

“SUPERABUNDANT BEING”: DISAMBIGUATING RILKE AND HEIDEGGER

THOMAS PFAU

Abstract

Rilke’s impact on the generation of writers reshaping philosophy and theology during the interwar years is arguably without parallel. Within this constellation, the case of Heidegger as a reader of Rilke presents unique challenges. For Rilke’s poetry neither quite allows for a wholly appropriative reading such as, for better or worse, Heidegger accords Hölderlin’s oeuvre; nor can Heidegger quite bring himself to subject Rilke’s poetry to critical appraisal. Instead, Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein* as worked out in Part I of *Being and Time* (1927) and in his lectures on *The Basic Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929) seems haunted by an intellectual and expressive debt to Rilke that he can neither acknowledge nor fully resolve. For to do so would be to confront a possibility of human finitude, so luminously traced in Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* (1922), still defined by moments of transcendence – moments that *can* be captured in the fleeting plenitude of poetic intuition (*Anschauung*) and lyric image (*Bild*). Whereas von Balthasar, in volume 3 of his *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* (1939), reads Rilke as fundamentally embracing Heidegger’s notion of strictly immanent and finite *Dasein*, I argue that the oeuvre of the later Rilke, without being reclaimed for a metaphysical, let alone religious position, nevertheless is shaped, both intellectually and expressively, by insistent, if enigmatic, moments of transcendence.

I

With the possible exception of Hölderlin, no German poet has had greater resonance in twentieth-century intellectual culture than Rilke. The list of philosophers and theologians responding to his poetry includes Erich Przywara, Romano Guardini, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Maurice Blanchot and, of course, Martin Heidegger. Of those expressly and for the most part affirmatively responding to Rilke, some (e.g., Przywara) simply quote his poetry at length and almost without commentary, seemingly taking Rilke’s late poetry, and the *Duino Elegies* in particular, as a canonical expression of post-World War I Europe’s spiritual and intellectual destitution.¹ Others, Heidegger, Guardini, and von Balthasar above all, offer more searching, if notably divergent, interpretations of Rilke. In von Balthasar’s wide-ranging exploration of eschatological motifs in European modernity (*Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, 1937-1939),

Thomas Pfau
English Department, Duke University, Box 90015, Durham, NC 27708-0015, USA
Email: pfau@duke.edu

¹ In a 1936 collection of essays, Przywara situates Rilke in a matrix of voices that include St. Ignatius, John of the Cross, Heraclitus, and Nietzsche. See Erich Przywara, *Heroisch* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1936), 165-95.

Rilke's late poetry functions as a *basso continuo* of sorts, particularly in the chapters on Nietzsche, Klages, George, Spitteler, and culminating in an extended parallel reading of Rilke and Heidegger.² That Rilke's oeuvre should have had such shaping influence on European intellectual culture during the first half of the twentieth century undoubtedly stems from the unique ways in which philosophical questions are woven into the very fabric of his mature poetry. Just as Heidegger conceives of "philosophy as a fundamental way of Dasein [*Philosophieren selbst ist eine Grundart des Daseins*]" whose true substance is found in its very "practice" (*Ausübung*), rather than in its discrete results, so Rilke after 1914 understands poetry as the ongoing meditation on a single, all-encompassing question: "How is it possible to live, considering that the elements of this life are wholly unfathomable [*völlig unfaßlich*] to us? Since we are forever inadequate in love, uncertain when choosing, and paralyzed in the face of death, how is it possible to exist [*wie ist es möglich, da zu sein*]?"³

As Käte Hamburger observed some time ago, Rilke's poetry does not drape philosophical propositions in poetic form but, instead, exists "in lieu of a philosophy" (*daß hier eine Lyrik statt einer Philosophie da ist*).⁴ To put it thus is to intimate that the form and medium of the poetic word – when considered in all its imagistic, rhythmic, and sonorous fecundity – seeks to capture phenomena and a wide spectrum of possible responses to them such as far exceed the purview of philosophical and discursive argument. Where Rilke and Heidegger are concerned, the question thus becomes whether this "in lieu of" merely denotes an asymmetry of approach to the fundamental question of Dasein ("How is it possible to exist?") or whether it signifies an outright incommensurability of the insights yielded by these writers' respective idioms of thought. It will be my contention that, even as Heidegger's diagnostic account of finite Dasein and its distinctive "attunement" (*Stimmung*) to the world shows significant convergences with, and likely debts to, Rilke's later poetry, its literal-demythologizing (Bultmannian) conception of language lacks a properly generative dimension of the word. Yet it is precisely this dimension of the *logos* that Rilke explores in unprecedented depth so as to capture the simultaneous impossibility and abundance of "ontic" experience. An epiphanic dimension is, for Rilke, an integral feature of being in the world and the very source for any conceivable, creative response to the question of Dasein or, more pointedly, *Hiersein* – as in *Hiersein ist herrlich!* ("Being here is splendid!").⁵ More than Heidegger, Rilke's astonishing sense of the plasticity of language, of words, names, even concepts infuses consciousness with visual and tactile qualities by exploring intricate sound patterns, by counterpointing syntactic expectation with distinctive rhythms, and by allowing for the

² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Apocalypse der deutschen Seele* [ADS] (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998); volume one of the trilogy opens with von Balthasar quoting Rilke's first elegy on the opening page; see also ADS I: 473; 490; 562; vol. II: 64-6; 162-7; 181-7; and III: 193-315.

³ Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Einsamkeit – Endlichkeit* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2004), 33; and *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 22; henceforth cited parenthetically as *GM* and *FC*, respectively. – Rilke, letter of 8 November 1915, in *Briefe in zwei Bänden*, edited by Horst Nalewski (Frankfurt: Insel, 1991), 1: 599-600; henceforth *RB*. For another programmatic formulation of existential questions, see Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge*, in Rilke, *Werke: kommentierte Ausgabe*, 4 vols., edited by Manfred Engel (Frankfurt: Insel, 1996), 3: 468-700; henceforth *KA*.

⁴ Käte Hamburger, *Philosophie der Dichter: Novalis, Schiller, Rilke* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966), 180 (trans. mine)

⁵ *KA* 2: 221. As Rilke writes in 1921, "considering that my productivity is ultimately grounded in the most immediate wonder at life itself [*aus der unmittelbarsten Bewunderung des Lebens, hervorgeht*], in daily, inexhaustible marveling (for how else could I have attained such productivity), I would feel like a liar if I were to reject life streaming toward me" (*RB* 2: 144).

inexhaustible metaphoric cross-pollination of specific words. Precariously situated in complex syntactic structures that often work at cross-purposes with rhythmic patterning, the poetic word unveils semantic spaces and epiphanic intensities well beyond depleted notions of aesthetic convention and bourgeois propriety that both Rilke and Heidegger regard as symptoms of a blighted modern culture.⁶

Hence, even as Rilke's poetry after 1914 frequently "surrenders the concrete shape and only speaks in abstract form, it retains *in nuce* the original concrete image [*Ausgangsbild*] within itself."⁷ For Rilke, the poetic word is above all an attempt to uncover intensive and intimate (*innig*) meaning within ordinary structures of experience. Ontologically speaking, Rilke's word is indeed timeless *logos*, capable of intimating an epiphanic fullness within the realm of mundane things forever beckoning at the level of human "intuition" (*Anschauung*) though beyond the reach of proposition (*Aussage*) and immediate "expression" (*Ausdruck*). No mere trace of some lost plenitude, Rilke's word instead seeks to reconstitute the mute, often unrecognized fullness of things in the domain of the "image" (*Bild*). For as a "property" of consciousness (*Bild ist Besitz* – KA 4: 117), the image enables Dasein to become fully present to the world, to become properly *Hiersein*. So understood, the poetic word is no longer conceived pragmatically as a mere tool for "soliciting" or "manipulating" the world (*Werbung nicht mehr* – KA 2: 220). Rather, its true value resides in facilitating the spiritual "action" (*Handlung*) of simply "saying" the thing and, in so establishing a reciprocal dynamic between mind and world that may extricate Dasein from modern life's aniconic transactionalism (*Tun ohne Bild*). Even generic names are capable of disclosing uncharted semantic terrain within the visible, ontic realm, if only we learn to "say" them in "such manner" (*so* – italicized by Rilke) as for the word to leave behind the quotidian order of reference and to *transform* the very being it names:

Sind wir vielleicht *hier*, um zu sagen: Haus,
Brücke, Brunnen, Tor, Krug, Obstbaum, Fenster, –
höchstens: Säule, Turm . . . aber zu *sagen*, verstehs,
oh zu sagen *so*, wie selber die Dinge niemals
innig meinten zu sein.

...

Hier ist des Säglichen Zeit, *hier* seine Heimat.
Sprich und bekenn. Mehr als je
fallen die Dinge dahin, die erlebbaren, denn,
was sie verdrängend ersetzt, ist ein Tun ohne Bild.
Tun unter Krusten, die willig zerspringen, sobald
innen das Handeln entwächst und sich anders begrenzt.⁸

⁶ See Annette Gerok-Reiter, *Wink und Wandlung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), 97f.

⁷ Romano Guardini, *Rilkes Deutung des Daseins* (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 1996), 226 (trans. mine).

⁸ KA 2: 228. – "Perhaps we are *here* in order to say: house / bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window – / at most: column, tower. . . . But to *say* them, you must understand, / oh to say them *more* intensely than the Things themselves / ever dreamed of existing. / . . . *here* is the time for the *sayable*, *here* is its homeland. / Speak and bear witness. More than ever / the Things that we might experience are vanishing, for / what crowds them out and replaces them is an imageless act. / An act under a shell, which easily cracks open, as soon as / the business inside outgrows it and seeks new limits." *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 2009), 57; henceforth cited parenthetically as *DES*.

In Rilke's mature poetry, grasping the order of Being and existence begins with recognizing ontic being or "things" (*Dinge*) as the only source capable of shedding light on the enigma of our lived existence. Yet Rilke finds the aura of things (animals, buildings, artworks, flowers, etc.) to have been atrophied by the humdrum of petit-bourgeois life and by the impersonal transactionalism of the bureaucratic state and international finance. The result is "a doing without an image" (*Tun ohne Bild*), an array of variously utilitarian and conventional, mute practices that have rendered the world small, pale, and brittle to the point of impending disintegration. As Rilke had observed in an earlier letter, "the world is contracting, just as things do insofar as their existence increasingly shifts into the vibration of money, which causes them to develop a type of spirituality that already exceeds their tangible reality."⁹

Von Balthasar's claim that "in Heidegger and Rilke Dasein has become wholly alert and sober" (*bei Heidegger und Rilke ist das Dasein völlig erwacht, und nüchtern*) thus requires further parsing.¹⁰ For "sober" not only implies a decided refusal of religious commitments, Romantic notions of sublimity and transcendence, or the blandishments of sentimental and fin-de-siècle aesthetics. On that much Rilke and Heidegger surely agree. Yet for Rilke it also implies an undesigning, humble, and patient attention to the visible ("ontic") world of things, with the poetic word awaiting its transfiguration in a virtual space called *Weltinnenraum*: *weil Hiersein viel ist, und weil uns scheinbar / alles das Hiesige braucht*.¹¹

Preise dem Engel die Welt, nicht die unsägliche, ihm
Kannst du nicht großtun mit herrlich Erfühltem; im Weltall
Wo er fühlender fühlt, bist du ein Neuling. Drum zeig
ihm das Einfache, das, von Geschlecht zu Geschlechtern gestaltet
als ein Unsriges lebt, neben der Hand und im Blick.
Sag ihm die Dinge.¹²

While the empyrean habitat of Rilke's angel at first glance seems entirely separate from, indeed incommensurable with, the order of "things," it is so only inasmuch as "novice" humans seek to attach grandiose speculative claims to it. For Rilke, however, transcendence does not involve some imaginary "felt splendor" (*herrlich Erfühltem*). Rather, it becomes accessible only as the "simplicity" of things that "live as part of ourselves / in our hands, in the shine of our eyes." Still, Rilke's three imperatives directed at finite Dasein – "praise ... show ... say" – also imply that the forever evolving order of simple

⁹ RB 1: 416 (letter of 1 March 1912); s.a. Rilke's letter to Hulewicz (13 November 1925): "the animated, experienced things, which have knowledge of us [*die belebten, die erlebten, die uns mitwissenden Dinge*] are fading and can no longer be replaced" (*RB 2: 377). On the role of the "image" (*Bild*) and the "loss of images" that, like Plato's ideas, ensure a well-ordered meaningful existence, see Guardini, *Rilkes Deutung des Daseins*, 310-15.

¹⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, vol. 3 (first edition 1939 – Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998), 199; henceforth cited parenthetically as *ADS*.

¹¹ KA 2: 227. – "Because *truly* being here is so much; because everything here / apparently needs us" (*DES*, 55). As Rilke writes, "I inhabit an altogether incommensurable world, awaiting the result of its influences, like one who is simply there, waiting ..." (*Ich wohne in einer mir völlig inkommensurablen Welt und warte das Ergebnis ihrer Einflüsse ab, wie einer der eben nur noch wartet*). Letter of 2 October 1914 (RB 1: 554).

¹² KA 2: 248. – "Praise this world to the angel, not the unsayable one, / you can't impress him with glorious emotion; in the universe / where he feels more powerfully, you are a novice. So show him/something simple which, formed over generations, / lives as our own, near our hand and within our gaze. / Tell him of Things." (*DES*, 57).

things is how we below experience transcendence, namely, by giving articulation to our intuitive relationship with the ambient world: *Wir machen mit Worten und Fingerzeigen / uns allmählich die Welt zu eigen, / Vielleicht ihren schwächsten, gefährlichsten Teil.*¹³

Unlike Rilke, Heidegger (in von Balthasar's polemical formulation) "never allows existence to come into view as a totality but duly brackets the question of the ontic" (*daß bei Heidegger nie das Ganze der Existenz in den Blick kommt, sondern das Problem des Ontischen geflissentlich ausgeklammert bleibt* – ADS 3: 222). Rejecting "substance ontology" in its Aristotelian and medieval form, Heidegger insists that neither a cumulative analysis of empirical praxis nor the abstract categories of Western metaphysics suffices to answer the question of Being. Yet Heidegger's alternative proposal, a *Fundamentalontologie* grounded in an analysis of Dasein, ends up displacing or bracketing yet again the world of things and the infinitely gradated, layered quality of their experience. Generic "dispositions" (*Befindlichkeiten*) such as care, curiosity, and anxiety effectively presuppose and, ultimately, obscure the richly textured particularity of the ontic realm and Dasein's infinitely varied and fluid embeddedness within that realm – which is the very substance of Rilke's late poetry. To be sure, Heidegger in *Being and Time* regards "any bracketing of the factual world in phenomenology [as] a crucial mistake," insisting that "all abstraction from the way Dasein actually experiences the world must destroy the phenomenon of 'having a world.'"¹⁴ Nevertheless, the curiously literalizing diction that pervades *Being and Time* (1927) and *Basic Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929/30) ends up reinstating the barrenness that Heidegger had considered to be a major flaw of Husserl's *epoché*: namely, its failure to grasp that meaning does not originate in discrete and explicit intentional states but in the "throwness" of Dasein into endless hermeneutic possibility.

That something analogous to Heidegger's "fundamental analysis of Dasein" also unfolds in Rilke's late poetry has long been recognized, beginning with none other than Heidegger himself. Fourteen years younger than the poet, the philosopher's first encounter with Rilke's oeuvre dates to his early years as a student of theology and philosophy at Freiburg (1909-1911) and extends to the beginning of World War I. Much later, Heidegger acknowledges Rilke's formative role for him during "the stimulating years" prior to WWI, and in some letters to Hannah Arendt he once again alludes to his readings in Rilke.¹⁵ Decades later, Heidegger also recalls being "deeply affected" by news of Rilke's death in December of 1926.¹⁶ A month earlier, he quotes Rilke in a letter to Elisabeth Blochmann, who in October 1928 sends him Lou Andreas-Salomé's short Rilke monograph (published that year) and, a year later, a new edition of Rilke letters just then published.¹⁷ In a letter from September 1929, Heidegger adapts Rilke's closing lines from "L'ange du Méridien" (1906), a sonnet meditating on the jarring dissonance between the mute and timeless serenity of a stone-carved angel on the Southside of the Chartres

¹³ "We, with a word or a finger-sign, gradually make the world our own, though perhaps its weakest, most precarious part" (*DES*, 113).

¹⁴ C. Dorothea Frede, "The Question of Being: Heidegger's Project," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Charles Guignon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 42-69; quote from 56.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, "Die erregenden Jahre zwischen 1910 und 1914 brachten ... Rilkes Dichtungen und Trakls Gedichte." *Gesamtausgabe* (henceforth GA) 1: 56.

¹⁶ See Heinrich Petzet, *Encounters & Dialogues with Martin Heidegger*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Malby (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 83.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger – Elisabeth Blochmann, *Briefwechsel, 1918-1969* (Marbach: Deutsches Literaturarchiv, 1990), 17; 24; 34.

Cathedral and Rilke and a friend finding themselves buffeted by icy winds as they glance up at the angel and the adjacent sundial: *Was weißt du, Steinerner, von unserm Sein? / und hältst du mit noch seligerm Gesichte / vielleicht die Tafel in die Nacht hinein?*¹⁸ In Heidegger's epistolary redaction, the line becomes *Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts*, a phrase also found in his inaugural lecture at the University of Freiburg (24 July 1929): *Die Hineingehaltenheit des Daseins in das Nichts auf dem Grunde der verborgenen Angst macht den Menschen zum Platzhalter des Nichts*.¹⁹ Substituting "nothingness" for Rilke's "night" is no mere slip of the pen, however, considering that without the alteration Heidegger's gnomic pronouncement ("man is the placeholder of nothingness") simply would not signify. Indeed, the substitution of "nothingness" for "night" foreshadows Heidegger's later, insistent bending of Rilke's visually far more particular diction toward philosophical concerns and conclusions that are not only more abstract in tone but, as we shall see, fundamentally different in substance.²⁰ By 1939, Rilke is once again on Heidegger's mind as he urges his sister to retrieve his prized 1905 edition of Rilke's *Book of Hours*, the gift of a fellow student; and only three years later passages from the Eighth Duino Elegy figure prominently in a sustained exegesis of *aletheia* and "the open" (*das Offene*) with which Heidegger's 1942/43 lectures on Parmenides conclude and to which we will turn momentarily.²¹ Heidegger's most sustained discussion of Rilke occurs in the 1946 essay, "Wherefore Poets?" (*Wozu Dichter?*), soon followed by his meeting and subsequent epistolary exchange with Rilke's widow, Clara, in the context of Heidegger's Bremen lectures in 1949, events brokered with much diplomatic finesse by the art historian and critic Heinrich Petzet.²²

II

Brief consideration of Heidegger's remarks on the Eighth Duino Elegy will show why Heidegger's occasional exegeses of Rilke's poetry are not the most effective inroad toward parsing their respective conception of Dasein. At the end of his 1942/43 lectures, Heidegger considers Rilke's phrase of "the open" (*das Offene*) as voiced at the opening of the Eighth Elegy:

Mit allen Augen sieht die Kreatur
das Offene. Nur unsre Augen sind
wie umgekehrt und ganz um sie gestellt
als Fallen, rings um ihren freien Ausgang.

¹⁸ KA 1: 463 – "Thing of stone, what do you know of our plight? / And does your face show a more blessed glance / as you hold your slate far into the night." Rilke, *New Poems*, trans. Joseph Cadora (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2014), 53.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Was ist Metaphysik?" in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1978), 117; see also Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 54f.

²⁰ To trace this divergence further, one should consider Rilke's fine early poem, "Menschen bei Nacht" (KA 1: 275).

²¹ Letters of 26 November and 19 December, 1939, in *Briefwechsel mit seinen Eltern* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 2013), 135; 137. – Heidegger, *Parmenides* in *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 54, 225-43 (henceforth cited parenthetically as GA 54); on Heidegger's discussion of Rilke, see Anthony Phelan, "Rilke and his Philosophical Critics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, edited by Karen Leeder and Robert Vilain (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 174-88.

²² Martin Heidegger, "Wozu Dichter?" in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1980), 285-316. – On Heidegger's conversations with Clara Rilke, see Petzet, *Encounters*, 49-56.

Was draußen ist, wir wissens aus des Tiers
 Antlitz allein; denn schon das frühe Kind
 wenden wir um und zwingens, daß es rückwärts
 Gestaltung sehe, nicht das Offne, das
 im Tiergesicht so tief ist. Frei von Tod.²³

Heidegger's discussion of these lines presupposes that Rilke's phrase of *das Offene* is intended, though ultimately fails, to clinch the same understanding of the phrase that Heidegger himself has been working out. It is this assumption that allows Heidegger to dispense with a thorough exegesis such as would first work out the elegy's fundamental issue by considering its complex rhythmic, sonorous, syntactic, and lexical organization. Claiming that "a thorough exegesis of the elegy is neither intended nor necessary" (GA 54: 227), Heidegger instead uses Rilke's poem as a foil for consolidating his own understanding of "openness as conceived in the domain of *aletheia* and in sharp contrast to Rilke's [poetic] word" (*durch die entschiedene Abhebung gegen das Rilkesche Wort*).

The elegy fails, so Heidegger contends, because it frames "openness" as a particular dynamic within the ontic realm: "a continuous sequence from one finite being to another within the horizon of beings" (*der ... ständige Fortgang von Seiendem zu Seiendem innerhalb des Seienden*).²⁴ Both man and "creature" reveal their essential difference through the way they possess or lack awareness of "the open." Yet in so framing the issue, Heidegger considers Rilke trapped by Western metaphysics' illicit transposition of Aristotle's *zoon logon echon* into the modern *animal rationale* (GA 54: 231): "[Rilke] stays entirely within ... the received metaphysical determination of man and animal" and within the horizon of man as incessantly representing, manufacturing, ordering, and reclaiming all his productions as the property of "the subject" (*der das ... jeweils Gemeisterte auf sich, d.h. den Menschen zurückstellt als Besitz*).²⁵ The elegy thus depicts man as wholly trapped by his own creations and, hence, terminally barred from accessing the "pure space" where animals and plants abide and flourish in eternal unself-consciousness. Quoting from the elegy once more – *Wir haben nie, nicht einen einzigen Tag, / Den reinen Raum vor uns, in den die Blumen / unendlich aufgehen*, Heidegger offers a seemingly cogent summary of how "the open" organizes the elegy's juxtaposition of man and animal.²⁶ Constitutive of the latter is "the absence of boundaries and barriers, the 'objectless' [*das Gegenstandslose*], which should not be construed as a deficiency but as the primordial wholeness of the real into which the animal has been placed and released [*freigelassen*]" (GA 54: 234).

²³ KA 2: 224. – "With all its eyes the creature looks out / into the Open. / Only *our* eyes are turned / backward, and surround plant, animal, child / like traps, as they emerge into their freedom. / We know what is really out there only from the animal's gaze; for we take the very young / child and force it around, so that it sees / objects – not the Open, which is so / deep in animals' faces. Free from death." (DES, 49).

²⁴ GA 54: 226. For a more searching and nuanced reading, see Guardini, *Rilkes Deutung*, 265.

²⁵ GA 54: 232. Three years later, Heidegger sharpens his observation, noting that "*animal rationale* ... is not simply the Latin translation of the Greek *zoon logon echon* but rather a metaphysical interpretation of it" and, as such, "conditioned by metaphysics" which, even as it "indeed represents beings in their Being ... does not think the difference of both" (*denkt nicht den Unterschied beider*). It is this failure that prevents Western thought from "ask[ing] whether the essence of man primordially and most decisively lies in the dimension of *animalitas* at all. Are we really on the right track toward the essence of man as long as we set him off as one living creature among others in contrast to plants, beasts, and God?" "Letter on Humanism," 226f.

²⁶ KA 2: 225. – "Never, not for a single day, do *we* have / before us that pure space into which flowers / endlessly open" (DES, 49).

In the event, Heidegger signally fails to see how the elegy's dialectical form, by progressively working through the relation of man and creature, commutes their seeming opposition into an intentional object of lyric consciousness. Thus Rilke's elegiac meditation gradually transposes the "opposition" of two kinds of beings into a play of "differences" encompassed by, though never fungible with, Being. As the initial static "opposition" (*Gegensatz*) of man and animal is liquefied into dynamic "difference" (*Unterschied*), or into what Hölderlin calls *das harmonisch-entgegengesetzte*, the lyric voice transcends the horizon of mere *Dasein* and comes to discern the *Kreatur* as its own other. This becomes especially apparent in lines not considered by Heidegger:

Und doch ist in dem wachsam warmen Tier
Gewicht und Sorge einer großen Schwermut.
Denn ihm auch haftet immer an, was uns
oft überwältigt, – die Erinnerung,
als sei schon einmal das, wonach man drängt,
näher gewesen, treuer und sein Anschluß
unendlich zärtlich. Hier ist alles Abstand,
und dort wars Atem. Nach der ersten Heimat
ist ihm die zweite zwitterig und windig.²⁷

Rilke's elegy is less an extended reflection on the *same* unchanging opposition than a gradual probing of the virtual space that man and creature share. In a short prose piece from 1913, titled "Erlebnis," Rilke homes in on this epiphanic convergence of consciousness and its other by observing how, suddenly, "objects appeared at once more distant and more true [*zugleich wahrer*], ... the moment when a bird call out there accorded with its presence in his interior, as it were not checked by the boundary of his physical body but fusing both into a single continuous space" [*ein Vogelruf draußen und in seinem Innern übereinstimmend da war, indem er sich gewissermaßen an der Grenze des Körpers nicht brach, beides zu einem ununterbrochenen Raum zusammennahm*].²⁸ Likewise, the Eighth Elegy ponders how consciousness will unexpectedly find itself enveloped by this virtual space, or *Weltinnenraum*. Here "openness" divulges itself in small-scale epiphanies, such as "when a dumb animal, with its calm eyes, /is seeing through and through us. / That's our Fate, to be possessed by the opposite, / to be forever across-from and nothing more" (*Oder daß ein Tier, ein stummes, aufschaut, ruhig durch uns durch. Dieses heißt Schicksal: gegenüber sein und nichts als das und immer gegenüber* – KA 2: 225). The passage echoes a remarkable encounter with an animal that Rilke had recorded nearly a decade earlier:

Recently, in Cordoba, an ugly little female dog, in a state of advanced pregnancy, came toward me. It was a truly unremarkable animal, no doubt carrying random offspring that wasn't going to be anyone's concern. Still, she struggled over toward me and, as we were alone, raised her eyes enlarged by care and inwardness and desired my gaze [*hob ihre von Sorge und Innerlichkeit vergrößerten Augen auf und*

²⁷ KA 2: 225. – "Yet in the alert, warm animal there lies / the pain and burden of an enormous sadness. / For it too feels the presence of what often / overwhelms us: a memory, as if the element we keep pressing toward was once / more intimate, more true, and our communion / infinitely tender. Here all is distance; / there it was breath. After that first home / the second seems ambiguous and drafty." (DES, 51).

²⁸ "Ein Erlebnis" (KA 4: 668); Rilke recalls this moment in a letter of 14 January 1919 RB 1: 702.

begehrte meinen Blick]. And in her look there was everything that transcends the individual, reaching I don't know where, into the future or the unfathomable. ... We were celebrating the liturgy, so to speak, engaged in the simplest giving and receiving [*wir lasen gewissermaßen die Messe zusammen, die Handlung war nichts als Geben und Annehmen*], and our communication was altogether boundless. Such things can surely happen only on Earth ... (RB 1: 450; trans. mine)

Such an account sharply contradicts Heidegger's reading of the Eighth Elegy that would construe "fate" as sheer oppositionality and mankind's seemingly terminal estrangement from all things (animate and inanimate) in the modality of definitions and predication. If Rilke initially conceives fate as being "forever across-from and nothing more" (*gegenüber sein /und nichts als das und immer gegenüber*), that very predicament suddenly comes into focus in an experience wherein, without negating the distance, both communicants find themselves jointly participating in a virtual space, a *Weltinnenraum* that is delineated in the incontrovertible reciprocity of their gaze. Time and again, Rilke's writings feature epiphanic spikes in which human beings' seemingly fated estrangement from the realm of creatures and things is momentarily overcome. However ineffable the communion between man and dog that so unexpectedly plays out in some nameless street in Cordoba, there is no denying that the animal's gaze amounts not just to a mechanistic looking-at but to a genuine looking-for reciprocation (*hob ihre von Sorge und Innerlichkeit vergrößerten Augen auf und begehrte meinen Blick*). In the blink of an eye (*Augenblick*), a seemingly fated opposition of man and creature dissolves as both participate in a shared order of Being. However ineffable, such an experience of pure reciprocity (*nichts als Geben und Annehmen*) explodes the myth of fate confining each being within a horizon seemingly decreed by nature itself. Where an "accord is boundless" (*unsere ganze Verständigung war grenzenlos*) the horizon of finitude is dispelled, at least temporarily, and *Dasein* is no longer circumscribed by pure immanence. The moment of grace – to use a word that for contingent biographical rather than sound theological reasons Rilke would almost certainly have rejected – involves precisely this wordless communion of two orders of being with one another and thereby with Being as such.

Heidegger's contention that, unlike what we find in Hölderlin's late poetry, Rilke situates "the open" strictly within an "ontic" matrix (of things, objects, interests, desires, fears), ignores evidence that Rilke's understanding of *das Offene* bears a strong resemblance to his own. Indeed, a more speculative and somewhat conspiratorial reading, not to be pursued here, might take Heidegger's account as belatedly disputing Rilke's awareness of the very ontological difference that close study of the elegies may well have helped Heidegger to formulate in the first place. Be that as it may, small textual details, such as the italicized copula "is" in line 5 (*Was draußen ist, wir wissens aus des Tiers Antlitz allein*) imply a shift of focus, away "from empirical facts ... and toward authentic 'deep Being' [*das "tiefe Sein" der Eigentlichkeit*] where all is One."²⁹ In an often-quoted letter to Nora Purtscher-Weydenbruck, also referenced by Guardini, Rilke anticipates Heidegger's founding distinction between spatiotemporal, ontic beings and Being, between "being-such" (*Was-sein*) and "Being-as-such" (*Daß-Sein*). Rilke there speaks of paranormal or mystical experiences that, far from being subjectively indulged, beg to be "integrated with the totality of our being-here" (*in das Ganze unseres Daseins einzuordnen*). So considered, the epiphanies in question expose a

²⁹ Guardini, *Rilkes Deutung*, 268.

hitherto unobserved foundation of the pyramid atop which sits consciousness itself. Put differently, the experiences in question unveil a “depth of our interiority” (*Tiefendimension unseres Inneren*) extending far beyond the quotidian, spatiotemporal consciousness circumscribed by “the givenness of worldly Dasein” (*die von Raum und Zeit unabhängigen Gegebenheiten des weltischen Daseins*) into an “imaginary space” (*imaginärer Raum* – RB 2: 333f.).

To be sure, Rilke never voices the slightest pretensions to being a philosopher and, as early as July 1901, acknowledges his “lack all philosophical education [*ohne jegliche philosophische Vorbildung*] and experience; whenever encountering philosophy in any of its guises, I have treated it as poetry [*wie eine Dichtung behandelt*], with an excess of aesthetic interest and a deficit of fanaticism and conscientiousness [*zuwenig Fanatismus und Gewissenhaftigkeit*]” (RB 1: 88f.). Instead, he takes lyric speech and philosophical prose to be related as two distinct modes of reasoning, neither reducible to the other, though both forever circling the same existential questions. Much later, in his programmatic letter to Witold Hulewicz (13 November 1925), Rilke affirms that his poetry, particularly the elegies, aspires both in depth and scope to a philosophical meditation on the “sheer impossibility of this life, suspended over the bottomless” (*daß dieses so ins Bodenlose gehängte Leben unmöglich sei*). Rather than seeing existence fragmented into “this world and the next, there is only the great unity” (*die große Einheit* – RB 2: 374) encompassing and entwining both, life and death – which is not its negation but, rather, the “middle of life” itself.³⁰

Conversely, and with some justification, Heidegger dismisses objections to his measuring poetic speech with a philosophical yardstick as “nonsense” (*Unfug*): “the authority of word and speech must be reclaimed for the care of man and restored to their primordial, shared purpose (*Befugnis*). Truth cannot be logically thought as incidental to one or another medium of reflection but must be one” (GA 54: 227). In his study of the elegies, Guardini repeatedly seconds this point, insisting that Rilke’s mature poetry is never just “expression but statement” (*nicht nur Ausdruck, sondern auch Aussage*).³¹ Yet that is as far as the similarities extend. For in his Parmenides lectures, Heidegger construes Rilke’s elegy as adumbrating the poet’s *philosophical* position, rather than as the projection of a voice struggling to enlarge the scope of what language can say (*aussagen*) in response to the ontological question of existence itself (“How is it possible to live?”). By ignoring the essential contingency of Rilke’s lyric voice and his habit of “drawing on discrete experiences and impressions” (*die bloße Berufung auf persönliche Erlebnisse und Eindrücke*), Heidegger presupposes that poetic, no less than theological, answers to the question of *Dasein* must be fungible with an analysis of *Dasein* that is itself the prolegomenon to his *Fundamentalontologie*. Lecturing in the wake of General Paulus’ surrender at Stalingrad (2 Feb. 1943), Heidegger rejects idiosyncratic, ambiguous, or subjective expression as plainly impermissible “in an age where not only the very being or not-being of a people is being decided, but more fundamentally yet the essence and truth of Being and non-being are at stake” (*in einem Zeitalter, in dem nicht nur Sein oder Nichtsein eines Volkes zur Entscheidung steht, sondern all dem voraus das Wesen und die Wahrheit von*

³⁰ As Rilke puts it, “I accuse all modern religions of having furnished the faithful with consolations and extenuations of death, rather than enabling them to reconcile and arrange themselves with death. ... What is needed is a key that permits us to read the word ‘death’ without negation; like the moon, so life surely has at all times a side that faces away from us, yet which is *not* its opposite but completes it, makes it into the whole, the real, intact, and round sphere or orb of Being” (*zu der wirklichen heilen und vollen Sphäre und Kugel des Seins*). To Margo Sizzo, 6 January 1923 (RB 2: 267f.); see also his letter to Anita Forrer of 22–24 March 1920 (RB 2: 57–63).

³¹ Guardini, *Rilkes Deutung*, 19.

Sein und Nichtsein selbst).³² To the extent that Heidegger appraises Rilke's late poetry with constant reference to his own philosophical objectives, he proves unable (or disinclined) to respond to the elegy's formal and semantic complexity. From the outset, that is, Heidegger's exegeses of Rilke preclude the possibility that the poetry in question might be animated by insights and concerns at once closer to his own *Fundamentalontologie* and, for that very reason also more revealingly at variance with that project.

III

Taking to heart von Balthasar's canny insight that "Heidegger has a habit of *not* quoting the decisive authors precisely where, in his oeuvre, they truly speak" (*AdS* 3: 195n.), a more revealing approach, to be pursued for the remainder of this essay, will have us stage a virtual conversation between the poet and the philosopher by returning to the Heidegger of the late 1920s, especially his lectures on *Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Einsamkeit – Endlichkeit* (1929/30). Extending the central thesis of *Being and Time* (1927), these lectures conceive of Dasein as circumscribed by "fundamental dispositions" (*Grundstimmungen*) reflecting its utter finitude and solitude. More emphatically than before, Heidegger characterizes modern existence as mediocre, existentially tedious, and bereft of epiphanic potentialities. A compound of statistical averages, mimetic habits, and an unthinking conformity that seemingly extends across all of modern society, "average man" (*der Normalmensch* – *GM* 32/*FC* 21) – successor to the "anyone" (*das Man*) of *Being and Time* (§§ 25-27) – has become "a being among countless others."³³ As such, modern Dasein is both symptom and consummation of a century-old tendency in Western metaphysics to treat the supernatural as just another domain of beings and, in so doing, "descend to the same level with other knowledge of beings in the sciences or practical-technical fields." Since Descartes, this conception of "metaphysics is leveled down and trivialized into everyday knowledge" (*nivelliert und veräußerlicht in die alltägliche Erkenntnis*), thereby causing the "everyday attitude" of the agent of knowledge (*die alltägliche Haltung des Erkennenden*) to have become the norm. With the "meta-" having effectively been expunged from metaphysics, the "peculiar turnaround which philosophizing ultimately entails" has become so utterly obscured as to cause thinking to have lost touch with Being altogether (*enthüllt gerade nichts von der eigentümlichen Umwendung, die am Ende das Philosophieren in sich schließt* – *GM* 66/*FC* 44).

For Heidegger, Western metaphysics' progressive deviation from its innermost calling has, in the modern era, resulted in a pervasive leveling and averaging of human existence itself. With prophetic urgency he thus asks, "who can guarantee to us that man in this present-day self-conception has not raised some mediocre aspect of himself to the status of a god?" (*Wer verbürgt uns, daß der Mensch in dieser seiner heutigen Selbstauffassung nicht eine Mittelmäßigkeit seiner selbst zum Gott erhoben hat* – *GM* 32/*FC* 22). Are we to take modern naturalism's premise that "stone, animal, man, and indeed plants [are] all given to us on the same level" (*gleichmäßig auf einer Ebene gegeben* – *GM*

³² *GA* 54: 236. – Similarly, in "Wozu Dichter?" Heidegger's idiosyncratic formulation that the *Elegies* and the *Sonnets to Orpheus* "contract" into Rilke's "valid poem" (*das gültige Gedicht Rilkes zieht sich in geduldiger Sammlung auf die beiden schmalen Bände der Duineser Elegien und der Sonnette an Orpheus zusammen* – *Holzwege*, 270) preempts consideration of Rilke's subtle experimentation with sound, rhythm, syntax, tone, perspective, allusion, and, especially, with blurring the borderline between the conceptual, the nominal, and the metaphoric dimension of words.

³³ Martin Heidegger, *Der Mensch – ein Seiendes unter anderen*, in "Was ist Metaphysik?" in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1978), 105.

303/FC 207), and is the consequent deformation of Dasein itself, as a definitive and irreversible condition? Heidegger's apparent critique of the univocity of Being seems to anticipate (sharply contested) claims to the same effect recently advanced by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and others about Duns Scotus' disfiguring impact on philosophical theology and metaphysics.³⁴ To suppose "that what I go out to, in moving away from the physical, is in principle not distinguished from the physical [*sich grundsätzlich von diesem nicht unterscheidet*], except through the distinction persisting between the sensuous and the suprasensuous, ... is," so Heidegger contends, "a complete misinterpretation of the *theion* which, in Aristotle, is at least left to stand as a problem" (GA 66-7/FC 44).

Any attempt to recover Being (however obscured by its re-designation as *theion*) must begin with an "awakening" of the "fundamental attunements" (*Grundstimmungen*) that reflect the conflation of Being with "equivalent/indifferent" (*gleich-gültig*) beings. "Mood" (*Stimmung*) is not an *accidens* that has befallen the sub/stance of interiority; it is not to be confused with a contingent feeling or anything "that occurs in the soul as an experience." Precisely because Dasein is at all times circumscribed by its fundamental attunement to the world, its "mood" can never become an intentional object for consciousness. Inasmuch as Dasein itself is always already "attuned" (*gestimmt*) (GM 99-102/FC 66-8) vis-à-vis the world, its "moods" cannot be assimilated to the order of "experience" (*Erlebnis*). Alluding to his disputation with Ernst Cassirer in Davos earlier that same year, Heidegger sharply criticizes the project of *Kulturphilosophie* for failing to grasp "the essence of man as Dasein" (GM 115/FC 77). In strident terms, he summarily dismisses the entire framework of bourgeois humanism and *Bildung* developed by Herder, Goethe, and Humboldt among others (all of them variously drawing on the *Urtext* of Kant's third *Critique*). In its early-twentieth-century inflection by Cassirer and the Warburg Circle, such a "philosophy of culture" is little more than a nostalgic residue (*das Ewig-Gestrige* – GM 112/FC 75) that "no longer has a hold on us" (*Diese Kulturphilosophie ... greift uns nicht*). To the question "Why not?" and "Why must we discredit any philosophy of symbolic forms as epigonal?", Heidegger's dismissive response will be that a philosophy premised on the creative and transcendent power of symbolic forms "merely attains the *setting-out* of man, but never his *Da-sein*" (*sie gelangt nur zur Dar-stellung ... aber nie zu seinem Da-sein* – GM 115/FC 77).

What renders *Darstellung* and the symbolic forms on which it relies so objectionable is that it presupposes the human individual's fundamental openness and orientation toward supra-personal meaning and capacities that Heidegger's analysis of Dasein has effectively jettisoned altogether. Even more emphatically than *Being and Time*, the 1929/30 lectures develop a model "of philosophy functioning as a theology evacuated of transcendence" and, to that end, insistently "despoiling theology of the language of

³⁴ Among those attributing a univocal conception of being to Duns Scotus, see Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: on the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), esp. 121-35. More nuanced is Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 174-80; following Dupré, Charles Taylor considers the "autonomization of nature [as] the first timid step towards the negation of all super-nature" that, in the later scholasticism of Ockham, Biel, and Autrecourt, renders things no longer intelligible "in terms of supposedly normative patterns at work in them." *A Secular Age* (Harvard, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 91, 98. See also Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 160-82. Among those sharply critical of those attributing a univocal conception of divine and finite being to Duns Scotus, see David Aers "Introduction" to the special issue on Brad Gregory's *Unintended Reformation* in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 46, no. 3 (2016): 475-8 and Richard Cross, "Where Angels Fear to Tread: Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy," *Antonianum* 76, no. 1 (2001): 7-41.

being and beings."³⁵ Not infrequently, Heidegger comes close to trading philosophical argument for a hectoring, ideologically hard-driving tone that blurs the line between the descriptive and the normative, between sweeping assumptions and seductive rhetorical questions. On his account, modern Dasein appears wholly bereft of all inner meaning: "we no longer find relevant meanings, no genuine possibilities of Being" (*Wir finden für uns keine Bedeutung, d.h. keine wesentliche Möglichkeit des Seins mehr*). Against this background of all-encompassing, existential desolation and boredom, a rhetoric of implacable, collective self-fashioning emerges. Once it awakens to its own destitute interiority, Dasein therefore has no choice but to construct a new "role" for itself:

Why do we find no meaning for ourselves any more, i.e., no essential possibility of being? Is it because an *indifference* [*Gleichgültigkeit*] yawns at us out of all things, an indifference whose grounds we do not know? ... Nevertheless we seek a role for ourselves. Once again we must ask, "What is happening here?" Must we first make ourselves interesting to ourselves again? Why *must* we do this? Perhaps because we ourselves have become bored with ourselves? (*GM 115/FC 77*).

Having pronounced a quasi-Gnostic rift between Being and Dasein, Heidegger's performatively drawn-out disquisition on boredom issues in an ominous political theology that involves the wholesale repudiation of "our everyday human traits, our being human," traits that have only served to "fend off and conceal the profound boredom in question" (*ob der heutige Mensch nicht gerade in und durch alle seine heutigen Menschlichkeiten jene tiefe Langeweile niederhält, und das heißt, ob er nicht sein Dasein als solches sich verbirgt*).³⁶

Following a cataclysmic World War that had produced some thirty-five million casualties (including countless young men of Heidegger's generation), and considering Germany's post-war faltering attempts at creating viable economic and democratic structures, Heidegger's jaundiced view of Weimar Germany's superannuated forms of sociability can hardly surprise. Like the principals of Hermann Broch's *Sleepwalkers* (1931), Heidegger's Dasein finds itself ensnared by the false epiphanies and stale ideals of an economically ruined and morally discredited parent generation. In rejecting this epigonal order, Heidegger's own generation had come to cultivate a stridently anti-bourgeois ethos that, both prior to and after World War I, had also found expression in the Catholic and Protestant youth movements (Quickborn, Heliand, Juventus, Bund Neudeutschland, Wandervogel, et al.), some of them galvanized by charismatic intellectuals such as Guardini and Przywara. Other forms of critique, less communitarian and practical than ideologically hard-driving and often pointedly anti-democratic (Spengler, Schmitt, Jünger, Liebknecht, Brecht, et al.) arise alongside. Among the many causes contributing to the failure of the Weimar Republic, not least was the complacency with which its cultural architects and political founders had simply assumed

³⁵ David Bentley Hart, "The Offering of Names," in *The Hidden and the Manifest* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 8, 10.

³⁶ *GM 248/FC 166*. One ought to ask what prompts Heidegger's choice of "a profound boredom [as the] fundamental attunement of contemporary Dasein" (*GM 200/FC 132*). His choice of "contemporary" suggests a historical judgment of sorts, though no evidence is provided and no alternative types of attunement are being considered. Why boredom, or anxiety, and why now? Regarding Heidegger's identification of "anxiety" as Dasein's "fundamental attunement" in the present, Hart sensibly asks why, "rather than ... wonder, or even eros" anxiety should stake a "better claim to ontological probity?" David Bentley Hart, "The Offering of Names," 34.

the emergent democratic order to draw on the cultural, religious, and social norms and practices of Wilhelmine Germany – an order that, even prior to the Great War, had manifestly outlived itself.

For Heidegger, hardly alone in this regard, this entire framework must be leveled if Dasein is to confront its essential “emptiness” (*Leergelassenheit*) and the fact that the bourgeois individual promoted by Romantic ideals of *Bildung* and *Kultur* has mutated “into an undifferentiated no one” (*zu einem indifferenten Niemand* – GM 203/FC 135). Still, what sets Heidegger apart from virtually all of his contemporaries, is that his analysis of Dasein is emphatically *not* intended as a historical and contingent portrait of an era:

Profound boredom, its being left empty, means being delivered over to beings’ telling refusal of themselves as a whole [*das Ausgeliefertsein an das sich im Ganzen versagende Seiende*]. It is thus an emptiness as a whole [*solche Leere im Ganzen*]. We ask: Is *our* Dasein attuned through and through by such *emptiness as a whole*? ... Are we affected by a need [Not], does any such need concern us? More than one will retort: everywhere there are disruptions, crises, catastrophes, needs: the contemporary social misery, political confusion, the powerlessness of science, the erosion of art, the groundlessness [*Bodenlosigkeit*] of philosophy, the impotence of religion.

To those who would object to this dismal portrait by pointing out the many valiant efforts by “groups, associations, circles, classes, parties” aimed at remedying such “distress” [Not], Heidegger replies, almost mockingly, that “precisely this fitful self-defense [*diese zappelnde Notwehr*] ... prevents any need from emerging in its totality [*eine Not im Ganzen*]” (GM 243/FC 163). The procedural and organizational rear-guard actions of Weimar Germany around 1930, no less than the faltering Republic’s stubborn attachment to a moribund humanist inheritance merely obfuscates Dasein’s existential “distress” [Not], “emptiness” [*Leergelassenheit*], and “anxiety” [*Bedrängnis*]. Democratic bustle and humanitarian concern are precisely the reason why “an essential oppressiveness refuses itself” (*daß eine wesentliche Bedrängnis sich versagt*). What is called for, Heidegger insists, is Dasein’s confrontation with its own, constitutive “distress,” that is, not more remedial transactionalism but a willed, total caesura of history.

Particularly revealing in this regard is Heidegger’s critique of “empathy” (*Einfühlung*) in §49 of the lectures. Where different *kinds* of being are concerned, he argues, the term simply does not signify. Thus a human being cannot “transpose” (*versetzen*) herself into a stone or an animal; which, it bears pointing out, is not what Scheler or, for that matter, Rilke in his Eighth Elegy suggests. “Empathy” is not a matter of substituting oneself for another’s identity but the art of its imaginative apprehension, a relation achieved not by negating but more fully attending to the other “across from” (*gegenüber*) oneself. Meanwhile, where other *human* beings are concerned, Heidegger once again rejects the ideal of empathy as originating in a misconception of the person as a hermetically sealed and isolated “ego-sphere” (*Ichsphäre*). In fact, “the being-there of Da-sein means *being with others* [*Mitsein*], precisely in the manner of Dasein, i.e., existing with others [*Mitexistieren*].” Revealing about Heidegger’s equation of “empathy” and “existing with others,” of *Einfühlung* and *Mitexistieren* (GM 301/FC 205), is the slippage from creative and imaginative *action* to a naturalistic concept of *behavior*. Within a few pages, Scheler’s notion of empathy has dissolved into an “inconspicuous and self-evident going alongside one another” (*dieses unauffällige, selbstverständliche Miteinandergehen*), and all creative self-transcendence focused on a particular *person* has been diluted into Dasein’s

unthinking movement within a collective.³⁷ Lecturing in 1930, Heidegger not only rejects Scheler's personalism but also insists that, collectively, Dasein must learn to embrace a negative epiphany whose key words are those of "emergency" (*Not*) and "terror" (*Schrecken*). Modern Dasein pines for the man-God who will unsparingly confront it with the existential dread that *Kultur* and *Geist* have obscured for all too long: "we must first call for someone capable of instilling terror into our Dasein again" (*wir müssen erst wieder rufen nach dem, der unserem Dasein einen Schrecken einzujagen vermag* (GM 255/FC 172). Hope and charity must be expunged, not just from philosophy, where Heidegger considers them to be unwelcome traces of philosophy's unhappy entanglement with theology, but from thinking itself. In the strictest and most thoroughgoing sense possible, that is, Heidegger seeks to divest thinking itself of any counter-factual or transcendent dimension, thereby leaving his existential analyses seemingly "animated by a theological hunger, in the service of which he pursues an entirely unsustainable anti-theological logic of immanence."³⁸

IV

It is here that the 1929/30 lectures return us to the relationship between community, epiphany, and language briefly touched upon above. Heidegger's vision of a wholly unfettered Dasein entails an iconoclasm of all "fixed ideals and archetypes" (*festes Ideal und starr aufgehängtes Urbild* – GM 247/FC 165). What stands to be expunged in the present is the lived experience of time as a continuous, meaningful narrative and dynamic tradition. For underwriting that conception, which extends from Platonic and Patristic thought all the way to the enlightened humanism of Goethe, Humboldt, and Cassirer, is the malleable authority of symbolic forms mediating finite individual existence with Plato's transcendentals of the good, the beautiful, and the true. Whether considered in a political, aesthetic, or liturgical sense, the *symbolon* will forge a lateral community of finite beings precisely insofar as the latter jointly acknowledge the symbol's supra-individual and trans-generational authority. Like tradition itself, the symbol constitutes a type of intercession. As is well known, the term *symbolon* originates in the *tessera hospitalis* of the Greeks, shards of a single piece of pottery preserved so that, upon being rejoined or "fitted-together" (*ymballein*) at some future point in time, they will enable their respective bearers to identify themselves as members of a single community of memory. Hence, for the *symbolon* to properly function, it is presupposed that individuals otherwise unknown to one another may recognize and acknowledge the past as their shared and unifying inheritance. As Gadamer puts it, the symbol "not only points to the fact that people belong together, but demonstrates and visibly presents that fact."³⁹ Or, in Rilke's gnomic line: *Heil dem Geist, der uns verbinden mag; / denn wir leben wahrhaft in Figuren.*⁴⁰

Heidegger's concept of *logos* implicitly contests this transcendent, supra-personal authority of the symbolic order. Already in his writings of the late 1920s, language instead

³⁷ That theories of sympathy may evolve into a reflexive, proto-behaviorist model of sociability can already be observed in Adam Smith; see my discussion of "sentiment" as a form of unreflective mimesis giving rise to conformist sociality in *Minding the Modern*, 327-73.

³⁸ Hart, "The Offering of Names," 33.

³⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2006), 147.

⁴⁰ KA 2: 246. – "Hail to the god who joins us; for through him arise the symbols where truly live." (*DES*, 105).

is mobilized for the purposes of “reduction.” Though obviously derived from Husserl, the term in Heidegger’s corpus is assigned a vastly expanded role as a “leading-back” (Lat. *reducere*) of all kinds of meanings, philosophical no less than everyday, to the central idea of Dasein’s “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*). Contrary to a view of language as symbolic form grounded in and, in turn, reaffirming the continuity of the present with the past, *logos* in Heidegger is emphatically prospecting, the “projection” (*Entwurf*) of a future on the part of Dasein that thereby effectively realizes itself as a “self-projection” (*Selbstentwurf*).⁴¹ As such, language at its best *discovers* or *unveils* (*entdecken/entbergen*) precisely what had been concealed by a given tradition and the specific symbolic order instituting the continuity of past and present. “Reduction,” then, precisely does *not* aim at “retrieving” or creatively engaging with a tradition but, rather, at unmasking its culpable role in the concealment and forgetting of Being. Where a symbolic quality continues to permeate the *logos*, Heidegger’s Dasein remains caught up in a complex web of transcendent meanings and ethical obligations. Yet Dasein, on his account, will properly be itself only if and when it no longer seeks to respond to past actualities but to construct or “project” future possibilities; and these “projected possibilities,” Heidegger claims, are intelligible only insofar as they remain wholly immanent to Dasein itself: “interpretation is not the acknowledgment of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding.”⁴²

Occasionally, Heidegger appears to glimpse a transcendent pattern woven into the very fabric of *logos* and *legen* and, as such, indispensable as the contrasting foil for his proposed, strictly immanent conception of existence. For if the “fundamental function of *legen* is to take whatever prevails from concealment” (*GM 41/FC 27*) and thereby realize truth (*aletheia*) as “unconcealment” (*Entbergen*), then the *logos* is the site of transcendence *par excellence*. It alone “sustains Dasein’s potentiality for being, its possibilities,” for which reason Heidegger also speaks of *logos* as “a telling announcement” (*Ansage*) or a “calling” (*Anrufen*) ... which properly makes possible the Dasein in me” (*GM 216/FC 143*). In language reminiscent of Rilke’s letters, he also characterizes philosophy as “the adventure of human existence, an appetite for the wholly enigmatic nature and fullness of Dasein and all things” (*die Lust am Abenteuer der Existenz des Menschen, das Durchkosten der ganzen Rätselhaftigkeit und Fülle des Daseins und der Dinge* – *GM 14/FC 10*). Indeed, absent such a transcendent horizon of positivity, of hope and faith in the *logos*, it would be hard to see how and wherefore philosophy’s quest should even get underway in the first place. Creative thought does not merely seek to reconfirm what is immanent to Dasein. Or, put differently, the notion of Dasein as pure immanence is incommensurable with its manifestation as a sheer “self-projection” (*Selbstentwurf*). In *Neue Gedichte* (1907),

⁴¹ As Walter Hoeres has shown in some penetrating analyses, the radical immanence of Dasein in Heidegger’s writings of the late 1920s has the peculiar effect of construing most other key concepts – such as “intuition” (*Anschauung*), “knowledge” (*Erkenntnis*), and “truth” (*Wahrheit*) – as epiphenomenal. Even the concept of openness “has itself been derived from the transcendental self-projection [*Selbstentwurf*] of Dasein. ... Notwithstanding many differences, Heidegger remains indebted to Husserl’s objective, *viz.*, to explain openness and, accordingly, the ‘transcendent status of the thing, their in-itself,’ in terms of immanence.” Building on Ernst Tugendhat’s critique, Hoeres sees Heidegger forcing this self-certifying notion of Dasein to the point that he “cannot even pose the question concerning objective truth [*der gegenständlichen Wahrheit*]. For truth only ever originates in [Dasein’s] self-projection and functions as its extension.” Walter Hoeres, *Der Weg der Anschauung* (Zug, Switzerland: Graue Reihe, 2004), 38; 41 (trans. mine).

⁴² *Auslegung ist nicht die Kenntnisnahme des Verstandenen, sondern die Ausarbeitung der im Verstehen entworfenen Möglichkeiten* (*BT 139/SZ 148*). As David Bentley Hart points out, having “elevated possibility over actuality” Heidegger fails to see that “the difference between possible and actual” must itself have been “enfolded within a prior actuality. ... *fieri* simply cannot precede *esse*.” (Hart, “The Offering of Names,” 17-18).

Rilke reimagines the parable of the prodigal son in a poem that specifically focuses on the radical openness and enigma not only of *where* he will go but *who*, by departing for "the unknown" (*ins Ungewisse*) he will thereby become.

Und dann doch fortzugehen, Hand aus Hand,
 Als ob man ein Geheiltes neu zerrisse,
 Und fortzugehn: wohin? Ins Ungewisse,
 ...
 Dies alles auf sich nehmen und vergebens
 vielleicht Gehaltnes fallen lassen, um
 allein zu sterben, wissend nicht warum –
 Ist das der Eingang eines neuen Lebens?⁴³

Similarly, by proclaiming that the *logos* "tears *physis* ... from concealment [*der Verborgenheit entreißt*] and thus brings beings to their truth," that truth corresponds "to the German word *Un-schuld* [in-nocence], *Un-endlichkeit* [in-finity]," and that infinitude is the very essence of the *logos*, Heidegger appears to break with his rigidly immanent conception of *Dasein*. It seems nonsensical, then, to characterize "truth [as] a fate of the finitude of man" (*daß Wahrheit ein Schicksal der Endlichkeit des Menschen ist* - (GM 43-5/FC 29) and, concurrently, to insist that "what is true for the poet is true of philosophy: the poet should create, not talk [*Bilde Dichter, rede nicht!*]" (GM 232/FC 154).⁴⁴ For unlike mere "making" (*facere*), "creating" (*creare*) does not just alter what has been given but utterly transforms and transcends it.

The implausibility of a wholly immanent conception of existence proves especially revealing when *Dasein* engages the world in the primal modality of intuition. As Walter Hoeres puts it, "where Heidegger attempts to explain, indeed derive, the meaning and rank of intuition itself from the anterior nexus of actual life and *Dasein*'s mode of being [*des gelebten Lebens und Seinsverhältnisses des Daseins*], we ... must ask whether this does not do violence to intuition and its intentional status. Ought we not, instead, derive *Dasein* itself from the very essence of intuition, its gravitational pull, and a capacity to become wholly immersed in it?"⁴⁵ Putting the matter thus quite accurately describes Rilke's understanding of *Dasein* as both essentially "intuitive" (*anschauend*) in its relation to the ambient world of things (*Dinge*) and, consequently, as susceptible of profound "transformation" (*Verwandlung*). The latter term may be justly considered as the imperative anchoring Rilke's poetics as a whole: *Wolle die Wandlung*, with "transformation" (*Wandlung*) a term that, quite tellingly, is almost nowhere to be found in the corpus of Heidegger's writings.⁴⁶ For where "boredom" is premised as the *Grundstimmung* of

⁴³ "And to go away: why? From urge, from / from impatience, from dark expectation, ... / To take all this upon yourself and in vain / perhaps let fall things firmly held, / in order to die alone, not knowing why – / Is this how new life begins?" Rilke, *New Poems*, trans. and ed. Edward Snow (New York: North Point Press, 2001), 39.

⁴⁴ On Heidegger's "equation of truth with finitude," and on his dogmatic insistence that "the working-out of the innermost essence of finitude must itself always be finite," see von Balthasar, *ADS* 3: 238-45.

⁴⁵ Hoeres, *Der Weg der Anschauung*, 35 (trans. mine).

⁴⁶ *Wolle die Wandlung. O sei für die Flamme begeistert, / drin sich ein Ding dir entzieht, das mit Verwandlungen prunkt*" (*Sonnets to Orpheus*, Part II, no. 12 – KA 2: 262). "Will transformation. Oh be inspired for the flame / in which a Thing disappears and bursts into something else" (*DES*, 157). As Rilke writes in a letter of 3 Nov. 1908: "Dear God! What beauty hovers around seeing and experience [*Sehen und Erleben*]. One is altered by it, again and again [*Man wird anders davon und immer wieder anders*]" (RB 1: 326).

existence, the world into which Dasein finds itself thrown seems preemptively denuded of all epiphanic and transformative potential. Hardly a phrase one would encounter in Rilke, Heidegger's reference to "being left empty by things that refuse to disclose themselves" (*die Leergelassenheit von den sich versagenden Dingen* – GM 152/FC 101; trans. modified) thus confines the "possibilities" (*Möglichkeiten*) opened up by Dasein's intuitive self-projection (*Selbstentwurf*) to strictly epiphenomenal status.

As we make a final return to the Ninth Elegy, we find Rilke conceiving of intuition as a quintessentially creative and kenotic event. A fusion of the quotidian and the "miraculous," intuition effects a kind of self-transcendence within Dasein, "orienting us wholly to what is outside" and, at the peak of this *kenosis*, allowing "things that have longed to be unobserved to unfold within us with the utmost integrity and anonymity, without us."⁴⁷

Sag ihm die Dinge. Er wird staunender stehn; wie du standest
bei dem Seiler in Rom, oder beim Töpfer am Nil.
Zeig ihm, wie glücklich ein Ding sein kann, wie schuldlos und unser,
wie selbst das klagende Leid rein zur Gestalt sich entschließt,
dient als ein Ding, oder stirbt in ein Ding –, und jenseits
selig der Geige entgeht. – Und diese, von Hingang
lebenden Dinge verstehn, daß du sie rühmst; vergänglich,
traun sie ein Rettendes uns, den Vergänglichsten, zu.
Wollen, wir sollen sie ganz im unsichtbarn Herzen verwandeln
in – o unendlich – in uns! Wer wir am Ende auch seien.⁴⁸

If the "angel of the elegies has already accomplished the transformation of the visible into the invisible in which we are still engaged" (RB 2: 377-78), it prefigures for the finite being consumed with simply "saying the thing" a movement of self-transcendence. By transposing the phenomenon (as the noematic correlate of intuition) into the order of *logos*, human existence redeems the finite thing and, thus, participates (on however small a scale) in the theodicy of the world. For precisely through its constitutive "passing away" (*diese von Hingang / lebenden Dinge*), not just *from* the transient order of appearance but *into* that of the "sayable" (*das Sägliche*), a thing achieves both a state of "bliss" (*wie glücklich ein Ding sein kann*) and, ultimately, salvation itself as something "innocent" (*schuldlos*). It enters the realm of truth.

Like Walter Benjamin, who in his 1923 book on German tragic drama defines truth as the "salvation of phenomena" (*Rettung der Phänomene*), Rilke speaks of a kind of "deliverance" (*ein Rettendes*) that allows word and form (*Gestalt*) to rescue the thing from its transient phenomenality. As they reflect on "how even lamenting grief purely decides to take form" (*rein zur Gestalt sich entschließt*), both Benjamin and Rilke also reveal their

⁴⁷ *Das Anschauen ist eine so wunderbare Sache, von der wir so wenig wissen; wir sind mit ihm ganz nach außen gekehrt, aber gerade wenn wirs am meisten sind, scheinen in uns die Dinge vor sich zu gehen, die auf das Unbeobachtetsein sehnsüchtig gewartet haben, und während sie sich, intakt und seltsam anonym, in uns vollziehen, ohne uns.* Letter of 8 March 1907 (RB 1: 247).

⁴⁸ KA 2: 228-29. – "Tell him of Things. / He will stand astonished; as you stood / by the rope-maker in Rome or the potter along the Nile. / Show him how happy a Thing can be, how innocent and ours, / how even lamenting grief purely decides to take form, / serves as a Thing, or dies into a Thing –, and blissfully / escapes far beyond the violin. – And these Things, / which live by perishing, know you are praising them; transient, / they look to us for deliverance: us, the most transient of all. / They want us to change them, utterly, in our invisible heart, / within – oh endlessly – within us!" (DES, 57-59).

profound intellectual debt to Goethe's conception of "dynamic order" (*bewegliche Ordnung*).⁴⁹ A Goethean understanding of "transformation" (*Verwandlung*) thus informs the operation of the *logos*, which allows us "to internalize this transient, lapsed earth [*diese vorläufige, hinfällige Erde*] ... so that its essence will be resurrected within us, invisibly [*daß ihr Wesen in uns 'unsichtbar' wieder aufersteht*]" (RB 2: 376).

Erde, ist es nicht dies, was du willst: *unsichtbar*
 in uns erstehn? – Ist es dein Traum nicht,
 einmal *unsichtbar* zu sein? – Erde! *unsichtbar*!
 Was, wenn *Verwandlung* nicht, ist dein drängender Auftrag?
 Erde, du liebe, ich will. Oh glaub, es bedürfte
 nicht deiner Frühlinge mehr, mich dir zu gewinnen –, *einer*,
 ach, ein einziger ist schon dem Blute zu viel.
 Namenlos bin ich zu dir entschlossen, von weit her.
 Immer warst du im Recht, und dein heiliger Einfall
 ist der vertrauliche Tod.

Siehe, ich lebe. Woraus? Weder Kindheit noch Zukunft
 werden weniger Überzähliges Dasein
 entspringt mir im Herzen.⁵⁰

As early as 1912, Rilke identifies as his task "this capacity for relating to the infinite object" (*das reine Umgehenkönnen mit dem unendlichen Gegenstand*" – RB 1: 437), and not even the horrors of a cataclysmic World War "can make me doubt the plenitude and goodness and kindness of lived existence" (*mich nicht irre machen kann an der Fülle und Güte und Zugeneigtheit des Daseins* – RB 1: 680). These affirmations cannot be construed as mere "projections" in Heidegger's sense of an *Entwurf*. They are not some imagined fruit conjured by a *Dasein* terminally enclosed in its own finitude. Rather, the "fullness" in question affirms *Dasein*'s intuitive "attunement" (Heidegger's *Grundstimmung*) to the ineffable wonder of its very being *here*, being *thus* and, indeed, being *at all*. Far from being circumscribed by *Angst* and inexorably ordered-toward-death, *Dasein* is experienced as "excess" (*überzählig*). It follows that time cannot be reduced to mere chronometric *durée*, nor is it simply subject to continual subtraction ("neither childhood nor future / grows any smaller"). Rather, time in Rilke very much resembles its Platonic definition as the moving image of eternity, "an effulgence of the *logos* wherein finitude is grounded and governed."⁵¹ Lived existence for Rilke unfolds under the penumbra of

⁴⁹ "Phenomena do not, however, enter into the realm of ideas whole ... but only in their basic elements, redeemed." Walter Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso, 1998), 33. On Goethe's conception of dynamic form and transformation, see Thomas Pfau, "All is Leaf: Differentiation, Metamorphosis, and the Phenomenology of Life," *Studies in Romanticism*, 49 (2010): 3-41. See also Rilke's letter of 26 November 1921, written in Muzot, where he surmises on Goethe drawing the Wallis landscape, "transposing the complete presence of the singular thing ... into his own" (*darin er diese vollkommene Gegenwart des Einzelnen ... zum Gegenstand seiner Aneignung gemacht hätte* – RB 2: 176).

⁵⁰ KA 2: 229. – "Earth, this what you want: to arise within us, / invisible? Isn't it your dream / to be wholly invisible someday? – O Earth: invisible! / What, if not transformation, is your urgent command? / Earth, my dearest, I will. Oh believe me, you no longer / need your springtimes to win me over – one of them, / ah, even one, is already too much for my blood. / Unspeakably I have belonged to you, from the first. / You were always right, and your holiest inspiration / is our intimate companion, Death. / ... Superabundant being / wells up in your heart" (DES, 59).

⁵¹ Guardini, *Rilkes Deutung*, 313.

the epiphanic as a latent presence and the continual possibility of its actualization. Rilke's name for what under conditions of finitude remains forever an incomplete, only partially realized plenitude of meaning – “this intimate transfiguration of the visible into the invisible” (RB 2: 377) – is, of course, the “angel.” Indeed, the very finitude of Dasein would itself never register as such were it not for its “being delivered unto something ineffable” (*ein Preisgebensein an Namenloses*). “Ever finite, Dasein yet transcends its measure. The unbounded, eternal, and absolute, which it has relinquished for the sake of the earth, returns as the inner quality of Dasein transformed.”⁵²

Unlike Heidegger, Rilke does not presuppose “that finitude is phenomenologically accessible immanently, i.e., prior to and independent of any relation to a transcendence that exceeds its power.”⁵³ If Rilke's earth longs to become “invisible,” and if sheer appearance is teleologically ordered toward its own salvation and redemption through the word, the result is a conception of existence no longer wholly immanent and finite. For not only does the “transformation” of things into the “intimate” (*innig*) space of Rilke's *Weltinnenraum* transcend the merely “ready-to-hand” (*zuhanden*); but precisely this transposition of a thing into the order of the “sayable” (*das Sägliche*) shows Dasein, for Rilke, to be principally defined by its undesigning responsiveness to what the Ninth Elegy's closing lines call earth's “urgent command” (*drängender Auftrag*): namely, to aid in transposing “this fleeting” thing (*dieses Schwindende*) into the *logos*. The living human being on whom this redemption of appearance pivots will flourish only insofar as it responds to the “task” (*Auftrag*) in question. In all other respects, Dasein is itself “the most ephemeral” (*uns, die Schwindensten*), more evanescent even than the unstable phenomena that summon it to articulate participation in them. Starting with *Neue Gedichte* (1907), Rilke no longer conceives transcendence as an ineffable beyond. Instead, it is experientially realized as an “unheard-of” possibility coded into the very appearance of things. As he puts it, “we must embrace our existence to the greatest possible extent; everything, even the unheard-of, must be encompassed by it as a possibility” (*Wir müssen unser Dasein so weit, als es irgend geht, annehmen; alles, auch das Unerhörte, muß darin möglich sein* – KA 4: 541). This dual imperative – that the unheard-of *must* be possible, and that what must be possible is nothing less than the *unheard-of* – attests to an indelible metaphysical substratum from which Rilke never retreats, and absent which poetry as a “statement” (*Aussage*) concerned with truth, not merely expression, would be inconceivable.

⁵² Guardini, *Rilkes Deutung*, 324.

⁵³ “We always call ourselves ‘finite’ from somewhere else. This ‘other place,’ so to speak, knows no finitude.” Tarek Dika, “Finitude, Phenomenology, and Theology in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 110, no. 4 (2017): 475-93; quote from 492.