the poem. The overarching concern of Heidegger’s second interpretation is, like the first, *to deinon*. On the one hand, Heidegger’s translation of *to deinon* as the “unhomelike” rather than the “uncanny” seems to narrow the determination of this word in order to speak to the Hölderlinian context of homecoming and the foreign. And yet, it is within such a discussion of *to deinon* as the unhomelike that he insists on its startlingly broad significance:

The first two lines of the first strophe, which appear to be the prelude to the whole choral ode but in truth point to its inner middle; indeed, they are the essential ground of this tragedy, and even of Sophocles’ poetic work as a whole.¹⁵⁴

As if it weren’t a startling enough claim to extrapolate the significance of the lines announcing man’s essence as *to deinotaton* to the ground of the entire play, he goes further and calls it the ground of Sophocles’ poetry as a whole. And yet, a little while later, Heidegger goes even further. He says that this word is

¹⁵⁴ *The Ister*, 60. GA 53: 73. “Die beiden ersten Verse (333/34) der ersten Strophe, die dem ganzen Chorlied das Vorspiel zu sein scheinen, in Wahrheit aber auf seine innere Mitte hinweisen, ja der Wesensgrund dieser Tragödie, ja sogar der Sophokleischen Dichtung im Ganzen sind.”

The fundamental word of this tragedy, indeed of Greek tragedy in general, and thereby the fundamental word of Greek antiquity.¹⁵⁵

Thus it is not just the case that tragedy is distinctively Greek; it seems that Greek antiquity itself is essentially tragic insofar as it is founded on *to deinotaton*.

But to speak of the fundamental word of Greek antiquity is to speak it only out of a confrontation or encounter, an *Auseinandersetzung*, with the foreign, that is, with the German. The resonance between Hölderlin and Sophocles is a “historical-poetic necessity within that history in which the being at home and being unhomely of Western humankind is decided.”¹⁵⁶ Human beings are *to deinotaton* because becoming homely is being unhomely. Here we see that he joins together two apparent sets of opposites at once: being and becoming, the homely and the unhomely. Only by *being* unhomely does the human being *become* homely. This is why the passage through the foreign in no way resembles a kind of ontological tourism, but is instead the experience of the belonging-together of the foreign and what is one’s own. One can read the dynamic of *Ereignis-Enteignis*, appropriation-expropriation, with its play on the *eigen*, the ownmost, as another formulation of this unity of the homely and the unhomely.

As the uncanniest, human beings are never simply at home, but can only move toward being homely in such a way that they continually suffer being shut out from it. Their relation to the homely is always a negative one, an experience of its refusal. And

¹⁵⁵ *The Ister*, 67. GA 53: 82. “das Grundwort dieser Tragödie, ja der griechischen Tragödie überhaupt und damit das Grundwort des Griechentums.”

¹⁵⁶ *The Ister*, 56. GA 53: 69. “eine geschichtlich-dichterische Notwendigkeit innerhalb der Geschichte, in der sich das Heimisch- und Unheimischsein des abendländischen Menschentums entscheidet.”

yet this is not just any sort of negativity. The character of this negative relation is all-important:

The adventurer is merely not-homely, the *deinotatos*, by contrast, is the most uncanny being in a specific manner of being homely, namely that which, within its own essence, finds no entry to this essence, remains excluded from it and without any way out that could allow it to enter the center of its own essence. The one who is properly unhomely relates back precisely to the homely, and to this alone, yet does so in the manner of not attaining it. . . . The unhomely one is deprived of the homely; deprivation is the way in which the unhomely one possesses the homely, or to put it more precisely, the way in which whatever is homely possesses the unhomely one. What becomes manifest in these relations is the essence of uncanniness itself, namely, presencing in the manner of an absencing, and in such a way that whatever presences and absences here is itself simultaneously the open realm of all presencing and absencing.”¹⁵⁷

Heidegger insists upon the essential difference between two ostensible synonyms: the not-homely and the un-homely. It is not as though the human being simply and fundamentally lacks a home, is home-less, or that humankind’s unhomeliness bespeaks some essential inadequacy or failure. Such an understanding of the privative character of the unhomely is what Heidegger would call the pessimistic or despairing interpretation of the negative. By contrast, the essence of uncanniness that Heidegger points to here is an unhomeliness that has an inner, counterturning relation to the homely despite, and yet because of, its character as deprivation. The homeliness of humankind’s essence consists in its being shut out of the homely toward which it constantly strives. This

¹⁵⁷ *The Ister*, 74-5. GA 53: 91-2. “Der Abenteurer ist lediglich nicht-heimisch; dagegen ist der *deinotatos* das unheimlichste Wesen in einer Art des Heimischseins, in jener nämlich, die innerhalb des eigenen Wesens nicht den Eingang zu diesem findet, von ihm ausgesperrt bleibt und ohne den Ausweg zum Eingang in die eigene Wesensmitte. Der eigentlich Unheimische bezieht sich gerade auf das Heimische und nur auf dieses zurück, aber in der Weise des Nichterlangens. . . . Der Unheimische entbehrt das Heimische, das Entbehren ist die Art, wie der Unheimische das Heimische besitzt, genauer gesagt, die Weise, wie dieses, das Heimische, jenen, den Unheimischen, besitzt. In diesen Bezügen offenbart sich das Wesen der Unheimlichkeit selbst; nämlich die Anwesenheit in der Art einer Abwesenheit, so zwar, daß das An- und Abwesende selbst hier zugleich der offene Bereich aller Anwesenheit und Abwesenheit ist.”

counterturning relation is a positive moment of this negation, just as it is a “presencing in the manner of an absencing.”

Nihilism and the Negative

This distinction between the two senses of the negative is a crucial one for understanding Heidegger’s thought, not only with respect to the interpretation of the choral ode, but for his understanding of tragedy and of the Greek world in general. As we have already seen, these are importantly bound together and in a sense equated in remarks that he makes elsewhere in the same text. Ultimately, the difference between nihilism and the tragic hinges on the way in which the negative is thought and experienced. This is one of the things that become clear in the 1942 interpretation of Sophocles’ ode.

Through his interpretation of the four key moments in the ode, all of which speak to this counterturning dynamic, Heidegger seeks to unfold the essence of the negative, for which tragedy is the site, in a way that escapes its determination by Platonism, German Idealism, or nihilism. This means that the negative is neither devalued as mere lack, nor subsumed into the absolute. These metaphysical determinations of the essence of the negative do not, he says, touch upon its essential origin.¹⁵⁸ The paradoxical joinings expressed by the *pantoporos-aporos*, *hupsipolis-apolis*, and *to deinotaton* bring to language a more originary experience of the negative. This counterturning essence of the negative is not possible within metaphysics, and yet precisely on the basis of this

¹⁵⁸ *The Ister*, 78.

impossibility, metaphysics is ineluctably related to and determined by it—that is, negatively. The counterturning essence of the negative is nothing other than this very relation. The designation of the human essence as the *deinotaton* makes manifest something originary about the negative, but the significance of this unfolding is not simply a matter of revising our understanding of the relation between humankind and beings. What is at stake is the essence of the truth of being as this counterturning dynamic. The human being is the uncanniest by virtue of its relation to being—as the open abode for the manifestation of beings which for that very reason is shut out of having an abode: “Whatever human beings undertake turns in itself—and not in the first instance in any adverse consequences—counter to what humans are fundamentally seeking from it, namely, becoming homely in the midst of beings.”¹⁵⁹ The unhomely is not something that human beings do or accomplish, but is rather an appropriation of their essence by being that they undergo. Only by virtue of suffering this appropriation by being which is also an expropriation, by this reversal and taking over of their essence by being, do human beings come into their own as the open space of the appearing of beings. This suffering and enduring—*pathein*—constitutes the action of Greek tragedy, and yet for this reason the action of tragedy is not an action in the familiar sense of the term. It is the human being’s suffering of its own uncanniness.

“The tragic” is not to be measured, as modern human beings think, according to the passion of which we can have a psychological “lived experience” and that belongs to the person of genius, but rather according to the truth of being as a whole and in keeping with the simplicity in

¹⁵⁹ *The Ister*, 84. GA 53: 104. “Das, was der Mensch unternimmt, wendet sich in sich selbst, nicht erst in irgendwelchen schlimmen Folgen, gegen das, was er dabei im Grunde sieht, nämlich das Heimischwerden inmitten des Seienden.”

which it appears. This is why in the Greek tragedy virtually nothing occurs. It commences with the downgoing [*Niedergang*].¹⁶⁰

Greek tragedy begins with this downgoing or decline. This suffering of the uncanny, this enduring rather than fleeing it, is the preservation of the counterturning character of the human essence. And yet to endeavor to preserve such an inner reversibility is, in a sense, to run counter to its own essential instability. The superlative character of the *deinon* consists in this doubling over of the countering relations, in which the sustaining of the counterturning runs counter to—and therefore at the same time raises to an even higher level—the reversibility of this relation. For Heidegger, this accounts for the Greek experience of the uncanny and its relation to metaphysics:

At that historical moment when one side of the counterturning character of being is devalued as the lesser and lower, the Greek world falls out of the orbit of its essence and its downfall [*Niedergang*] has been decided.¹⁶¹

Heidegger is referring here to the onset of metaphysics from within Greek thought in Plato. The downfall, the decline has been decided as soon as the essence of the negative conceals itself in its counteressence. The history of Western thought from Plato through Nietzsche is essentially un-essential: it is the result of having fallen away from the essence of the Greek world. Yet how is this not simply a Christian narrative of a fall, an expulsion not from Eden but from the hearth of being?

¹⁶⁰ *The Ister*, 103. GA 53: 128. “‘Das Tragische’ bemißt sich nicht, wie der moderne Mensch meint, nach der psychologisch ‚erlebbarer‘ Leidenschaftlichkeit der genialen Persönlichkeit, sondern nach der Wahrheit des Seins im Ganzen und nach der Einfachheit, in der es erscheint. Deshalb geschieht in der griechischen Tragödie fast nichts. Sie fängt an mit dem Untergang.”

¹⁶¹ *The Ister*, 77. GA 53: 95. “In dem geschichtlichen Augenblick, da die eine Seite im Gegenwendigen des Seins zum Minderen und Unteren herabgewertet wird, fällt das Griechentum aus der Bahn seines Wesens heraus und der Niedergang ist entschieden.”

It is not coincidental, as Nietzsche has shown, that the beginning of metaphysics is also the end of Greek tragedy. The inception of metaphysics is here characterized as a downgoing or decline, but ironically one of the traits of this falling away from the essence is that tragedy, which “commences in downgoing,” is no longer possible. The downgoing that Greek tragedy commences, and which it opens up and makes possible, is what also necessitates the downgoing that renders tragedy itself impossible. It shuts itself out of its own essence, which is presumably why Heidegger says that Sophocles’ poetizing of the uncanny is the first and the last time in the Greek world that it is spoken. This tensional dynamic whereby tragedy is a *Niedergang* which thereby makes possible its own impossibility—is one reason why this narrative of the inception of metaphysics is not a Christian one. For, in a concealed way, the counterturning essence of being is preserved, yet only negatively, precisely in withholding itself and thereby depriving us of its essence.¹⁶² The second reason why this is not a Christian narrative—which Heidegger finds to be utterly incompatible with the experience of the tragic, and that means, of Greek antiquity—is that this experience of the uncanny was never fully and essentially unfolded, even by Sophocles. Unhomeliness—which names our fundamentally being shut out from the homely—is itself shut out from us.

Becoming homely does not mean overcoming the unhomely, but marks a transformation of the way in which human beings relate to their own unhomeliness:

¹⁶² Heidegger designates this tragic counterturning dynamic as a kind of inner opposition in order to avoid the misunderstanding that he is describing an empty unity of opposites, or a dialectical logic of opposition and sublimation. And yet this remains a very difficult aspect of his thought, as is perhaps only appropriate. Heidegger repeatedly insists throughout his writings that an oppositional stance or a reversal, for example Nietzsche’s overturning of Platonism, does not escape that which it opposes. He criticizes such oppositional thinking as self-deceiving, insofar as it refuses to acknowledge its tacit commitment to that against which it defines itself, and is therefore determined by.

Finding what is fitting in being unhomely is becoming homely.
 Preserving such becoming is that being historical that attains its essential fullness when it comes to know what has been fittingly destined for it as that which has already been.¹⁶³

Hence humanity's becoming homely has a historical, temporal aspect: it is the disclosure of its having being destined. Humanity can come to know what has been destined for it only once this destining is passed—once it is, in a sense, too late. And yet this coming to know of the destined only once it has already been is not a cause for resignation or pessimism regarding humanity's essential ignorance. This is because such a disclosure of humanity's historical destining is also necessarily futural:

But if we continue to speak of peoples who have “declined” and the “declined” Greek world, what then do we know of the essence of historical decline? What if the decline of the Greek world were that event by which the primordial essence of being and of truth would be secured back in its own concealedness and thereby first become futural? What if “decline” would not be end but beginning? Every Greek tragedy narrates the decline. Every one of these declines is a beginning and dawning of the essential.¹⁶⁴

It is not just that Greek tragedy commences with a downgoing; rather, in an important sense the downgoing is a commencement, an inception. Heidegger locates in the Greeks the dawn of Western humanity. But, once we take the tragic aspect of the relation between the first Greek beginning and the other beginning into account, it becomes clear that Heidegger is not claiming in the Greek thinkers and poets a kind of home in the

¹⁶³ *The Ister*, 128. GA 53: 159. “Das Findenn des Schicklichen im Unheimischsein ist das Heimischwerden. Die Bewahrung dieses Werdens ist das Geschichtlichsein, das zu seiner Wensfülle gelangt, wenn es das im Zugeschickte als das schon Gewesene erkennt.”

¹⁶⁴ *Parmenides*, 113. GA 54: 167-8. “Wenn wir aber schon von ‚untergegangenen; Völkern und vom ‚untergegangenen‘ Griechentum reden, was wissen wir denn vom Wesen des geschichtlichen Untergangs? Wie, wenn der Untergang des Griechentums jenes Ereignis wäre, wodurch das anfängliche Wesen des Seins und der Wahrheit in seine eigene Verborgenheit zurückgeborgen und damit erst zukünftig wird? Wie, wenn ‚Untergang‘ nicht Ende, sondern Anfang sein müßte? Jede griechische Tragödie sagt den Untergang. Jeder dieser Untergänge ist ein Anfang und Aufgang des Wesenhaften.”

sense of a fully present origin. The tragic attunement of Heidegger's thinking at the end of metaphysics is not the mourning of a bygone origin from which we have irremediably fallen away, but is instead a courage for what is to come based on an acknowledgement of the concealed essence of being and truth.

Before the beginning

In the *Parmenides* and *Der Ister* courses, as we have seen, Heidegger not only interprets Sophoclean poetry, but he remarks on the essential Greekness of tragedy. He goes so far as to remark that the poetizing of the human being as *to deinotaton* is not only the fundamental word of all tragic poetry, but of Greek antiquity as such. But *to deinotaton* names the essential withdrawing of origin: the way in which humanity comes into its own only by being shut out of its home. One of the most distressing aspects of this dynamic is that Western humanity does not even experience this refusal, much less experience it as proper to its own essence. Greek tragedy seems to occupy a strange and perhaps uncanny place in this dynamic. On the one hand, it belongs ineluctably to a world that has long been closed to us, and yet our relation to this closure and refusal seems to be understood by Heidegger as a tragic narrative, whereby we do not even experience this refusal until it is too late. In the next, final chapter, we will examine more closely the way in which tragedy governs Heidegger's understanding of the counterturning relation between the end of metaphysics and its beginning.

Chapter 5

The Essence of Tragedy

They do not understand how, differing with itself, it agrees with itself: a backward-turning harmony like that of the bow and the lyre.—Heraklitus, Frag. 51

Beginning at the End

The last reference to tragedy that appears in the Heideggerian corpus occurs in the 1946 essay, “The Anaximander Fragment.” Here Heidegger treats the “oldest known fragment of Western thinking.”¹⁶⁵ It was originally published in 1950 as the last piece in the collection *Holzwege*. The volume contains essays written during the years 1935-1946, and spans the period of time in which references to tragedy appear with the most frequency and emphasis in Heidegger’s work. Although the essay is ostensibly an interpretation of the oldest known fragment of Greek thinking, and hence a return to the very beginning of the Western tradition, Heidegger makes it clear that this gesture of return is governed by a sense of our own lateness, of standing at a point of crisis and end with respect to the West.

It would seem that what Heidegger discovers in the Anaximander fragment, which stands at the dawn of the Western tradition, can only be heard from out of this tradition’s passing. This movement of reversal, in which the beginning is only disclosed

¹⁶⁵ *Early Greek Thinking*, 13. *Holzwege*, 321: “der älteste Spruch des abendländischen Denkens.”

at the end, will in the end be important for understanding the place of the tragic in relation to Heidegger's thinking at the end of metaphysics.

Ultimately, the essay is less concerned with rendering a careful reading of the Anaximander fragment—Heidegger assertively dismisses the “philologically enlightened” approaches to the fragment while at the same time demonstrating his familiarity with the classical scholarship—than it is with experiencing the destinal character of being.¹⁶⁶ This turning against the usual philological and historiological methods is not an act of pique but is intrinsic to his purpose in returning to the fragment in the first place: the abandonment of these methods and certainties, though distressing, is a way of acknowledging the fundamental confusion regarding being that has, in a hidden way, sustained the West.

The fragment will never engage us so long as we only explain it historiologically and philologically. Curiously enough, the saying first resonates when we set aside the claims of our own familiar ways of representing things, as we ask ourselves in what the confusion of the contemporary world's fate consists.¹⁶⁷

We first come to hear this fragment when we turn against our usual way of representing the past, in which we focus on what we know of Anaximander of Miletus and his world, and instead ask ourselves about our own world, about its future possibilities. With these assertions about how we might begin to translate the fragment, Heidegger suggests a

¹⁶⁶ As Karin de Boer remarks, “Comparing Heidegger's texts on Anaximander with the fragment of Anaximander itself cannot but result in disappointment. The fragment is questioned, but not for its own sake: it functions merely as a point of departure, that is, as one of the possible ways of turning our attention towards the concern of thinking as such.” “Giving Due,” 153.

¹⁶⁷ EGT, 57. *Holzwege*, 372. “Darum wird der Spruch nie ansprechen, solange wir ihn nur historisch und philologisch erklären. Der Spruch spricht seltsamerweise erst darauf an, daß wir unsere eigenen Ansprüche des gewohnten Vorstellens ablegen, indem wir bedenken, worin die Wirnis des jetzigen Weltgeschickes besteht.”

reversal and inversion of our usual, linear understanding of time and of origination as such. Oddly, the saying only begins to speak when we seemingly turn our back on it and look ahead, to the fate of the West. The beginning of Western thought may turn out to lie ahead of us, still to be disclosed as what has been. By 'beginning at the end,' it is no longer clear what, exactly, is proper to either.

End and Origin

The Anaximander fragment is the oldest known saying of the Western philosophical tradition and therefore occupies a place at its beginning, if not its origin. And yet Heidegger is not interested in the fragment simply because of its age or special status as the oldest of its kind. The fragment's originarity is governed not by chronology but by the way in which the essence of the West does or does not come to language there. Not only is the fragment designated as belonging to the origin of the West, but it also speaks of origin: *ex hon de he genesis*, the first words of the fragment, have traditionally been understood to speak of that from which all beings have their origin. Strangely, the fragment seems to turn back upon itself, commenting on itself as origin. In speaking of the origin, it places itself or is placed back into the originarity that it opens up. The fragment, though hardly understood, stands as a source text for the Western tradition. But what necessitates our return to the fragment now, when the Greek world to which it belonged is irretrievably gone from us, and has been for thousands of years?

In a reversal of all expectation, Heidegger insists that the fragment's distance from us—if it is distant—consists not in its belonging to a by-gone antiquity but in fact

lies ahead of us, outdistancing all that is contemporary. How do we comport ourselves to our origin when its disclosure as origin is still to come? Are we, like Oedipus, consigned to an ignorance of our origin whose revelation will come only once it is far too late? Will the reversal of this ignorance concerning the origin of the West, if it ever does come, be just as horrifying a *peripeteia* as that of the tragic hero?

The antiquity pervading the Anaximander fragment belongs to the dawn of early times in the land of evening [*Abend-ländes*]. But what if that which is early outdistanced everything late; if the very earliest far surpassed the very latest? What once occurred in the dawn of our destiny would then come, as what once occurred, at the last (*eschaton*), that is, at the departure of the long-hidden destiny of being. The being of beings is gathered (*legesthai, logos*) in the ultimacy of its destiny. The essence of being hitherto disappears, its truth still veiled. The history of being is gathered in this departure.¹⁶⁸

The gesture of returning to the oldest fragment of Western thinking, to its origin, belies the fact that it is necessitated by our situation at the opposite extremity, at the end of the tradition begun there.

The suggestion that the fragment holds the promise of a hitherto unsaid and therefore unthought beginning defies the logic of a tradition that tries to take hold of its own origins and to grasp the origin as pure presence. Our current situation as “latecomers” to the Western tradition may turn out to have been governed all along by the force of a hidden beginning—a beginning that only discloses itself to us as such once the possibilities that it has released have exhausted themselves. The disclosure of the earliest saying of Western thought, which can only occur at this late hour, means that we

¹⁶⁸ EGT, 18. *Holzwege*, 327. “Das Altertum, das den Spruch des Anaximander bestimmt, gehört in die Frühe der Frühzeit des Abend-Landes. Wie aber, wenn das Frühe alles Späte, wenn gar das Früheste das Späteste noch und am weitesten überholte? Das Einst der Frühe des Geschickes käme dann als das Einst zur Letzte (*eschaton*), d. h. zum Abschied des bislang verhüllten Geschickes des Seins. Das Sein des Seienden versammelt sich (*legesthai, logos*) in die Letzte seines Geschickes.”

will have undergone a reversal of the way in which we understand origination in terms of stable, eternal presence.¹⁶⁹

The Fragment

The fragment stands at the dawn of Western thinking, in which beings as such first appear. The fragment itself seems to speak of beings as such, of their origin, their growth and decay. But how is the destining of being, which inheres in its self-concealing as origin, related to what Anaximander says in his fragment?

Before he begins to translate the fragment, one of the first things that Heidegger does is to excise both its beginning and end from consideration, as “Aristotelian in structure and tone” and of spurious authenticity.¹⁷⁰ He then takes up the words of the fragment one by one in order to unfold it. Of the remaining words, he begins at the end, with the last one—*adikia*, which he translates as *Unfuge*, or disjointure. This disorienting gesture, in which he not only translates the words of the fragment from last to first, but uses an archaic German word [*Fuge*] instead of the standard translation of *adikia* as “Ungerechtigkeit” or “injustice,” is a nod toward the very disjointure that he finds in the fragment. He asks

how does Anaximander experience the totality of things present; how does he experience their having arrived to linger awhile among one another in unconcealment? What at bottom runs through whatever is present? The

¹⁶⁹ See Charles Scott, “A (Non-) Passing Sense of Tragedy,” in *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics*, 50: “The sense of an originary being has within it the projection of a full encompassment, a completed beginning and end, a present that is essentially a completion, an eternal now.”

¹⁷⁰ EGT, 29. *Holzwege*, 341. “nach Bau und Klang weit eher aristotelisch als archaisch”

fragment's last word gives the answer. We must begin the translation with it.¹⁷¹

Once again, we find ourselves beginning at the end. This gesture of reversal, which reverberates throughout the essay on so many levels, foreshadows the reversing, counterturning tension that Heidegger finds spoken in the fragment itself.

So far we have focused almost exclusively on the oppositional tension, which is also a unity, between the beginning and end. As Heidegger's treatment of the fragment proper makes clear, a certain strife unity of opposition is the dominant focus of his interpretation. We find in Heidegger's interpretation of the Anaximander fragment a certain proliferation of pairs of oppositions. Some of these are named in the fragment itself: *genesis* and *phthoran*, which the tradition translates as growth and decay, or coming to be and passing away, and *dike* and *adikia*, justice and injustice. Heidegger adds that later, classical commentators on Anaximander sometimes see a certain opposition among these two pairs which is reflected by a dissonance in the language of the fragment itself: for the first pair seems to belong to the natural world, to *phusis*, whereas *dike* and *adikia* are regarded as purely juridical notions that belong to the law courts, and only poetically or metaphorically belong in their application to the growth and decay of things. Heidegger cites Theophrastus as one of these commentators who see a certain incongruous tension between the poetic, anthropomorphic words in the saying and those that are proper to *ta phusei onta*.

¹⁷¹ EGT, 41. *Holzwege*, 354. "Wie aber erfährt zuvor Anaximander das All des Anwesenden, das je weilig zu einander in die Unverborgenheit angekommen ist? Was durchzieht im Grunde überall das Anwesende? Das letzte Wort des Spruches sagt es. Mit ihm müssen wir die Übersetzung beginnen."

In the course of thinking through these oppositions, Heidegger adds numerous others. We have already begun to see that a certain tension between the beginning and the end is in play in the essay, but other pairs, such as rescue and danger, illumination and withdrawal, concealment and unconcealment, being and becoming, persistence and transition, earliest and latest, dawn and evening, obliteration and preservation, and most importantly presence and absence appear in the course of the essay's unfolding.

Despite the proliferation of oppositions within which the fragment and Heidegger's interpretation move, his chief concern is with one oppositional unity that has been persistently overlooked and forgotten, so much so that it has sunk into oblivion: the difference between being and beings, or presencing and what is present.

From early on it seems as though presencing and what is present were each something for itself. Presencing itself unnoticeably becomes something present. . . .The essence of presencing, and with it the distinction between presencing and what is present, remains forgotten. *The oblivion of being is the oblivion of the distinction between being and beings.*¹⁷²

Although these oppositional pairs are all to various degrees operative within and constitutive of Western metaphysics, an abiding irony that is tacitly in play in Heidegger's commentary is that the present epoch is sustained by an oblivion to the difference between being and beings. The distinction between the sensible and the supersensible, in all of its permutations, upon which metaphysics is based, is in fact the concealment of the distinction between being and beings—although this difference is precisely what metaphysics takes itself to be articulating. The essential differing between

¹⁷² EGT, 50. *Holzwege*, 364. "Von früh an scheint es, als sei das Anwesen und das Anwesende je etwas für sich. Unversehens wird das Anwesen selbst zu einem Anwesenden. . . . Das Wesen des Anwesens und mit ihm der Unterschied des Anwesens zum Anwesenden bleibt vergessen. Die Seinsvergessenheit ist die Vergessenheit des Unterschiedes des Seins zum Seienden."

presencing and what is present is different from all of the other oppositional pairs under consideration—and yet it is also, ultimately, their source. The difficulty of this singular and originary distinction consists in thinking it without at the same time turning presencing itself into something that is present.

This tendency of presencing to sink back behind what is present, to withdraw continually behind it, and thereby to conceal itself in its essential differing from present beings, was experienced early on in the Greek world. Or was it? Perhaps we are only able to recognize the traces of this experience in early Greek thinking now, from our position as latecomers at the end of the West. This withdrawal proper to all presencing is attested to in the Greek experience of truth, *a-lētheia*. Heidegger returns to the Anaximander fragment in an attempt to retrieve this experience, while at the same time bringing the weight of Western destiny to bear upon it. It is a matter of thinking the Western tradition

on the basis of a fundamental characteristic of being which is more concealed in *lēthe* than it is revealed in *alētheia*. Yet this concealing of its essence and of its essential origin is characteristic of being's primordial self-illumination, so much so that thinking simply does not pursue it. Being itself does not step into this light of being. The unconcealment of beings, the brightness granted them, obscures the light of being.¹⁷³

Presencing and what is present, being and beings are now thought in terms of the *lēthic* and *a-lēthic*. With its sets of oppositions and reference to paying recompense, Anaximander's saying seems to speak of beings as an economy of growth and decay, an

¹⁷³ EGT, 26. *Holzwege*, 336-7. "aus einem Grunzug des Seins, den es als die *Alētheia* in der *Lēthe* eher verbirgt als enthüllt. Doch dieses Verbergen seines Wesens und der Wesensherkunft ist der Zug, in dem das Sein sich anfänglich lichtet, so zwar, daß ihm das Denken gerade *nicht* folgt. Das Seiende selbst tritt nicht in dieses Licht des Seins. Die Unverborgenheit des Seienden, die ihm gewährte Helle, verdunkelt das Licht des Seins."

even exchange in which all give and take. Yet, in the context of these evenly balanced oppositions, Heidegger draws our attention to a certain imbalance, a lack of symmetry, even an excess when it comes to the truth of being itself. Concealment and unconcealment, *lēthe* and *alētheia* are not simply opposed pairs, despite their appearance as such. Beings are unconcealed, while being itself is concealed in this unconcealment. Unconcealment, the ostensible negation of *lēthe*, does not in fact amount to its reversal, but if anything its intensification. The *lēthic* characteristic of being consists in its granting unconcealment to beings while being itself withdraws precisely in this illumination. The brightness of beings in unconcealment is at one and the same time the hiddenness, the self-concealment of being. While concealment and unconcealment have a lexical symmetry and reciprocity, this obscures the abyssal difference between the concealed and the unconcealed; being is concealed, beings are unconcealed, at one and the same moment. Because being reveals itself precisely in beings, it is not as though we can ever hope or expect somehow to overcome being's withdrawal; for it is not itself a being, but only this relation between being and beings. This duality is something that Heidegger also refers to as the "bifurcated essence" of *alētheia*.¹⁷⁴ The mystery, the enigma or riddle of being consists in this difference between being and beings, which is abyssal and yet at the same time preserves them in their relation.

¹⁷⁴ EGT, 39. *Holzwege*, 352. "zwiespältigen Wesen"

Tragedy

But what does this duality within the truth of being have to do with tragedy? If one is looking to explain the enigmatic appearance of tragedy in this essay, there are numerous terms and statements that seem to bear at least an external resemblance to the most important features of tragedy, as they have been identified by the tradition. We find in Heidegger's essay the mention of *Eris* (strife) and *Moirai* (fate), of *Chreon* (necessity) and *Dike* (justice), each important conceptual terms for tragedy. Fate, destiny, and self-destruction are all important themes in the essay and resonate in an unacknowledged way with tragedy. Furthermore, and more dramatically still, we encounter in Heidegger's text the figures of the prophet/soothsayer, the herdsman, and the riddle, all of which are familiar figures in tragic drama, particularly in that tragedy about a certain man's hubristic blindness to himself, *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Western man's essential blindness to himself and to being despite his technological mastery is also a prominent concern for Heidegger in the essay, and can in that sense be read as an Oedipal understanding of Western man.

Scattered throughout the essay are yet more terms that are evocative of the tragic hero. Heidegger speaks of present beings in terms of their "insurrection," their "rebelliousness," "stubborn inclination," and "haughty pose." He admits the "daring" of every thoughtful word addressed to being. He speaks of the necessarily "excessive demands" of translation. All of these expressions in the essay resound with familiar tragic themes and motifs, even if they are not identified as such. In order to gain a sense

for why Heidegger employs them, let us look more closely at the places in the essay where tragedy or the tragic is in fact named.

As we have already noted, Heidegger begins with the last word of the remaining fragment, *adikia*, which he translates as *Unfug*, or disjointure. Beings, insofar as they persist and are present, are characterized by their disjointure from presencing. This difference between being and beings, in which what is present is experienced as “standing in disjunction,” brings to the fore [*zum Vorschein*] the “pessimism—not to say the nihilism—of the Greek experience of being.”¹⁷⁵ The disjointure that Heidegger names in his translation of *adikia* is the abyssal difference between being and beings that is named in the experience of *a-lētheia*. The unconcealment of beings is not the annulment of concealment, but in fact its intensification. The unconcealment of beings is the self-concealing of being, and is thereby the concealing of the abyssal difference between being and beings.

Beings seem to stand in insurmountable opposition to being. What is present, beings, become present by virtue of a release from and a turning against presencing. The experience of beings seems to consist in their insistence on presence, in their lingering. This is their *adikia*, their disjointure or disjunction in which their “insurrection” and “rebelliousness” consists. He asks, “does the fragment say that the essence of what is

¹⁷⁵ EGT, 42. *Holzwege*, 355. “So käme im frühen Spruch des Denkens das Pessimistische der griechischen Seinserfahrung, um nicht zu sagen das Nihilistische, zum Vorschein.”

present consists in disjunction?” and he gives a strange non-answer, one which consists of its own oppositional unity: “It does and it doesn’t.”¹⁷⁶

Heidegger explicates (I do not say solves) his riddling answer by interpreting the Anaximander fragment as saying that the disjointure of beings is at the same time their giving of jointure. This giving of jointure is thus the surmounting of disjointure:

The presencing of whatever is present for the time being does not consist in *adikia* by itself, i.e. not in disorder alone; rather, it consists in *didonai dikēn . . . tēs adikias*, since whatever is present lets order belong in each case. Whatever is presently present is not a slice of something shoved in between what is not presently present; it is present insofar as it lets itself belong to the non-present. . . . The experience of beings in their being which here comes to language is neither pessimistic nor nihilistic; nor is it optimistic. It is tragic. That is a presumptuous thing to say. However, we discover a trace of the essence of tragedy, not when we explain it psychologically or aesthetically, but rather only when we consider its essential form, the being of beings, by thinking the *didonai dikēn . . . tēs adikias*.¹⁷⁷

What is presently present stands against and in opposition to absence. And yet, at the same time, this opposition to absence is at the same time a letting-belong to absence.

Presencing gives beings their presence, but thereby shuts itself out from that which it gives. The surmounting of disorder or disjointure does not consist in its cancellation; rather, the disjointure of what is present is also its giving of jointure. Giving jointure is a giving in the sense of that which “lets something belong to another which properly

¹⁷⁶ EGT, 42. *Holzwege*, 356. “Doch sagt der Spruch, das Wesen das Anwesenden bestehe in der Un-Fuge? Er sagt es und sagt es nicht.”

¹⁷⁷ EGT, 44. *Holzwege*, 357-8. “Nicht in der *adikia* für sich genommen, nicht im Un-Fug besteht das Anwesen des jeweilig Anwesenden, sondern im *didonai dikēn . . . tēs adikias*, darin, daß das Anwesende je und je den Fug gehören läßt. Das gegenwärtig Anwesende ist nicht abgeschnitten zwischen das ungegenwärtig Anwesende geschoben. Das gegenwärtig Anwesende ist das gegenwärtige, insofern es in das ungegenwärtige sich gehören läßt. . . . Die Erfahrung des Seinenden in seinem Sein, die hier zur Sprache kommt, ist nicht pessimistisch und nicht nihilistisch; sie ist auch nicht optimistisch. Sie bleibt tragisch. Doch das ist ein überhebliches Wort. Dem Wesen des Tragischen kommen wir jedoch vermutlich auf die Spur, wenn wir es nicht psychologisch und ästhetisch erklären, sondern erst seine Wesensart, das Sein des Seienden, bedenken, indem wir das *didonai dikēn . . . tēs adikias* denken.”

belongs to him.”¹⁷⁸ It is a donation whose gifting character consists in its status as a kind of excess, a release. We have seen this relation of jointure-disjointure in various instantiations in Heidegger’s thought. In the *Beiträge* it is unfolded as appropriation-expropriation.¹⁷⁹ In the *Der Ister* and *Introduction to Metaphysics* courses it is the becoming homely in being unhomely. This odd joining of jointure-disjointure, which is a surmounting of *adikia*, disorder, and yet neither its cancellation nor dialectical *Aufhebung*, constitutes the tragic experience of being.

As he does elsewhere, Heidegger here contrasts the tragic to pessimism, nihilism, and optimism. It is irreducible, in other words, to an experience of being that is thought exclusively in terms of pure absence or presence. The tragic does not stand in strict opposition to pessimism or nihilism, but stands as it were behind them, as the hidden ground of their unity. The experience of this tragic trace—and it can only appear as a trace, as kind of non-appearing—is the experience of the relation of being and beings. It names the necessity of the withdrawal of the origin from what emerges from it, and the ensuing essential tendency or this origin of being as presencing to fall into oblivion.

¹⁷⁸ EGT, 43. *Holzwege*, 356-7. “Solches Geben läßt einem anderen das gehören, was als Gehöriges ihm eignet.”

¹⁷⁹ Reiner Schürmann makes a point about these lexical pairings that is crucial in order to understand the tragic aspect of their relation. He says “I find it difficult to endorse reading that would take Heidegger to vary, yet again, symmetrical contraries. To see the dysmetry of the double bind, it is enough to recall how the transgressive strategy asserts itself in everydayness, namely, through the pull toward death. Now being-toward-death, or ‘mortality,’ temporalizes phenomena by the loss of their world: by a *possible*, singularizing loss, inscribed in being-in-the-world. Only if one stops one’s reading at the words and their symmetry will the contextualizing-decontextualizing strategies oppose one another inside one genus and yield some dualism. Such a reading would amount to jumping over the decontextualizing factor itself: the possible which, in Heidegger, always arises from the future.” Further on he adds, “One must let oneself be duped by the *lexical* match when the double bind is described as appropriation-expropriation, unconcealment-concealment, being-nothingness, Yes-No, or, again, legislation-transgression. In each of these pairs that are not pairs at all, the first word designates the phenomenality that a being owes to its world, and the second, its singularization to come.” “Ultimate Double Binds,” 255; 263.

The trace of the tragic that Heidegger says comes to language indicates a tension or duality within being itself. This duality is the origination, the *chreon*, which he translates here as “usage,” which makes possible the realm of unconcealment in which beings can appear, and is at one and the same time the impossibility of the appearing of that which grants unconcealment. The tragic surmounting of disjointure is the self-concealing donation of being. It is a donation in the sense that the presencing of what is present gives, *es gibt*, and is at the same time given. Yet we cannot simply say that being gives disjointure, for this would once again be to think being as a present being.

Any attempt to understand being from within the very space of unconcealment that it makes possible is doomed or destined to fail. These attempts constitute errancy; the epochal holding-back of being as it reveals itself in beings. The uncanny character of this realm consists in the fact that being is not somewhere or something else other than its withdrawing self-revealing in beings. This unconcealment, however, also makes possible, if not inevitable, the tendency for the thinking of the truth of being to circumvent (*umirren*) what is like being by understanding it on the model of perdurance. The oblivion of being, which is the oblivion of the distinction, the differing between being and beings, happens according to a possibility that is essential to being. This means that the errancy that occurs in and as this oblivion has an aspect of inescapability, of inevitability.¹⁸⁰

Oblivion of the distinction is by no means the consequence of a forgetfulness of thinking. Oblivion of being belongs to the self-veiling essence of being. It belongs so essentially to the destiny of being that the dawn of this destiny rises as the unveiling of what is present in its

¹⁸⁰ It is an erring, then, that recalls Aristotle’s discussion of tragic *hamartia*.

presencing. This means that the history of being begins with the oblivion of being, since being—together with its essence, its distinction from beings—keeps to itself. The distinction collapses. It remains forgotten.¹⁸¹

The self-concealing of being's essence and its essential origin brings us back to the hidden origin of the West, which strangely enough lies ahead of us still. The withdrawal of being in its self-illumination in beings is the beginning of history. History begins when beings appear as such as a whole; yet this only happens when being conceals itself and refuses its essence. This is the realm of errancy: "error is the space in which history unfolds."¹⁸² By error, Heidegger does not mean a kind of mistakenness, he means a relation to being that is defined by its privation, its self-refusal. The source of the appearing of beings keeps itself in its truth to itself. The withdrawal of being is the release of a certain sending, a destiny of being in beings; it is the destiny of errancy. The reversal of this destiny that Heidegger calls for is not the reversal of being's self-concealment, but is rather the experience of being as this refusal.

In a way, Heidegger performs the very joining-disjoining of tragedy when he remarks on his own presumption in calling it tragic. He acknowledges the hubristic insolence, the presumptuousness, of his reference to the essence of tragedy in his translation of the fragment. His own statement appears *adikon*, obtrusive and out of place. Tragedy, after all, has not been mentioned in the essay since the first page, and in reference only to Nietzsche's early book in which the Anaximander translation appears.

¹⁸¹ EGT, 50. *Holzwege*, 364. "Allein, die Vergessenheit des Unterschiedes ist keineswegs die Folge einer Vergeßlichkeit des Denkens. Die Vergessenheit des Seins gehört in das durch sie selbst verhüllte Wesen des Seins. Sie gehört so wesentlich in das Geschick des Seins, daß das Sein mit seinem Wesen, mit dem Unterschied zum Seienden, an sich hält. Der Unterschied entfällt. Er bleibt vergessen."

¹⁸² EGT, 26. *Holzwege*, 337. "Er ist der Wesensraum der Geschichte."

The violence of Heidegger's statement will necessarily appear so, as long as we think of essence only as perdurance. And yet this thinking of essence as perdurance, as pure presence, is given by the essence of the truth of being itself.

Tragedy and the Origin of the Work of Art

It may seem strange that relatively little has been said about the artwork in a work devoted to the presence of Greek tragedy in the Heideggerian corpus. And yet, as has already been noted, this is because its status as artwork is not one of the main thematic axes along which tragedy appears in Heidegger's thought. Its status as poetry, and moreover as the thinking poetry which is the rightful counterpart to the poetic thinking of the Presocratics, is taken for granted rather than problematized in the texts. When we turn to the 1935-6 essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" for assistance, the question of tragedy becomes in some ways more, rather than less murky.

On the one hand, the specific reference to tragic poetry as artwork is so fleeting in this landmark essay that it is easily missed or forgotten. On the other hand, however, once we have examined the importance of tragedy in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, the *Beiträge*, the "Der Ister" course, and "The Anaximander Fragment," we find the same themes and ideas which are in those texts more or less explicitly linked to tragedy or a tragic dynamic alluded to in "The Origin of the Work of Art." For example, the violent struggle of *dasein*, the violence-doer, against the overwhelming which is analyzed in the interpretation of the choral ode from *Antigone* in *Introduction to Metaphysics* is here reconfigured in terms of the struggle between world and earth in the setting-into-work of

truth. We also find in “Origin” a brief discussion of the resolute willing-to-know which is constitutive of the human being’s entrance to the openness of beings—a willing-to-know which in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* course is limned in terms of Oedipus’s glory and downfall.

There is also a complementarity and an overlap between “The Origin of the Work of Art” and the *Beiträge*.¹⁸³ Not only are both devoted to recovering an experience of *aletheia* as happening or event that is anterior to its metaphysical determination as correspondence, but the closing sections of the *Beiträge* deal explicitly with the origin of the work of art and the strife of world and earth. We also hear echoes of the discussion of the Greek *polis* in the “Der Ister” course in his assertion in “Origin” that the founding of a state is also an event of truth, and he briefly alludes to the idea, which is so central to “The Anaximander Fragment” essay, that the beginning is only disclosed.

And yet the multiple ways in which tragedy resonates throughout “Origin” are not apparent on the basis of the essay alone; it is only by examining the significance of tragedy in Heidegger’s other works that we can recognize the themes as they arise in this very dense, complicated, and perhaps most-widely-read essay. And yet this is one regard in which “Origin” is also in accord with Heidegger’s other texts that mention tragedy: the fleeting, suggestive remarks about tragic poetry that Heidegger does make once again belie the larger significance that it holds in his thought, particularly with respect to his understanding of truth as concealment-unconcealment, or *aletheia*.

¹⁸³ Daniella Vallega-Neu makes this point in her introductory book, in which she claims (rightly, I think), that “The Origin of the Work of Art” should be considered an essential complement to the *Beiträge*. Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction*, 48.

Let us return to the place in the essay in which tragedy is mentioned. We have had a brief glimpse of this passage in the Introduction already. In “Origin,” Greek tragedy is mentioned only in the section titled “The Work and Truth,” in which the work’s non-representational character as opening up the world into which it belongs is developed. The Greek temple is the first example of such an artwork, chosen because it cannot be regarded as representational. After asserting that the temple is a work that allows the god himself to presence, rather than a portrayal of the god, Heidegger says:

The same is true of the linguistic work. In the tragedy, nothing is staged or displayed theatrically. Rather, the battle of the new gods against the old is being fought. In that the linguistic work arises from the speech of the people, it does not talk about this battle. Rather, it transforms that speech so that now every essential word fights the battle and puts up for decision what is holy and what unholy, what is great and what small, what is brave and what cowardly, what is noble and what fugitive, what is master and what slave (cf. Heraklitus, Fragment 53 in Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*).¹⁸⁴

Like the temple, the tragedy performed at the holy festival (as opposed to the tragedy found in the best critical edition of *Antigone*) is essentially non-representational. The Greek tragedy is not the staging of a battle, but it is itself the fighting of the battle; it is not a representation, but a happening.

Heidegger’s assertion that Greek tragedy is the fighting of the battle of the old gods against the new seems uncharacteristically narrow. The reference to the old and the new gods seems to be an allusion to Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, or perhaps to *Prometheus*

¹⁸⁴ *Off the Beaten Track*, 22. *Holzwege*, 32. Dasselbe gilt vom Sprachwerk. In der Tragödie wird nichts auf- und vorgeführt, sondern der Kampf der neuen Götter gegen die alten wird gekämpft. Indem das Sprachwerk im Sagen des Volkes aufsteht, redet es nicht über diesen Kampf, sondern verwandelt das Sagen des Volkes dahin, dass jetzt jedes wesentliche Wort diesen Kampf führt und zur Entscheidung stellt, was heilig ist und was unheilig, was gross und was klein, was wacker und was feig, was edel und was flüchtig, was Herr und was Knecht (vgl. Heraklit, Fragm. 53).

Bound, in which the authority of the “new,” Olympian, gods is challenged by the older deities, such as the Furies. At the same time, this distinction seems to make use of the idea that the “new” gods are the heavenly ones, as opposed to the old, chthonic, earth-bound gods—thus subtly alluding to the opposition of world and earth.

But what is the connection between this battle that is fought in the Greek tragedy and the strife of world and earth that constitutes the setting-itself-to-work of truth? Why does Heidegger make this pointed reference to tragedy as a “battle,” if not in order to imply a connection between this battle and the strife of earth and world? Is this latter struggle in some way tragic? Heidegger does not say one way or the other. But the fact that Greek tragedy is the only one of the artworks mentioned in the essay that is singled out as the fighting of a battle is quite provocative, given the importance of strife as counterplay to the happening of both truth and work.

The key to the question of the relation between the tragic battle of succession that Heidegger mentions and the primordial strifing of world and earth, concealment and unconcealment rests in his identification of this tragic battle with Heraklitean *polemos*. As we have already seen in the passage cited, Heidegger says with respect to tragedy that the linguistic work is a battle that transforms the speech of the people in which it is written. In this transformation the linguistic work puts up for decision with every “essential word” what is holy and unholy, brave and cowardly, noble and fugitive. But the battle mentioned here is precisely the polemical struggle of world and earth.

In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger describes the struggling-forth of world as a Heraklitean *polemos* as well. Although he does not use the term “earth” the counterpart to world there, but rather “overwhelming sway,” the understanding of

polemos that he develops there accords with the primordial strife of world and earth that is developed in “Origin.” In *Introduction*, he translates fragment 53 and then explains that

The *polemos* named here is a strife that holds sway before everything divine and human, not war in the human sense. As Heraklitus thinks it, struggle first and foremost allows what essentially unfolds to step apart in opposition, first allows position and status and rank to establish themselves in coming to presence. In such a stepping apart, clefts, intervals, distances, and joints open themselves up. In con-frontation, world comes to be.¹⁸⁵

The battle of the old gods and the new in the tragedy is referred back to the primordial *polemos* of world and earth in which the gods are first put up for decision, and in which those who struggle against each other only first come forth in the struggle, rather than existing somehow prior to it. This means that it is only in the strife of world and earth that each comes to be what it is: it is only in their oppositional counterplay, opened up by the work, that the world is first opened up as the destiny of a historical people. But with this opening of world rises up the earth upon which it is grounded, as the self-concealing and unmasterable.

On the basis of our reading of Heidegger’s other texts concerning tragedy we can see the way in which this reference to Greek tragedy as a “battle” is not gratuitous. For although he does not draw our attention to it explicitly in “Origin,” the polemical strife of world and earth in their opposition and unity has a tragic aspect to it. The strife of world and earth means that each is continually striving to surmount the other:

In its resting upon earth the world strives to surmount it. As the self-opening it will tolerate nothing closed. As the sheltering and concealing,

¹⁸⁵ *IM*, 65.

however, earth tends always to draw the world into itself and to keep it there.¹⁸⁶

This means that the fundamental incompatibility of world and earth is also the basis of their unity insofar as each carries the other to the self-assertion of its essence. The more the world strives to open itself, and thereby turns against the earth, the more it places itself back into the earth's sheltering-concealment. This is the tragic aspect of their dynamic that we have seen traced out in texts such as the *Beiträge* and *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

But is there a special connection between the linguistic work—and tragic poetry in particular—and this primordial strife? Tragedy still seems to be just a passing example in the essay, taking its place alongside the temple, the Van Gogh painting, and the Meyer poem. On the other hand, tragic poetry seems to have a more immediate connection to the polemic strife of world and earth that constitutes the setting-into-work of truth. The answer, I suspect, resides in the tension between language, representation, and truth.

Truth is developed in "Origin" as the happening of the strife of world and earth in the opposition of concealment and unconcealment. This understanding of truth is itself in opposition to that which predominates in metaphysics, in which truth is the correctness of representation. And yet these two, fundamentally incompatible conceptions of truth are as intertwined as the strifely opposites of world and earth, concealment and unconcealment. The linguistic work is most profoundly the site of this tension, which we see only hinted at in the passage about tragedy.

¹⁸⁶ *OBT*, 26. *Holzwege*, 37. Die Welt trachtet in ihrem Aufrufen auf der Erde, diese zu überhöhen. Sie duldet als das Sichöffnende kein Verschlossenes. Die Erde aber neigt dahin, als die Bergende jeweils die Welt in sich einzubeziehen und einzubehalten.

One of the paradoxical aspects of the linguistic work that emerges in this essay is that, as linguistic, the work is more easily or more likely to be taken as representational, as speaking about something rather than as itself an event, the happening of truth. Insofar as words and not color, tone, or stone are the material out of which the linguistic work is made, the tendency for a representational understanding of truth to predominate in the work is identical to that which is inherent in language generally for Heidegger. And yet, for this reason, the linguistic artwork also seems to offer the greatest possibility for the setting-into-work of truth because of its immediate connection to the poietic-poetic essence of art, which is essentially a saying. As Heidegger says at the end of the essay,

Language itself is poetry in the essential sense. But since language is that happening in which, each time, beings are first disclosed as beings, poesy, poetry in the narrower sense, is the most primordial form of poetry in the essential sense.¹⁸⁷

Language itself is poetry, the essence of art, and the essence of poetry in turn is the founding of truth. Linguistic works such as tragic poetry, therefore have a “privileged position among the arts as a whole,” an assertion that ironically accords with the valorization of poetry accorded by the metaphysical tradition of aesthetics.¹⁸⁸

Given the understanding of truth that is developed in the essay as poetic projection, and the essential role of language in this projecting-open, one might expect that Heidegger would say more about tragic poetry in the essay. But he doesn’t. This is perhaps because the tragic texts, whose world has long ago passed away, are

¹⁸⁷ *OBT*, 46. *Holzwege*, 61. Die Sprache selbst is Dichtung im wesentlichen Sinne, Weil nun aber die Sprache jenes Geschehnis ist, in dem für den Menschen überhaupt erst Seiendes als Seiendes sich erschliesst, deshalb ist die Poesie, die Dichtung im engeren Sinne, die ursprünglichste Dichtung im wesentlichen Sinne.

¹⁸⁸ For an unfolding of this irony, see Jacques Derrida’s essay, “Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing.”

overdetermined by the aesthetic tradition that presumes to preserve and exhibit them. We have seen Heidegger make statements to this effect in his other works, such as the *Parmenides* course. Nevertheless, we find in revisiting “The Origin of the Work of Art” that tragedy is more than just a passing example of Greek art before the rise of Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysics. In attempting to attune us not only to the loss of the world of the Greek temples and tragedies, but the loss of an experience of truth that was opened up but never grounded in that world, Heidegger forges a stronger connection between tragedy and truth than he betrays by any direct acknowledgement in the essay. It is an experience of truth that nevertheless continues to determine, in a hidden way, the derivative essence of truth as representation which predominates in metaphysics.

Poetic violence

The tragic attunement of Heidegger’s thinking with respect to the end of metaphysics has to do with the suffering of a loss. This loss is the passing of “the richest and most prodigious event” of Western metaphysics, which means that it is also the loss of a kind of ignorance—and innocence.¹⁸⁹ It is a loss then, which is a painful gain, a sudden insight into the way in which the Western tradition is itself the event of a certain essential loss, insofar as it has been destined by the abandonment and oblivion of being. In human terms, the tragic insight consists in the distress suffered by our recognition that our attempts hitherto to think the being of beings have been, all along, precisely the

¹⁸⁹ EGT, 51. *Holzwege*, 365. “Das reichste und weiteste Ereignis.”

contrary: the metaphysical understanding of being is nothing other than the event of its concealment and refusal.

As we look back over the role that tragedy and the tragic have in Heidegger's thought, we may also experience another, different kind of loss. In a way that is perhaps even more profound with the Greek tragedians than it is with other poets and thinkers, one has the sense that the tragic texts themselves do not matter to Heidegger very much. Even on the few occasions when he offers an interpretation of a tragic poem, it is never done from the perspective of the work as a whole. Considerations of poetic and dramatic context, plot, mythology, are almost entirely absent in Heidegger's treatments of tragedy. This rough treatment of dramatic works which continue to be treasured as some of the greatest works of Western art is admittedly violent on Heidegger's part. Following his interpretation of the *Antigone* stasimon in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, for example, Heidegger notes that

If we restrict ourselves to explicating what is directly said in the poetry, the interpretation is at an end. And yet with this the interpretation stands for the first time at the inception. The authentic interpretation must show what does not stand there in the words and which is nevertheless said. For this the interpretation must necessarily use violence.¹⁹⁰

This interpretive violence performs the very violence that Heidegger claims to find within the text itself. We see here that Heidegger acknowledges the excessive character of his interpretation. He seeks in the poem that which exceeds the domain of philological or historiological interpretations and thereby transgresses the limits of what is explicitly said

¹⁹⁰ IM, 173. GA 40: 170-1. "Wenn wir uns auf die Erläuterung des in der Dichtung unmittelbar Gesagten beschränken, ist die Auslegung am Ende. Gleichwohl steht sie damit erst am Anfang. Die eigentliche Auslegung muß jenes zeigen, was nicht mehr in Worten dasteht und doch gesagt ist. Hierbei muß die Auslegung notwendig Gewalt brauchen."

in the poem precisely in order to bring the poem as a whole to light. This affirmation of the necessary violence of his interpretation is not merely, or perhaps even primarily, a strategic move aimed at evading criticism that Heidegger is a careless reader. Rather, he suggests the necessary violation of the poem takes part in the violence of which the poem itself speaks. Just as the sea, the earth, the animals only appear as such and for the first time when their domains are transgressed and displaced by the violent human being, so too does the poem itself only appear in its violation.

Yet even when we acknowledge that there is a certain logic in play with regard to the violence of Heidegger's interpretations and that which is brought out by them, the force of this interpretive violence is not mitigated by his explicit acknowledgement of it. So much of the richness of tragic poetry is ignored or obscured by Heidegger's treatment of it. This is especially the case with tragedy, since the Attic tragedies were not artworks in the modern sense, but were ritual, religious, political, poetic events. Yet any discussion of Attic tragedy as a historical or artistic phenomenon is almost entirely absent in Heidegger's texts; instead it is the basis according to which he thinks the history of being.

Perhaps it is impossible to do both—perhaps one cannot simultaneously maintain a sense of the integrity of the tragic poems and at the same time develop an understanding of philosophy as inherently tragic.¹⁹¹ Yet we sense the imperative of paying heed to the tragedies in their historical, literary, and artistic richness when, along with Heidegger, we invoke the “tragic” character of being, or its historical “destining.” Despite the relation

¹⁹¹ As we have already seen, Heidegger makes the claim in *Besinnung* that the phrase “tragic philosophy” says twice the same—i.e., that philosophy is essentially tragic.

of the latter to the former, we are also confronted with the impossibility of simply joining the two together, of tracing this tragic attunement concerning the thinking of the truth of being back to the tragic poems as artworks. The absence, in Heidegger's thought, of a certain kind of heed or respect to the integrity of the tragic poems draws our attention to the fact that Greek tragedy does not simply serve as a kind of source or paradigm for his understanding of the tragic character of being in its historical destining—or not simply so. One cannot find already contained in the tragic poems all that Heidegger says or implies about the tragic experience of being: that is, they are not an origin in the metaphysical sense, and yet he nevertheless discovers in tragedy an originary disclosure of the conflictual intertwining of being, unconcealment, and seeming. The lack of a more thorough approach to Greek tragedy in Heidegger's thought, given its manifest influence, is an important and profound loss; the palpable anger and frustration of some of Heidegger's commentators on this point attests to this. And yet precisely for this reason it is in keeping with the tragic dynamic that Heidegger is attuned to, as it causes us to experience anew the withdrawal of origin as we find ourselves longing for the source.

Bibliography

References to works by Heidegger:

All volumes from Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* (Collected Works) are published by Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main.

- GA 6 *Nietzsche I*. Edited by Brigitte Schillbach, 1996.
GA 13 *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*. Edited by Hermann Heidegger, 1983.
GA 40 *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. Edited by Petra Jaeger, 1983.
GA 45 *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte ‚Probleme‘ der ‚Logik‘*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1984.
GA 53 *Hölderlins Hymne ‚Der Ister.‘* Edited by Walter Biemel, 1984.
GA 54 *Parmenides*. Edited by Manfred S. Frings, 1982.
GA 65 *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1997.
GA 66 *Besinnung*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1997.
Holzwege. 3rd ed. Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1957.
Sein und Zeit. 18th ed. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001.
Wegmarken. Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967.

English translations of Heidegger. Translations cited are frequently modified by the present author.

- Basic Questions of Philosophy*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
Being and Time. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962.
Hölderlin's Hymn 'Der Ister.' Translated by William McNeill and Julia Davis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
Early Greek Thinking. Translated by David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi. San Francisco: Harper, 1975.
Introduction to Metaphysics. Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
Off the Beaten Track. Edited and Translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
Parmenides. Translated by André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.
Pathmarks. Edited by William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated by I. Bywater. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Bambach, Charles. *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003.
- Barbour, John. *Tragedy as a Critique of Virtue: The Novel and Ethical Reflection*. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984.
- de Beistegui, Miguel. *Heidegger and the Political: Dystopias*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Benardete, Seth. *The Argument of the Action: Essays on Greek Poetry and Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Bernasconi, Robert. *Heidegger in Question: The Art of Existing*. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993.
- de Boer, Karin. "Giving Due: Heidegger's Interpretation of the Anaximander Fragment." *Research in Phenomenology* 27 (1997): 150-166.
- Davis, Stephen. "The Path of a Thinking, Poetizing, Building: The Strange Uncanniness of Human Being on Earth." In Ladelle McWhorter, ed., *Heidegger and the Earth*. Kirksville Mo: The Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1992.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Heidegger's Ear: Philopolemology." In John Sallis, ed., *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Dodds, E. R. "On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*." In Erich Segal, ed., *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Else, Gerald. *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*. Leiden: Brill, 1957.
- Fariás, Victor. *Heidegger und der Nazional Sozialismus*. Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 1989.
- Fóti, Véronique. "Empedocles and Tragic Thought." In David Jacobs, ed. *The Presocratics After Heidegger*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.
- *Heidegger and the Poets: Poiesis/Sophia/Technē*. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1992.
- "Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Sophoclean Tragedy." In James Risser, ed. *Heidegger Toward the Turn*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.
- Fried, Gregory. *Heidegger's Polemos: From Being to Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Gall, Robert S. "Heidegger, Tragedy, and Ethical Reflection." *International Studies in Philosophy* 21:1 (1989), 33-48.
- Gelvin, Michael. "Heidegger and Tragedy." In William Spanos, ed., *Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.
- Gethmann-Siefert, Anne Marie. "Heidegger and Hölderlin: The Overusage of Poets in an Impoverished Time." *Research in Phenomenology* 19 (1989), 59-88.
- Grene, David and Richmond Lattimore, eds. *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Aeschylus I and II*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

- Jacobs, David. C. "Introduction." In David Jacobs, ed., *The Presocratics After Heidegger*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.
- Knox, Bernard. *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy*. Berkeley: . University of California Press, 1966.
- Krell, David Farrell. "Art and Truth in Raging Discord: Heidegger and Nietzsche on the Will to Power." In William Spanos, ed. *Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.
- Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*. Translated by Chris Turner. Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- McNeill, William. "Porosity: Violence, and the Question of Politics in Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*." *The Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 14: 2-15:1 (1991), 183-212.
- Naas, Michael. "Keeping Homer's Word." In David Jacobs, ed. *The Presocratics After Heidegger*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Oudemans, Th. C. W. and A. P. M. H. *Tragic Ambiguity: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Sophocles' Antigone*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987.
- Sallis, John. *Double Truth*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- *Echoes: After Heidegger*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Schmidt, Dennis. "What We Didn't See." In David Jacobs, ed. *The Presocratics After Heidegger*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.
- "Why I am So Happy." *Research in Phenomenology* 24 (1994), 3-14.
- Schürmann, Reiner. "A Brutal Awakening to the Tragic Condition of Being." In Karsten Harries and Christoph Jamme, eds., *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology*. London: Holmes and Meier, 1994.
- *Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*. Translated, in collaboration with the author, by Christine-Marie Gros. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- "Riveted to a Monstrous Site." *The Heidegger Case*.
- "Technicity, Topology, Tragedy: Heidegger on 'That Which Saves' in the Global Reach." In Arthur Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, M. Richard Zinman, eds., *Technology in the Western Political Tradition*. Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- "Ultimate Double Binds." In James Risser, ed., *Heidegger Toward the Turn*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.
- Scott, Charles, et. al., eds., *Companion to Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Scott, Charles. *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Segal, Charles. *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Sophocles. *Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*. Translated by David Grene. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

- Stieple, Karlheinz. "An Eye Too Few: Earth and World in Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Rousseau." In Karsten Harries and Christoph Jamme, eds., *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, Technology*. London: Holmes and Meier, 1994.
- Vallega-Neu, Daniella. *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre and Pierre Vidal Nanquet. *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. New York: Zone Books, 1990.
- Winkler, John and Froma Zeitlin. *Nothing to do with Dionysos?: Athenian Drama in its Social Context*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Wright, Kathleen. "Heidegger and the Authorization of Hölderlin's Poetry." In Karsten Harries and Christoph Jamme, eds., *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, Technology*. London: Holmes and Meier, 1994.
- Zimmerman, Michael. *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Karen E. Gover

curriculum vitae

Philosophy Department
Penn State University
240 Sparks Bldg.
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 865-1240

Education:

Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University, May 2005
B.A., The University of Richmond, May 1997

Areas of Specialization:

19th and 20th century German philosophy; ancient Greek philosophy; aesthetics

Awards and Honors Received:

DAAD Fellowship (2004-5), Albert-Ludwigs Universität, Freiburg Germany
Institute for the Arts and Humanities Graduate Summer Resident, summer 2003
Graduate Assistant Grant and Fellowship, Penn State University, 1998
Magna cum laude, 1997
Phi Beta Kappa, University of Richmond, 1997
Phi Sigma Tau, Philosophy honors society, 1997
Best Essay award, English Department, University of Richmond, 1997
Outstanding Research award, University of Richmond, 1997

Languages:

German
Ancient Greek
French