

Chapter 15

Nihilism: Heidegger/Jünger/Aristotle¹

Thomas Sheehan

Loyola University Chicago

I Overcoming Nihilism?

Do we live in the age of fulfilled nihilism? If so, can we overcome such nihilism?

These are two of the questions that inform the extraordinary open letter that Martin Heidegger published in 1955 in a Festschrift celebrating Ernst Jünger's sixtieth birthday.² Heidegger's letter is in response to an essay that Jünger had contributed six years earlier, in 1949, to a Festschrift on Heidegger's own sixtieth birthday. So there was a certain reciprocity in the exchange: a favor returned, a public gesture of respect mirroring an earlier one.

No doubt it was a heartfelt gesture on Heidegger's part, especially since the Festschrift in his own honor, the one to which Jünger had contributed, had come at the worst period in Heidegger's career, when he was isolated, under suspicion for his pro-Nazi activities in the 1930s, still forbidden to teach at any German university, and trying to put his life back together after the nervous breakdown he had suffered three years earlier.

¹This text develops themes that found an initial expression in "Nihilism, Facticity, and the Economized *Lethe*," in *Heidegger: A Centennial Appraisal* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1990), pp. 28-61. The present text is dedicated, as was the earlier one, to Prof. William J. Richardson, S.J.

²Originally published as "Über 'Die Linie,'" in *Freundschaftliche Begegnungen. Festschrift für Ernst Jünger zum 60. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt a. M., 1955), pp. 9-45; later as *Zur Seinsfrage* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1956). Reprinted in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (hereinafter: GA), 9, pp. 385-426. ET by Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback, *The Question of Being* (New Haven, Conn. Twayne Publishers, 1958). Hereinafter abbreviated as ZS with the paginations from the 1956 edition, the GA edition, and the current English translation. For example, in the present case: ZS pp. 9-45/385-426, ET pp. 33-109. Ernst Jünger died on February 17, 1998, at the age of 102.

But Heidegger's open letter was more than a cordial gesture toward an old friend. It was above all a philosophical engagement with the very person who had inspired Heidegger in the late 1920s with his essay "Totale Mobilmachung" and then with his book *Der Arbeiter*, published in 1932, the year before Hitler took power. These works not only had inspired Heidegger but also opened doors for him onto such themes as nihilism, technology, and *Gestell*, which figure so prominently in his later work. Since Jünger had raised some of these issues in his 1949 essay, Heidegger took the occasion to address them too and, in the process, to re-evaluate his intellectual relationship to Jünger.

To return to our first two questions: At first glance it seems that, *ex professo* Heideggerians would agree that we do live in the age of fulfilled nihilism and that it is both desirable and possible that such nihilism be overcome. The long "history of being" has culminated in the virtual domination of τέχνη over φύσις, the triumph of the man-made world over nature, of forms imposed by artisans and technicians over forms that come to be of themselves (cf. φύω), so much so that φύσις seems to disappear, to count for nothing, to amount to *nihil*, a "negative nothingness."³ Hence, the age of complete nihilism. It is not that being *tout court* has disappeared: that is impossible, since as long as there are human beings there will be being, and even nihilism is a formation of being. Rather, Heideggerians hold that only a certain kind of being—but the most fundamental kind, the one that underlies all other modes of being—has withdrawn. Or better, it seems to have been stamped out by men and women, who stamp everything with their own Gestalt, turn all entities into reproductions of human will, and thus reduce being to production. On this reading, nihilism means that the being of entities has become their unlimited intelligibility-as-this-or-that and their unlimited availability-for-production. Entities *are* whatever human beings would make of them.

Thus we no longer live in a natural world that is moved from within by φύσις; rather, we live in an artificial world frenetically propelled from without, by τέχνη, into what human beings want it to be. The world is too much with us—in fact it *is* us, the theater of our mirrored selves. "We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves." "So it returns. Think you're escaping and run into yourself."⁴ The universe of modernity is a closed world as hermetically sealed as the tidy little cosmos of Eudoxus or Callippus or Ptolemy, a

³ZS, p. 34/415, ET p. 89.

⁴James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: The Modern Library, new edition, 1961), pp. 213, 377 (Dedalus and Bloom, respectively).

world that reflects modern human subjectivity just as much as the cosmos of Augustine, Aquinas, and Bonaventure reflected divine subjectivity. For those medieval philosophers, each entity had its being to the degree that it stood before God's mind and was held in existence by his divine vision: "We see these things you have made because they exist; however, only because you see them do they exist."⁵ Each entity was stamped into existence by God and had being to the degree that it was a reflection of his own divine ideas, the *rationes aeternae*. But today, thanks to technology, that hermetically sealed world is no longer divine but human: it is referred back to ourselves. It is a world in which we seem to meet nothing but ourselves *qua* workers extrapolated into our products.⁶ In this reading, therefore, correlative to nihilism is "humanism," the ideology which asserts that human being is fulfilled in abetting the limitless availability and intelligibility of everything that is.

On this account it seems that we do live in the age of complete, fulfilled nihilism, where the power of being is reduced to the power of human labor under the rubric of Vico's thesis that *verum et factum convertuntur*.⁷ It would seem, too, that the task of philosophy (or at least that of Heidegger's thinking) is to annihilate nihilism, i.e., to overcome it, by drastically limiting the power and the reach of τέχνη and making room again for φύσις. Should we not, at least to some degree, turn our backs on technology, industrialization, and the exploitation of the earth, and first of all on the rationality that drives them? Should we not strive to preserve ourselves from the ravages of city life and return to nature, the way Heidegger did by taking refuge in his simple hut in the Black Forest? Isn't this why he threw his weight in the 1930s behind the reactionary socialism ("half lamentation, half lampoon") of the Nazis?⁸ Isn't that the case Heidegger is

⁵"Nos itaque ista quae fecisti videmus, quia sunt; tu autem quia vides ea, sunt." *Confessiones*, XII, 38 (52), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Prima Latina* (hereinafter *PL*), ed. J-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1844-1864), here XXXII (1861), p. 868. Augustine frequently expresses his related conviction that God does not know things because they exist but that they exist because God knows them; cf. *De Trinitate*, VI, 10 and XV, 13, *PL*, XLII, pp. 931 and 1076.

⁶ZS, p. 27/407, ET p. 75: "der Mensch meinen kann, er begegne nur noch sich selbst."

⁷Giambattista Vico, *De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia ex Linguae Latinae Originibus Eruenda* (Naples: Felice Mosca, 1710), I, 1, i; ET *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. L. M. Palmer (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 45; cf. "Verum esse ipsum factum," p. 46.

⁸Cf. ". . . halb Klage lied, halb Pasquill, halb Rückhall der Vergangenheit, halb Dräuer der Zukunft": Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1971), IV, 483 (*Communist Manifesto*, III, 1.A).

arguing? And even if his political choice was wrong, wasn't at least his philosophical motive commendable?

Let us see if that is so. The essay Jünger published in Heidegger's honor had been entitled "*Über die Linie*," roughly: "Across the Line." There Jünger had discussed the overcoming of nihilism—specifically how, after World War II, Western humanity seemed to be crossing a line from nihilism into a new age when being (*das Sein*) might "turn toward" human beings and put an end to their homelessness. Jünger called this hoped-for future event *die Zuwendung des Seins*, and in the phrase we seem to hear an echo of Heidegger's own language and thought. But not so. When he responded to Jünger's essay in 1955, Heidegger subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) rewrote Jünger's essay and reinscribed it—much transformed—into Heidegger's own quite different understanding of nihilism and of the prospects for possibly "overcoming" it.

Fifteen years earlier, during his 1940 seminar on the *Physics*, Heidegger had called attention to how Aristotle, in taking up the doctrine of the fifth-century Eleatic Sophist, Antiphon, had radically reinterpreted that doctrine by quietly incorporating it, with a new meaning, into his own vision of φύσις. Heidegger had written that

Aristotle's acceptance of Antiphon's doctrine nevertheless constitutes the sharpest rejection of it. The most drastic way to reject a proposition is not to dismiss it brusquely as disproved and merely brush it *aside*, but on the contrary to take it over and work it *into* an essential and grounded connection with one's own argument—i.e., to take it over and work it in as the non-essence [*Unwesen*] that necessarily belongs to the essence.⁹

Something similar can be said of Heidegger's open letter of 1955, in which Jünger's earlier essay is quietly appropriated as *Unwesen*, a perhaps inevitable but finally false "shadow" of the essential issue. Heidegger takes virtually all the major topics that Jünger had expounded and inverts and corrects them, or takes them beyond themselves. Heidegger transforms Jünger's *Überwindung* into a *Verwindung*;

⁹Martin Heidegger, "Vom Wesen und Begriff der φύσις. Aristoteles' *Physik* B 1," *Wegmarken*, GA 9 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976), pp. 239-301, here, p. 364; in the first edition (1967), pp. 309-371, here, p. 294. ET "On the Essence and Concept of φύσις in Aristotle's *Physics* B 1," tr. Thomas Sheehan, in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, John Sallis, and David Krell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 183-230, here p. 224. Hereinafter I provide pagination to both the second and the first German editions and to the English translation. For example, in the present case: *Wegmarken*, p. 364/294, ET p. 224. For the text of the *Physics* I use W.D. Ross' edition, *Aristotle's Physics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936).

his "topography" into a "topology"; his "line" into a "zone." Above all, he shows Jünger's central thesis about a future *Zuwendung des Seins* to be an impossibility: we should await no such future moment when being will allegedly "turn" to human beings, precisely because being is always already a *Zuwendung zum Menschenwesen*. And above all, there is no "crossing of the line," no promised exit from nihilism.

Heidegger's incorporation/transformation of Jünger begins at the very top of the piece. Jünger had called his essay *Über die Linie*, and Heidegger gives his open letter the same title, except that he adds a set of quotation marks around the noun—*Über "die Linie"*—and thereby changes the meaning. The preposition *über* can mean both "over"/"across" (Latin, *trans*) and "concerning" (Latin, *de*). Jünger had used it in the first sense: "Crossing the Line" (from nihilism to being), whereas Heidegger's quotation marks transform the title from *trans lineam* to *de linea*: *Über "die Linie,"* as if to say: "What about this 'line'?" The alteration effects an important shift of horizon that lets Heidegger propose a different kind of question, not about a possible "attribute" of nihilism (its ability to be overcome) but rather about its essence.¹⁰

¹⁰Heidegger's discussion presumes some basic distinctions. First one must observe the difference of *Seiendheit*/beingness—sometimes named as "the being of entities"—from *das Sein selbst*/being-itself/*Ereignis*. Second, it is important to distinguish between the *essence* of nihilism (which we shall provisionally call "essential nihilism") and historical nihilism. Historical nihilism is the alleged philosophical fact that, under the pressure of the increasing humanization of the world, the "natural" beingness and intelligibility (*οὐσία/Seiendheit*) of entities gives way to *human* constructions of beingness and intelligibility and thus seems "forced" to withdraw. But what makes historical nihilism possible is essential nihilism, the fact that what enables or makes possible ("gives," "dispenses") any and all forms of beingness and intelligibility, including the form operative in historical nihilism, is, when viewed from any entitative perspective, a *nihil*, i.e., neither an entity nor any form of the beingness of entities. Heidegger calls this enabling power *Ereignis*. The nil-status of what enables all forms of beingness is called its intrinsic "hiddenness" or "withdrawnness." This hiddenness is *Seinsvergessenheit* in its primary and strict sense—the "self"-concealment of being-itself—which Heidegger finds named in Heraclitus' dictum that φύσις, in and of itself, prefers to hide (Fragment 123). The "self"-concealment of what enables beingness leads to the enabling power getting overlooked and forgotten—*Seinsvergessenheit* in the second of its two meanings, the "forgottenness" of being-itself—which in turn leads to historical nihilism.

It is clear from Heidegger's texts (1) that *Seinsvergessenheit* in its secondary sense is not the forgetting of *οὐσία* (the complete overlooking of beingness is, in any case, a virtual impossibility); (2) that *Seinsvergessenheit* in its primary sense cannot be overcome; and (3) that what *enables* the beingness of entities is not reducible to the beingness that it enables. In what follows I argue that the so-called "forced" withdrawal of being *qua* φύσις, due to the increased humanization of the world, is the *gift* of that which enables beingness; and that the intrinsic hiddenness of this enabling (i.e., the λήθη at the heart of ἀλήθεια) comes into its own as the total availability of entities to human cognition and manipulation. If

This shift in the question about nihilism might remind us of an analogous effort: Socrates' attempt to get Meno to ask a different kind of question about ἀρετή. At three cardinal points in the *Meno* (70a and 71a-b; 86c-e; and 99e-100b), Socrates tries to direct Meno's attention away from an attribute of ἀρετή (viz., how it might be acquired) and toward the essence of ἀρετή—from *quale est* to *quid est*—for “If I do not know what something is (τί ἐστὶ), how could I know one of its qualities (ὁποῖον)?” (71b)

Heidegger does something similar. Jünger's essay was concerned with how nihilism might be overcome. Heidegger, however, insists on the prior question: “What is the *essence* of nihilism?” Without first answering that question (Heidegger seems to say), one might end up like Meno (cf. 70a, 86c, 100b), thinking that nihilism could be overcome by nature, effort, or learning, or perhaps by some other way:

- “by nature” (φύσει), that is, by a future “turning” of being/φύσις toward Dasein,
- which turning would be accompanied, on Dasein's part, by a unique kind of effort (cf. ἀσκητόν), the discipline of “willing-not-to-will,”¹¹
- all of which might be taught and learned (cf. διδακτόν, μαθητόν)—perhaps by elucidating and appropriating Heidegger's texts on technology and the history of being ;
- or nihilism might have to be overcome “in some other way” (τίνι ποτὲ τρόπῳ: 86c; ᾧ τινι τρόπῳ: 100b), perhaps with the help of the gods.

The *Meno*, we recall, ends with Socrates pretending to favor the last of these four possibilities. “When it comes to acquiring ἀρετή,” he seems to say, “only a god can save us” (*nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*)—for as far as Meno was able to discern, ἀρετή apparently “comes to one by divine fate, unaccompanied by understanding” (ἀρετή θεῖα μοίρα παραγιγνομένη ἄνευ νοῦ: 99e). However, for Socrates that suggestion is entirely ironic, not because it claims that virtue is a divine gift (it might well be) but rather because it says that virtue is

what enables beingness loves to hide, it also loves to turn the world over to human beings. Therefore, to awaken from the oblivion of being in the secondary sense (ignorance of the enabling of beingness) would be to awaken to the inevitability of the humanization of nature and the naturalization of the human.

¹¹“... wollen wir das Nicht-Wollen.” Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 3rd ed. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), p. 57.

bestowed ἄνευ νοῦ, without understanding. The core of the *Meno* was dedicated to illustrating the exact opposite, namely, that the path to true understanding—the path to essence—is ἀνάμνησις (81a-e, 85c-86c, and 98a).¹² And once one recollects the essence of ἀρετή (or any other essence), one realizes that it is always already present, always already known (cf. οὐκ ἔστιν ὃ τι οὐ μεμύθηκεν, 81c). Strictly speaking, then, one need not “search” for the always-already but only recover it.¹³

Heidegger seems to treat Jünger (and by implication some Heideggerians) the way Socrates treats Meno. Regarding those who would sit on their hands and wait for being to “turn toward us” some day, Heidegger is as ironic as Socrates was: “Only a god can save us now!” What is more, against anyone who thinks nihilism can be overcome at all—whether by the four ways indicated above or any others—he argues that once one has experienced ἀνάμνησις—what he calls the “turning back” (*Rückkehr*) or “thinking back” (*Andenken*) into essence—one must realize that nihilism cannot be overcome at all. Overcoming nihilism is an illusion.

Heidegger’s focus on the *essence* of nihilism rather than on one of its “attributes” (its ability to be overcome or not) is the reason why he changed the title of his open letter one last time, not simply by inserting quotation marks into Jünger’s old title but rather by directly stating what he thinks is at stake. When he published his text as a separate pamphlet a year later (1956), Heidegger called it *Zur Seinsfrage*, as if to say: The question of nihilism must be brought back to the question of being. In the Preface to the pamphlet he wrote: “The new title is meant to indicate that this reflection on the essence of nihilism stems from a clarification of being as being.” (The cross-out indicates that “being” as used here does not refer to “beingness”—the whatness, thatness, and howness of things¹⁴—but to what *enables* all forms of beingness.¹⁵

¹²Socrates’ answer to the dilemma posed by Meno was that it is possible to search for what we think we do not know—by remembering what we already know. St. Augustine makes a similar point: “Perdiderat enim mulier drachmam, et quaesivit eam cum lucerna (*Luc.* xv, 8), et nisi memor ejus esset, non inveniret eam. Cum enim esset inventa, unde sciret utrum ipsa esset, si memor ejus non esset?” *Confessiones* X, 18 (27), *PL* XXXII, p. 791.

¹³The obligation to search mentioned at 86b-c (δεῖν ζητεῖν) is contrasted with Meno’s claim that it is neither possible to find, nor obligatory to search for, what we think we do not know.

¹⁴In its traditional formulation, the question of/about being is directed at the beingness (οὐσία/*Seiendheit*) of entities and corresponds to Aristotle’s question, τίς ἡ οὐσία; (*Metaphysics* Z 1, 1028 b 4). This usage is cognate with what Husserl (in a more restricted context) called “ousiology”: see *Vorlesungen*

This sentence from Heidegger's Preface to *Zur Seinsfrage* sets our task, namely: (1) to clarify the essence of being (2) so as to clarify the essence of nihilism (3) so as to decide about the possibility or impossibility of overcoming nihilism. In what follows I focus on Heidegger rather than Jünger, not only because Heidegger is philosophically more interesting, but also because Jünger himself eventually conceded Heidegger's points. Some twenty-six years later, in an interview with Frederic de Towarnicki in Paris (October 1981), Jünger remarked:

The reflections that Heidegger wrote to me on this subject seem to me to be quite right. [. . .] At that time [1949, the writing of "Über die Linie"] I was too optimistic. After the defeat [of Nazi Germany] I was saying in effect: "The serpent's head has already broken through the line of nihilism. It has gotten out, and the whole body will soon follow, and we shall soon enter a better spiritual climate, etc." In fact, we are far from it.¹⁶

Moreover, I propose to read the Heidegger of *Zur Seinsfrage* as he demanded (rightly or wrongly) to be read, namely, as *homo philosophicus* rather than as *homo politicus*, i.e., as a thinker about being rather than as the conservative German nationalist who inserted himself dramatically and disastrously into politics more than two decades before he published this essay. It is not that I think we should refrain from reading Heidegger politically—far from it. But regardless of whether one believes Heidegger's artfully crafted *apologia* for his political engagement, regardless of whether one thinks he was

über Ethik und Wertlehre, 1908-1914, Husserliana XXVIII, ed. Ullrich Melle (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), Beilage XIV, p. 377: "Die reale Ousiologie behandelt die Wesenslehre realer Gegenständlichkeit in allgemeinsten Allgemeinheit."

¹⁵To distinguish being-itself and beingness we might draw on the *verbal* (but not the definitional) distinction that late Hellenistic philosophers and the Greek Fathers made between οὐσίωσις and οὐσία, where the former would have the sense of simply "making possible/enabling οὐσία" rather than the Patristic sense of creation. As *terms*, οὐσίωσις and the corresponding verb forms occur frequently in Simplicius' commentaries on Aristotle; cf. *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* (Berlin: Reimer), VIII (1907), *Simplicii in Aristotelis Categoriae Commentarium*, ed. Carl Kalbfleisch, pp. 34.19; 102.2; 114.31 and 32; 129.23 and 27; 182.15; 195.18; 227.28, and 369.11 (these last three are perhaps the best approximations to the meaning we are indicating here). In the Greek Fathers the term generally means "creation": (cf. Eusebius, *Historica ecclesiastica*, PG XX (1857), 56A; cf. also 1405C, and *Demonstratio evangelica*, PG XXII (1857), p. 252C; but in the Latin fathers also "subsistentia" (cf. Boethius, "De duabus naturis et una persona, contra Eutychem et Nestorium, PL LXIV (1847), p. 1345A/B: "in nullo subjecta" and "nullo indigens"). According to Procopius of Gaza (ca. A.D. 520), οὐσίωσις (rei primitivam essentiam dar) and μεταποίησις (in meliorem conditionem commutare) are treated as equal subsets of ποίησις/κτίσις: *Commentarii in Deuteronomium*, (32:6), PG LXXXVII, Pars Prima (1863), p. 956D.

¹⁶Martin Heidegger, ed. Michel Haar (Paris: Cahiers de l'Herne, 1983), p. 149. Jean Beaufret and Odile Gandon were present at the interview.

amazingly naïve in how he read German politics in the 1930s and how he understood world politics right up to his death, Heidegger did in fact claim, to the very end, that his reasons for supporting National Socialism had to do with his hope of overcoming nihilism and tempering the effects of technology. He claimed in effect that we could understand his political "error" (as he called it) only if we first understood what he thought about nihilism and technology. Taking Heidegger at his word, one might argue (although I do not) that in his laudable effort to overcome nihilism he may have picked the wrong party, but at least he intended the right goal; and that even while criticizing him for the former, one should join him in pursuing the latter.

Be that as it may, I choose to investigate nihilism and technology on Heidegger's own terms and to bracket for now the political implications of his philosophy. My focus is on Heidegger's transformation of Jünger's hope for an *Überwindung* of nihilism into Heidegger's new vision of a *Verwindung*, a "freeing" of oneself from social and cultural nihilism by seeing its rootedness in a deeper and unsurpassable "nihilism" that is, in fact, the human condition.¹⁷ In so doing I shall take seriously Heidegger's claim that in questioning nihilism one has to "reflect on old, venerable words that, as language, convey to us the realm of the essence of nihilism and the promise of *Verwindung*, that is, of getting free in relation to it."¹⁸

To repeat: Are we in the age of fulfilled nihilism? and if so, can we overcome it? There may well be other, more direct and more fruitful ways of broaching these two questions, but for now let us follow Socrates' suggestion that questions of "how to . . . ?" follow from questions of "what is . . . ?" Let us test Heidegger's thesis that

¹⁷It is best to shelve the discourse of the "overcoming" (*Überwindung*) of metaphysics and of the nihilism that is its fulfillment, insofar as this alleged "overcoming" seems to promise that once human beings come to understand the history and the meaning of the *Gestell* as the form of the current epoch of disclosure, they will take a step towards a new day when being will again "turn towards" humankind and when the current economic, social, and political configuration of power might thereby begin to change. All of that is an illusion, and its illusoriness is not mitigated by the fact that it is shared by so many Heideggerians. It is also a misreading of Heidegger, who finally prefers the discourse of a *Verwindung* of metaphysics and nihilism, a liberation from metaphysics' blindness to the original *nihil* that enables all forms of beingness. According to Heidegger, that *nihil* is bound up with the human essence, and not to accept and "enter upon" it is to refuse one's essential destiny. But the more important point is that this *Verwindung*, as an "accepting" of the original *nihil*, provides not the slightest clue as to how one might set about the tasks of solving the concrete material problems of humankind.

¹⁸ZS, pp. 43-44/425, ET p. 109.

reflecting on the essence of nihilism by reflecting on the essence of being will help us to decide on whether or not nihilism can be overcome.¹⁹

II Horizon and Method

First, a remark on the horizon within which Heidegger's reflections in *Zur Seinsfrage* move. As we would expect from this thinker of "one thing only," whatever Heidegger has to say about nihilism is bound up with what he has to say about being. Thus we must "reduce" nihilism (in the sense of *zurückführen*, leading nihilism back) to the question of being, and hence to a "meta-technological" level. However, Heidegger's "question of being" is not about being as beingness (οὐσία), taken as that which makes entities be entities. Rather, it is about the "essence" of οὐσία—that which enables (brings about) all forms of beingness—and this is ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, "beyond" οὐσία, other-wise than beingness.²⁰ It is in this "beyond" that one presumably encounters the *essence* of nihilism. Heidegger writes:

Perhaps a time will come when the essence of nihilism will appear more clearly along other paths and in a brighter light.

¹⁹Underlying the present essay are the following presuppositions about how Heidegger understands his *own* work: •The beingness of entities is their in-principle unlimited intelligibility-as-this-or-that. •Classical metaphysics attempts to trace the possibility of all forms of such synthetic intelligibility back to a perfectly self-coincident, self-knowing entity that is non-synthetic intelligibility-itself. •Heidegger argues that the proximate cause of all synthetic intelligibility is human finitude, grounded in the insurmountable, intelligibility-enabling ontological lack that human being itself is. •This lack is called "the nothing"/*nihil*; its state of inevitability and insurmountability is called "the mystery"; and human being's grounding in this insurmountable, intelligibility-enabling *nihil* is called "appropriation"/*Ereignis*. •The limitless intelligibility of entities is the "gift" of the insurmountable, intelligibility-enabling *nihil* into which human being is appropriated. •Thus the fulfillment of human being consists in understanding and accepting its appropriation into the insurmountable *nihil* and the resultant limitless synthetic intelligibility of everything that is.

²⁰By "that which enables" ("das Tauglichmachende") I mean to evoke Heidegger's claim that what he calls *Ereignis* is already intimated, albeit inadequately, in Plato's τὸ ἀγαθόν: *Wegmarken*, p. 228, E.T. p. 175 (see *ibid.*, *Ermöglichung*). Compare (1) Heidegger's *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, GA 24 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1975), p. 405: "die Bedingung der Möglichkeit des Seinsverständnisses [= Seiendheitsverständnisses]"; ET by Albert Hofstadter, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 286. And (2) his *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik*, GA 26, where Heidegger seems to retrieve from Plato's ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας (*Republic* VII, 509 b 9) the notion of the world as "das Umwillen": p. 203-252; ET by Michael Heim, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 159-195.

But until then I will content myself with the assumption that we might reflect on the essence of nihilism only by following the road that leads toward an explanation of the essence of being[ness].²¹

The "essence of beingness" is what *enables* the beingness of entities, and this Heidegger calls *Ereignis*/"appropriation," the central topic of his thought. "Appropriation" is Heidegger's effort to name the complex movement whereby

- a. the relative absence intrinsic to the human essence,²² operating in the mode of τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα,
- b. "evokes" that essence, i.e., pulls it forth into presence-bestowing possibility,²³
- c. thus making possible and necessary the openness (*Da*)
- d. wherein any and all entities can appear *as* this or that, i.e., *in* their current mode of beingness.

In short: *Ereignis* (a term that Heidegger retrieved from the unsaid in Aristotle's κίνησις) names the ontological movement whereby *Dasein* is drawn into pres-abs-ence in such a way that worlds of possible significance are engendered and sustained.

Under nihilism, on the other hand, appropriation seems to disappear, to "turn away" from the human essence, such that human beings, in taking things *as* this or that (and in thus encountering the beingness of those things) might think they are encountering only themselves, their own man-made purposes and intelligibilities. If human beings thus enable all forms of beingness, if they transcendently "work up" the various possibilities of intelligibility, then the self that they thus encounter is, in Jünger's language, their *Gestalt* as "worker," one whose essence is exhausted in dominating the world, with the consequence that the "worker"-self is locked into a correlativity with "the total

²¹ZS, p. 25/405, ET p. 71.

²²Cf. *Wegmarken*, p. 195, "das vergessene Geheimnis des Daseins" and Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie. Vom Ereignis*, GA 65 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1989), #168, p. 293: "Der Entzug aber ist des Da-seins."

²³The *togetherness* of (1) the "evocation" of the human essence and (2) the human essence's "response" to (i.e., its being-called-forth by) the evocation is (3) *Ereignis* as the "appropriation" of the human essence. This is what Heidegger is referring to when he writes: "Dieses jedes Mal Selbe, das Zusammengehören von Ruf und Gehör, wäre dann 'das Sein'?" (the answer he intends is: Yes) and: "In Wahrheit können wir dann nicht einmal mehr sagen, 'das Sein' und 'der Mensch' 'seien' das Selbe in dem Sinne, daß sie zusammengehören; denn so sagend, lassen wir immer noch beide für sich sein." ZS p. 28/408-9, ET p. 77.

work-character" of everything that is.²⁴ It seems, then, that the crux of nihilism is the correlativity—in fact, the direct proportionality—between, on the one hand, the assertion of the self as worker-dominating-the-world and, on the other, the "withdrawal of being," the apparent disappearance of appropriation as the source of all beingness and intelligibility.

But is this really so? A number of questions arise: How and in what way are these two correlative? Why are they correlative in an apparently zero-sum way, such that the increase in the power and domination of the Gestalt of the worker would necessarily entail the decrease in the power of appropriation? Why and with what consequences should this correlation be so crucial in the investigation of what is called nihilism? Add to that Heidegger's suggestion that in the final analysis efforts at overcoming nihilism miss the point. The purpose of his open letter, Heidegger writes at the end, is to take everything Jünger has to say and

elevate it to [the level of] a higher ambiguity, one that would let us experience how the [so-called] overcoming of nihilism requires the entry into the essence of nihilism and how, with this entry, the desire to overcome nihilism becomes null and void.²⁵

Jünger's hope of "overcoming" nihilism thus gets transformed into something quite different. Heidegger is making no predictions, and expressing no hopes, that social and cultural nihilism will (or can) ever be overcome. What counts for him, rather, is the awareness and acceptance of the original and originating *nihil*. The only kind of "overcoming" that interests him is that whereby "the *essence* of the nothing that was once related to 'being' can arrive and dwell amongst us mortals."²⁶

In the 1930s Heidegger had hoped National Socialism would provide economic, social, and political solutions to the problem of planetary nihilism (and he implies that his own philosophy might have served as the ideological superstructure of such changes). By the 1950s, however, it would appear he was convinced that a more profound understanding of the *essence* of nihilism invalidated such naïve hopes for a remedy.

If the horizon of Heidegger's discourse on nihilism is the "question of being"—the inquiry into appropriation—his usual μέθοδος for approaching nihilism is *Seinsgeschichte*, the history of the dispen-

²⁴ZS, p. 27/407, ET p. 75: den totalen Arbeitscharakter.

²⁵ZS, pp. 42f./424, ET p. 105f.

²⁶ZS, p. 29/410, ET p. 79, emphasis added.

sations of beingness from archaic Greece up to the epoch of the planetary worker. Since that road is long and winding, I propose instead to follow not Heidegger's historical μέθοδος but a more analytical ἀτραπός, a "short cut" that gets to the heart of the matter by raising the question of τέχνη. Heidegger himself hints at this approach in his open letter, when, after accepting *juxta modum* Jünger's position that the epoch of fulfilled nihilism consists in the total work-character (*Arbeitscharakter*) of the real, correlative to the Gestalt of the worker,²⁷ he goes on to assert that the "total mobilization" of the world is the last phase in the development of Greek τέχνη. Heidegger develops this point further in his essay "The Question of Technology," which he says was intended as something of a dialogue with Jünger.²⁸

The short-cut, then, consists in following Heidegger's lead and investigating τέχνη in the light of the question of being (the inquiry into appropriation), which means: investigating it in conjunction with the notion of φύσις. Here I shall use Heidegger's reflections on *Physics*, B, 1 as a guide to understanding the alleged hegemony of the Gestalt of the worker in the present age. The first step (section III) will be to get clear on the three presuppositions that, in Heidegger's view, inform the text of *Physics*, B 1 (see note 9 above). Those presuppositions will, in turn, lead us to the Greek vision of being-and-time according to Heidegger (sections IV and V) and so to the fulfillment of that Greek vision in the finite infinity of availability in the current epoch (section VI). All of this should allow us to decide about the overcoming of nihilism (section VII).

III Three Presuppositions: φύσις, κίνησις, φαίνεσθαι

The first presupposition that governs Aristotle's text on φύσις is what we might call a thoroughgoing "naturalism"—but in the Greek rather than the modern sense of that word. This "Greek naturalism" entails that absolutely everything that is, insofar as it is, even if it is an artifact, is in an essential sense a natural entity—something that has its being from and because of φύσις—and thus one that is moved of and by itself, καθ' αὐτό. That is, before φύσις designates a determined region of entities (growing things as contrasted with artifacts, τὰ

²⁷ZS, p. 22/401, ET p. 65.

²⁸ZS, p. 20/400, ET p. 61.

φύσει ὄντα vs. τὰ ποιούμενα), it refers to the whole of reality and names the in-itself-ness of every entity.²⁹

But this is too formal a characterization. It begins to take on specificity and content only when we note a second presupposition that is intimately bound up with the first. Accompanying this thoroughgoing naturalism, and in fact defining it, is an equally thoroughgoing "kineticism." For Aristotle, as for the archaic Greeks (even though they did not use this exact phrase), φύσις is the ἀρχὴ κινήσεως, the principle of intrinsic movement, its origin and on-going ordering force, which, in an effort to capture κίνησις καθ' αὐτό, we might risk calling "self"-movement.³⁰ In other words, to say that absolutely everything that is, insofar as it is, is a φύσει ὄν is to assert (1) that every entity as such is intrinsically in movement (cf. τὰ φύσει . . . πάντα . . . κινούμενα εἶναι, *Physics*, A 2, 185 a 12) and (2) that every entity, to the degree that it is a φύσει ὄν, has within itself the origin and directing of its own movement. Without prejudicing the case that Aristotle himself will make for an ultimate final cause of movement,³¹ we may combine the presuppositions of naturalism and kineticism and say that, for Aristotle, all entities, insofar as they are φύσει ὄντα, are "self-moving" entities.

It is true, of course, that from the very first sentence of *Physics* B 1 (192 b 8-11) Aristotle divides all entities into "those that are of-and-by φύσις" and "those that are of-and-by other causes." That is, he divides entities into (1) those that have been intrinsically (καθ' αὐτό) moved into their current form of existence from within themselves and (2) those that have been moved into their current form of existence from outside themselves. These latter are ποιούμενα, artifacts, things produced through the τέχνη of a τεκνίτης, the know-how of an artisan. The world seems divided, therefore, into intrinsically and extrinsically moved entities, into φυσικά and ποιούμενα.

But on the other hand even the artifact is made out of a natural substrate. Thus while we can and do (in action, language, and so forth) take entities *as* artifacts, that is, as entities that have been moved

²⁹Cf. *Wegmarken*, p. 369/299, ET p. 228f. Also *Holzwege*, 4th ed. (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1963), p. 298 ("die weite Bedeutung des Alls des Seienden"); ET, *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 15.

³⁰No anthropomorphism is intended, here or below, by this use of "self-." We are indicating, rather, that the entity's movement (and later the entity's presentation) is *intrinsic* to the entity.

³¹*Metaphysics*, Λ 7, 1072 b 7: τι κινούν αὐτὸ ἀκίνητον ὄν. I use *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), 2 volumes, Sandpiper Books edition, 1997. See also *Physics* Θ 5, 256 a 10-22.

into their present form (their current intelligible presence) by human artisans, nonetheless, regardless of whether we thematically attend to the fact or not, we always co-understand them as artifacts made of some natural stuff and to that degree as self-moved entities, φύσει ὄντα. We evidence that co-understanding, for instance, when we look at an old and beautifully crafted table and say, "Now *that* is wood!"—by which we mean something like: "This artifact shows us what wood really is and can be used for." Or for a non-linguistic example, there is Antiphon's experiment, which Aristotle mentions at 193 a 12-15: Bury that same table in your back yard, wait a long time until it rots and germinates, and then check what comes up. The seedling will be the start not of a table but of wood.

As Heidegger reads Aristotle, the self-movement of natural entities is not just locomotion, or qualitative or quantitative motion, and not even coming-to-be-at-all (γένεσις). Rather, the entity's self-movement is its *self-presentation*, its appearing-at-all (φαίνεσθαι) and its appearing-as-this-or-that (μορφή/εἶδος).³² Here we encounter yet a third presupposition that underlies *Physics* B 1, one that ties φύσις and κίνησις together into what may be called, at least provisionally, Greek "phenomenology." Everything that is, to the degree that it is natural and thus self-moving, is a process of putting itself into appearance, i.e., becoming available/intelligible. This is what the Greeks called φαίνεσθαι, the process of becoming a phenomenon, becoming available for human engagement.³³

Taken as a unity, these three presuppositions—φύσις, κίνησις, φαίνεσθαι: the "natural" movement of "self"-presentation—are the

³²"Die Gestellung in das Aussehen," *Wegmarken*, p. 347/277, ET p. 212.

³³In this essay I use the word "intelligible" (νοητόν) in the broad, Heideggerian sense of *zugänglich*: "accessible/available-to-human-beings." This broad sense of intelligibility/*Zugänglichkeit* encompasses entities both as νοητά in the narrow sense (i.e., accessible to theoretical intellection) and as πράγματα in the narrow sense) things available for practical use), as well as entities as works of art, toys, etc.—in short, any and all entities as *innerweltlich*, within the range of, and considered in terms of, possible significance to human beings. This meaning is consonant with both Parmenides' and Aristotle's usage. When Parmenides says that νοεῖν is correlative with εἶναι (fragment 3), he is not referring to intellectual knowing alone but to all forms of what Heidegger in *Einführung in die Metaphysik* calls *Vernehmen*, the "receiving" of entities—and that includes technical and practical as well as intellectual knowing. And when Aristotle in *De Anima* discusses the ταυτότης between ἐπιστήμη and τὸ πρᾶγμα (Γ 5, 430 a 20 and 7 431 a 1), he is referring not just to the mind's knowing of tools and usable things. In that context the word πρᾶγμα means "anything accessible to human ψυχή." Moreover, even when νοητόν and πρᾶγμα are used in their specialized sense of *Vorhandenes* and *Zuhandenes* (in *Sein und Zeit*, for example), the underlying and common issue is still that of *Zugänglichkeit*, accessibility.

structure of what Heidegger calls the intrinsic (and in the medieval sense of the term, the “transcendental”) disclosedness of entities, their ἀλήθεια.³⁴ In Heidegger’s view there are at least three levels of disclosure, ranging backwards from the most derivative to the most fundamental:

- ἀλήθεια₃: truth in the usual sense of the *adaequatio* of propositions and states of affairs;
- ἀλήθεια₂: truth in the (medieval “transcendental”) sense of the intrinsic “disclosedness” or intelligibility of an entity, according to Aristotle’s dictum, “The degree of being a thing has is the degree of truth it has,” which is echoed in the medieval *verum et esse convertuntur*;³⁵
- ἀλήθεια₁: “truth” as generation of the openness (*Da, Lichtung*) that allows for all significance and thus for both the disclosedness of entities (ἀλήθεια₂) and the correctness of statements (ἀλήθεια₃).

In this view, the natural-kinetic-phenomenological presuppositions that we have discussed operate on the *second* level of “truth.”

Heidegger argues that for ancient Greek thinkers, and especially for the pre-Socratics, the words φύσις and ἀλήθεια (along with λόγος, ποίησις, and by implication, κίνησις) did indeed name the being of entities. However, unlike the later philosophers of οὐσία (Plato and Aristotle), the pre-Socratics not only knew of beingness, taken as the

³⁴And to this concatenation of terms we may add μεταβολή, not in the ordinary sense of “change” but rather as that whereby “something heretofore hidden and absent comes into appearance”: “. . . daß im Umschlag [μεταβολή] etwas bisher Verborgenes und Abwesendes zum Vorschein kommt” *Wegmarken*, p. 319/249, E.T. p. 191; cf. also Martin Heidegger, *Zollikoner Seminare. Protokolle - Gespräche - Briefe*, ed. Medard Boss (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987), p. 201.

³⁵*Metaphysics*, α 1, 993 b 30-31: ἕκαστον ὡς ἔχει τοῦ εἶναι, οὕτω καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας. Thomas Aquinas glosses the point: “Eadem est dispositio rerum in esse sicut in veritate,” *Summa Theologiae* I-II, 3, 7, c. Aquinas traces this “transcendental” state (omne ens est verum) back to the creative divine intellect: “Veritas etiam rerum est secundum quod conformantur suo principio, scilicet intellectui divino.” *Summa Theologiae*, I, 16, 5, ad 2. For the *Summa Theologiae* I use the text in the series Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 3rd ed. (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1963). See also *De Veritate* I, 2 (things are measured by the divine intellect in which all created things are).

“stable” availability of entities to human engagement, but more importantly had an implicit awareness of “being-itself,” the relative non-presence that is the enabling γένεσις of such availability. What those ancient thinkers failed to thematize, however, was the essential structure of that enabling γένεσις: the “appropriation” that we sketched out above. That is why in Heidegger’s eyes the archaic Greek thinkers rank a cut above the philosophers of οὐσία: they at least *name* the genesis of οὐσία (which we have termed οὐσίωσις; see note 15 above). But what goes unthematized in their insights—appropriation as the prior generation of the openness that makes possible the genesis of οὐσία—cries out for the retrieval and articulation that Heidegger believed his own thought provided. Therefore, as much as archaic Greek thinking is (unthematically) aware of ἀλήθεια₁, it mostly operates on the level of ἀλήθεια₂.

All of this is pretty much a commonplace in the Heideggerian literature today, as is the groundedness of the three levels of disclosure in temporality. *SZ* argues that temporality makes possible *all* disclosure. More precisely, at levels two and three, the relation is one of possibilizing to possibilized (these two levels presume openness, and openness is made possible by *Zeitlichkeit*), whereas at level one, temporality *is* the intrinsic structure of openness.

However, Heidegger speaks not simply of *Zeitlichkeit* but also of the *Zeitigung* of *Zeitlichkeit*, one of his earliest names for *Ereignis*. Unfortunately the Macquarrie-Robinson translation of *Sein und Zeit* misleadingly renders *Zeitigung* as “temporalizing” (*Being and Time*, p. 278.17), and Professor Stambaugh’s new translation carries over this non-starter as “temporalization” (p. 217.13 *et passim*). (1) *Zeitigung* would be more meaningfully translated as “generation”—φύσις as γένεσις—in the double sense of the “bringing-about”/“coming-to-be” of the existential becoming called *Zeitlichkeit*. (2) But the temporality thus generated constitutes the very openness of the open.³⁶ (3) Thus the generation (*Zeitigung/Ereignis*) of temporality *is* ἀλήθεια₁, that which makes possible both the self-presentation of entities and the correct correspondence of propositions with states of affairs. Thus what we have called the “phenomenological” presupposition of Greek thought (level two) points back to a more fundamental “aletheiological” presupposition (level one).

³⁶Cf. “Weil die *Zeitlichkeit* die Gelichtetheit des Da ekstatisch-horizontal konstituiert . . .” (italicized in the original), *Sein und Zeit*, GA II (Klostermann: Frankfurt, 1977), p. 539 (Niemeyer edition, p. 408.7-8).

Heidegger made the first of the points above in a conversation he had with Medard Boss in 1963:

Zeitigung as *Sich-zeitigen* means self-unfolding, emerging and thus appearing. The Latin word *natura* comes from *nasci*, "to be born." Φύσις, from φύειν, means (in Greek [thinking]) "emerging" in the sense of coming out of concealment into the unconcealed.³⁷

In turn, *Zeitigung* as the emergence/appearing of *Zeitlichkeit* makes possible φαίνεσθαι as the emergence/appearing of a φαινόμενον as the intelligible appearance of an entity.

We find an indirect confirmation of this reading of *Zeitigung* as φύσις in *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*,³⁸ where, in the process of retrieving the problematic of openness (*Dasein*) from the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Heidegger takes up Kant's notion of time as pure self-affection. Heidegger finds the roots of pure receptivity ("being affected without experience, that is, affecting oneself," *KPM*, p. 172), and thus the subjectivity of the subject, in what he calls *das Von-sich-aus-hin-zu-auf . . . und Zurück-auf-sich*, "the emergence-from-itself-and-going-forth-from-itself and the return-into-itself." This bulky phrase is Heidegger's effort at reinterpreting the apparent circularity imaged in Aristotle's φύσις . . . ὁδὸς ἐκ φύσεως εἰς φύσιν (*Physics* B 1, 193 b 12) and applying it to the structure of human being. The "return" mentioned here is not a mere "going-back" to an ontic starting point but a returning to, and hence a remaining with, *one's essence*, a structure that is cognate with what SZ calls *Gewesenheit*. The emergence-and-return that remains with its essence—in this case, pure self-affection as a receptive openness that confirms one's essence as *Da-sein*—defines the structure of human being, φύσις/ἀλήθεια. Such emergence-and-return, he says, "constitutes the mental character of the mind [*den Gemütcharakter des Gemütes*] as a finite self" (*KPM*, p. 173). That is to say, this imperfect (i.e., "kinetic") *Bei-sich-sein*, this ἐνέργεια ἀτελής of *Zeitlichkeit*, is what constitutes the essence of openness (*Dasein*) in general and its aletheio-

³⁷"Zeitigung als Sich-zeitigen ist Sich-entfalten, aufgehen und so erscheinen. *Natura* (lateinisch) kommt vom nasci = geboren werden. φύσις → φύειν (griechisch) = aufgehen im Sinne des aus der Verborgenheit ins Unverborgene Kommen." *Zollikoner Seminare*, 203. Compare Heidegger's remark to Medard Boss in the spring of 1963: "Taken as words, neither *natura* nor φύσις have any connection with *time*." "Weder bei *natura* noch bei φύσις besteht dem Worte nach ein Zusammenhang mit *Zeit*," *loc cit*.

³⁸Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, third edition, 1965), p. 172f. Hereinafter *KPM*.

logical character in particular. What Heidegger envisions here is the circle of the *Da*, the open world of intelligibility: τὸ ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος ἀτρεμὲς ἤτορ, the “calm and stable heart of well-rounded disclosure.”³⁹

We may go further: This emergence-and-return is the secret of traditional Western philosophy, ever intimated but rarely thematized. It achieves a certain culmination in Thomas Aquinas’ description of all knowledge (and preeminently God’s self-knowledge) as an analogous “reditio in seipsum.”⁴⁰ And this “divine circularity” finds a cosmic mirroring throughout the Western tradition, whether in the neo-Platonic cycle of emanation and return (πρόοδος/ἐπιστροφή),⁴¹ or in the

³⁹Parmenides, Fragment 1: Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, second edition (Berlin: Wiedmann, 1906), I, 115.29 (εὐκυκλέος = εὐκυκλής; cf. εὐκύκλου σφαίρης, fragment 8, Diels, I, 121.43). Heidegger cites the first text in his “Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens,” *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Max Niemeyer: Tübingen, 1969), p. 74; ET in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, revised and expanded edition, 1993), p. 444.

⁴⁰*Summa Theologiae* I, 14, 2, obj. 1 and ad 1. (Since God is self-coincident, any “reditio” is really a “remaining” with his essence.) Aquinas derives the insight from Proclus (410-485), *Στοιχείωσις θεολογική (Institutio Theologica)* via its ninth-century Arabic condensation known in Latin as *Liber de Causis* (also known as *Liber de expositione bonitatis purae*). See Proclus, *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text*, edited and translated by E.R. Dodd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933): proposition 82 (76.29-30): Πᾶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ γνωστικὸν πρὸς ἑαυτὸ παντὴ ἐπιστρεπτικὸν ἐστίν (roughly: Everything that is capable of knowledge of itself is one that reverts to itself by way of a complete [return]). In the *Liber de Causis* that Aquinas used, proposition 15: “Omnis sciens scit essentiam suam, ergo est rediens ad essentiam suam reditione completa,” in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Librum de Causis Expositio*, ed. H.D. Saffrey (Louvain: Éditions E. Nauwelaerts, 1954), p. 88; In English, Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, translated and annotated by Vincent A. Guagliardo, Charles R. Hess, and Richard C. Taylor (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p. 98. In a recent and more correct rendering: “Omnis sciens qui scit essentiam suam est rediens ad essentiam suam reditione completa,” *Le Liber de Causis*, edited Adriaan Pattin (originally in *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie*, ca. 1967; I use the text in an offprint form). Cf. his *In Platonis Theologiam* [the εἰς τὴν Πλάτωνος θεολογίαν] e.g., II, 4: Καὶ εἰ πᾶς νοῦς εἰς αὐτὸν ἔστραπται καὶ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἐστὶ . . . , in Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, 6 volumes, ed. and trans. H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968-1997), II (1974), chapter 4, p. 36 (Greek), lines 22-23. See also Proclus, *Elements*, prop. 15 (16.30): ἀσωματόν, which may already be hinted at in *De Anima*, Γ 6, 430 b 24: χωριστόν; also props. 16 (18.7-8): χωριστὴν οὐσίαν ἔχει παντός σώματος; 43 (44.25): ἀύθυπόστατον; and 44 (46.1-2): κατ’ οὐσίαν ἐπέστραπται πρὸς ἑαυτό.

⁴¹For example in Proclus, *Elements*, propositions 25-30 (pp. 28-34, especially prop. 29), for πρόοδος, and 31-39 for ἐπιστροφή. See also ἡ ἀφ’ ἑνὸς πρόοδος in Proclus, *In Platonis Cratylus Commentaria*, ed. Giorgio Pasquali (Leipzig: Teubner, 1908), p. 2 P., and *Théologie platonicienne*, IV (1981), chapter 1, p. 7 (Greek), lines 10-11. Cf. Lucas Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 105-109.

exitus/reditus of the medieval notions of creation and ἀποκατάστασις,⁴² down to Hegel⁴³ and even to the Marx of the Paris manuscripts: communism as the complete return (*Rückkehr*) of human-kind to its true nature as species-being.⁴⁴

Let us take the next step. Heidegger finds the three presuppositions that underlie *Physics B 1*—"naturalism," "kineticism," and "phenomenology"—packed into the phrase that, for him, captures not only the essence of Greek ontology but also the problematic that will eventually develop into nihilism. Plato and Aristotle, he says, understood reality in terms of οὐσία, that is to say (and here is Heidegger's key phrase) as *beständiges Anwesen*.⁴⁵ These are the two words that we must carefully unpack if we are to get to the heart of Heidegger's interpretation of nihilism.

The accepted interpretation of *das beständige Anwesen* is as "the stable/constant coming-into-and-being-in-presence" of entities, where "presence" always entails "intelligibility" (*esse = verum esse*). As far as it goes, this translation is correct. But the English here misses the

The notion is already found (less thematically) in Plotinus' *Enneads*: ἀποροή at II.3.2; πρόοδος at VII.5.6; ἐπιστροφή at I.2.4, V.2.1, etc. Plotinus, *Opera*, ed. Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzler (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964ff.).

⁴²See John Scotus Erigena/Eriugena (ca. 810-ca. 877): *descensio/reversio* in *De divisione naturae*: cf. "descendens" at III, 23, PL CXXII (1865), p. 689B; and "in primordiales causas revertetur, quae sunt semper et incommutabiliter in Deo . . ." and "mirabilis atque ineffabilis reversio" at V, 8, p. 876B; also "defluunt/redeunt" at III.4, p. 632C; "descendens" and "omnium reditus in causam" at III.20, p. 683A and B/C; etc. Some of *De divisione naturae* is found in: John the Scot, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. Myra L. Uhlfelder (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976): V, 8, p. 876B at p. 288; and III, 4, p. 632C at p. 139. Note the theme in the title of his fragmentary *De Egressu et Regressu Animae ad Deum*, PL CXXII (1865), p. 1023-4. See Werner Beierwaltes, *Eriugena: Grundzüge seines Denkens* (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), pp. 71, n. 50, 300-307, and *passim*.

⁴³"Es ist das Werden seiner selbst, der Kreis, der sein Ende als seinen Zweck voraussetzt und zum Anfange hat und nur durch die Ausführung und sein Ende wirklich ist." G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), III, 23 (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Vorrede), echoing Proclus' development of prop. 33 (36.13-14): συνάπτει τῇ ἀρχῇ τὸ τέλος. On Hegele's relation to Proclus and Erigena, see Werner Beierwaltes, *Platonismus und Idealismus*, Philosophische Abhandlung, Band 40 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972), pp. 154-187.

⁴⁴In the third manuscript of his 1844 Paris manuscripts Marx speaks of "Der Kommunismus . . . als Reintegration oder Rückkehr des Menschen in sich . . . ; . . . als wirkliche Aneignung des menschlichen Wesens durch und für den Menschen; . . . als vollständige, bewußt und innerhalb des ganzen Reichtums der bisherigen Entwicklung gewordene Rückkehr des Menschen für sich als eines gesellschaftlichen . . .": Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1968ff.), *Ergänzungsband* (Schriften bis 1844, Erster Teil, 1968), p. 536; in MEGA: I/2, 263.

⁴⁵*Wegmarken*, p. 336/266, ET p. 204.

richness not so much of the German as of the Greek phrase that underlies it: ἡ αἰδιη οὐσία.⁴⁶ More important, the translation misses the interplay of “being” and “time” that is at work in the phrase. We shall now consider the “Greek” relation of being and time, first by treating the being-aspect under the rubric of *Anwesen*/οὐσία (Section IV), and then the time-aspect under the rubric of *beständig*/αἰεί (Section V).

IV *Anwesen*/οὐσία

Anwesen does indeed translate οὐσία (specifically οὐσία as φύσις; *Physics* B 1, 192 b 33 ff.) and thus refers to the “self”-presentation whereby entities become-and-are-intelligible to human beings. Heidegger makes this clear in his 1955 letter when he argues against Jünger’s hope for a “future” *Zuwendung* or “turning” of being toward human beings, as if being were something in and for itself that only occasionally orients itself toward men and women. Rather, says Heidegger, “Such turning toward [human beings] is itself presumably what we . . . call ‘being.’”⁴⁷ Indeed: “Presence (‘being’) as presence is always and in each case presence to the human essence”⁴⁸ Thus: “We always say *too little* about ‘being itself’ when, in saying ‘being,’ we leave out presence *to* the human *essence* and thereby fail to recognize that this [human] essence itself goes to make up being.”⁴⁹ This theme recurs frequently in Heidegger’s thought in the 1950s. In the spring of 1951, for instance, students in his *Übungen im Lesen* heard him say: “If the Greeks understand presence as εἶδος, and if εἶδος is

⁴⁶See, for example, Plato, *Timaeus* 37e.

⁴⁷ZS, p. 27/407, p. 75: “Vermutlich ist die *Zuwendung* selber, aber noch verhüllterweise, Jenes, was wir verlegen genug and unbestimmt ‘das Sein’ nennen.”

⁴⁸ZS, p. 28/408, ET p. 77: “*Anwesen* (‘Sein’) ist als *Anwesen* je und je *Anwesen* zum Menschenwesen, insofern *Anwesen* Geheiß ist, das jeweils das Menschenwesen ruft.”

⁴⁹ZS, p. 27/407, ET p. 75: “Wir sagen vom ‘Sein selbst’ immer *zuwenig*, wenn wir, ‘das Sein’ sagend, das *An-wesen* zum Menschenwesen auslassen und dadurch verkennen, daß dieses Wesen selbst ‘das Sein’ mitausmacht.” Compare: “Wir fragen nach der Beziehung zwischen dem Menschenwesen und dem Sein des Seienden. Aber—sobald ich denkend sage ‘Menschenwesen’, habe ich darin schon den Bezug zum Sein gesagt. Ingleichen, sobald ich denkend sage: Sein des Seienden, ist darin schon der Bezug zum Menschenwesen genannt.” *Was heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1954), p. 74; ET *What is Called Thinking?* trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 79. (The *Beziehung* that enables the Bezug between the human essence and beingness is Ereignis.)

thought of as an essential trait of φύσις, then included therein is a relatedness of presence to human beings.⁵⁰

We must take these assertions as literally as Heidegger puts them. If "being-itself" (*Ereignis*) is presencing, taken as the enabling of any and all accessibility, then the beingness of entities is their inclination to enter the realm of intelligibility. That inclination is not an add-on, such that entities would first of all be present in their beingness—even present to themselves—and then only occasionally be available to human beings. Rather, entities are ontologically "ad hominem." This is precisely what Heidegger is referring to when he says that the essence of a phenomenon is "to come into unconcealment," "to be disclosed," "to stand forth in the clearing," and other such ways of discussing ὄν ὡς ἀληθές, entities as open and available to human engagement. That movement-into-availability—*Anwesenung*—happens not in some utopia beyond the human world but only with, and in the midst of, that world. The very nature of entities is to be open to what the Greeks called νοῦς/νοεῖν, and therefore to be νοητά, always already correlative to a possible human νόησις. By reason of the φύσις/*Zeitigung*/*Ereignis* that makes οὐσία/beingness possible, entities are open to, available for, usable and knowable in, praxis, discourse, and thought. Their essence is to be "innerworldly" (*innerweltlich*).

And just as the "ad hominem" disposition of entities is not an add-on, so likewise the openness of human νοεῖν to entities—its ability to engage and know them—is equally essential to human being. It is this reciprocal correlativity that Heidegger finds named in Parmenides' third fragment, in the τὸ αὐτό (the "togetherness" or "gathering") that brings νοεῖν and εἶναι together,⁵¹ a phrase that is echoed in Aristotle as the "sameness" that gathers together ἐπιστήμη and πράγμα in actual knowledge.⁵² This togetherness is what Heidegger called "the wonder of all wonders": not transcendental consciousness as in Husserl, but *Ereignis*/ἀλήθεια₁, the "appropriation" of the human essence such that entities *are*, i.e., are *present to* and *engagable by* a reciprocally disposed νοεῖν.⁵³

⁵⁰Wenn die Griechen das Anwesen als εἶδος verstehen, wenn εἶδος als Wesenszug der φύσις gedacht wird, so liegt darin eine Bezogenheit des Anwesens zum Menschen" *Übungen im Lesen*, winter semester, 1950-1951: April 18, 1951.

⁵¹Parmenides, fragment 3: τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι.

⁵²*De Anima* Γ 5, 430 a 20 and 7, 431 a 1: τὸ δ' αὐτὸ ἐστὶν ἢ κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐπιστήμη τῷ πράγματι.

⁵³Husserl: "Das Wunder aller Wunder ist reines Ich und reines Bewußtsein" Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und*

To neglect this correlativity of $\delta\nu \eta \delta\nu$ with human praxis, production, and thinking is to miss "the central issue" (*die Sache selbst*). At the very least, as Heidegger puts it, it is to "say too little" about being-itself/*Ereignis* and even worse to "fail to recognize" what *Ereignis* entails: the availability of absolutely everything to human cognition and will. It must be admitted that this "failure to recognize" is the norm rather than the exception in the scholasticism that goes under the name of "Heidegger studies." But to recognize that correlativity for what it is means to concede the virtual inevitability of nihilism.

At the "innocent" dawn of Greek-Western history, this correlativity is the basis for what is altogether too loosely called Greek "humanism." Such "humanism" (if we may apply this much later term to archaic and classical Greece) is not first of all a celebration of the beauties of the human or a Promethean self-assertion whereby humans take themselves as the measure of all things. Yes, such self-assertion is a possible element of Greek humanism, maybe an inevitable consequence of it, and arguably even one of its positive achievements—but not its basis.

Prior to such self-assertion there rules the fact—which Greek philosophers understood—that entities as such and of themselves are open to human $\nu\omicron\epsilon\iota\nu$, that they are intrinsically accessible, engagable and (to take Heidegger's term *innerweltlich* in its broad and proper sense) ultimately "humanizable." The grounds for Greek humanism are ontological, not anthropological, and they lie in the *a priori* correlativity that governs the openness of human beings and the humanizability of entities. (And if Heidegger has any criticism of this Greek humanism, it is simply that it was unaware of, or did not adequately thematize, the *source* of this correlativity in the prior fact of *Ereignis*/appropriation.) The human being is $\nu\omicron\eta\tau\iota\kappa\acute{o}\varsigma$ (Latin: *intel-*

phänomenologischen Philosophie, III: *Die Phänomenologie und die Fundamente der Wissenschaften*, ed. Marly Biemel, *Husserliana* V (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 75; E.T. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, III: *Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences*, trans. Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), p. 64. Heidegger: "Und das 'Wundersame' liegt darin, daß die Existenzverfassung des Daseins die transzendente Konstitution alles Positiven ermöglicht": in Edmund Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie*, ed. Walter Biemel, *Husserliana* IX (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), p. 602; ET in Edmund Husserl, *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927-1931)* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), p. 140. Cf. also Wegmarken, p. 103/307: ". . . das Wunder aller Wunder: daß Seiendes ist." ET ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Penguin/Meridian, 1975), p. 261.

ligens) in the sense of being-in-a-world and able to have access to something only mediately, i.e., *as* something. And entities are νοητά (Latin: *intelligibilia*) in the sense of falling within-world, within the province of νοῦς; and only thus are they able to be engaged *as* something. On the one hand, because being-itself is a *Zuwendung* (and thus the very possibility of intelligibility), so too entities are ontologically “turned toward” human beings, inclined to and accessible within the realm of νοῦς. On the other hand, the essence of human being consists in being evoked by that *Zuwendung*,⁵⁴ such that humans have access to everything that is insofar as it is. These two potentialities—the ability to know and to be known respectively—are *a priori* correlative, a correlativity that is expressed in the τὸ αὐτό of Parmenides and Aristotle and that is grounded in the prior evocation/appropriation.

And at the other end of Greek-Western history—its eschaton, where things are no longer “innocent” (in this regard Heidegger speaks of “an extraordinary danger”⁵⁵)—we see the historical outcome of this Greek humanism in the virtual inevitability and arguable unsurpassability of nihilism, both rooted in that same τὸ αὐτό. Insofar as the essence of entities entails their presence to human cognition and will, it also entails that they are disposed to be picked up and used, to be reshaped as ποιούμενα—and endlessly so. The endless accessibility of the real is at the core of the Greek-Western vision of being, which from the pre-Socratics up to Heidegger, has affirmed the infinity of the intelligibility (and thus the transformability) of τὸ ὄν, an infinity that is correlative to the infinite reach of νοῦς. This affirmation does not require or necessarily depend upon (although one could argue to the possibility of) an entity in which everything knowable is already and fully known.⁵⁶ A bad infinity will do.

But can we include Heidegger in this vision as well? Yes, for if ἀλήθεια in Heidegger’s texts always entails the ad-hominem status and intrinsic accessibility of entities, the λήθη-dimension of ἀλήθεια (*pace* Heideggerian scholasticism) most emphatically does *not* indicate a point where such accessibility supposedly runs out. Rather, the λήθη (to put it formally) names the unexplainable facticity of such accessibility, or (to put it more materially) names *Ereignis* as the

⁵⁴Cf. Geheiß and Ruf und Gehör: ZS, p. 28/408, ET p. 77.

⁵⁵ZS, p. 10/389, ET p. 41: eine außerordentliche Gefahr.

⁵⁶The divine entity, in whom ἡ νόησις τῷ νοουμένῳ μία: *Metaphysics* Λ, 9, 1075 a 4-5. Heidegger comments: “Dazu ist sein [d.h. des Gottes] Verhalten ein solches, das in sich selbst τέλος hat in dem, was es schon ist, nicht im ἔργον [d.h. außerhalb]”: *Die Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie*, GA 22 (Frankfurt: Klosterman, 1993), p. 179.

presence-bestowing absence intrinsic to the human essence. By “evoking” human being and thereby generating the openness wherein entities can appear *as* this or that in their current mode of beingness, the λήθη makes possible an infinity of significance. There is no end to the human reach into entities, and yet this infinite reach is finally an unexplainable given. That is, the λήθη entails the endless availability of the real but “without [an ultimate] why.”

Thus we would be doing being-itself no favors if we just let entities “be” in the sense of leaving them pristine and untouched, perhaps even unknown. To let entities *be* means to let them *be present*, that is, to take them as endlessly engagable. And we do that by endlessly engaging them, both scientifically and practically, and, yes, by letting them be submitted to the domination of the worker in the inevitable humanization of nature and naturalization of man. If one follows Heidegger’s thinking (not to mention the facts) consistently, there is no promise of escape from that *Herrschaft*, no nostalgia for a time before we crossed over the line into “too much” τέχνη, no hope for a new age when the balance might shift back in favor of nature. Or better, if there *is* such nostalgia and such hope, its philosophical significance is nil. At worst, such nostalgia is an index of avoidance, flight, and inauthenticity, a refusal to face and accept the historical fatedness of Greek-Western existence that is captured in Parmenides’ word τὸ αὐτό.⁵⁷

⁵⁷The fact that the self to which the disclosed world is correlative is not a simple presence but a mortal “thrown project” in no way undoes the endlessness of accessibility and engagement but in fact confirms it. However, the crucial question lies in the “*how*” of that engagement.

(A) The “*what*” is clear: The projected status of our human openness (*Dasein*) is its fatedness to being mortal, and this fatedness is structured as our bivalent *a priori* movement of (1) being bonded to our dying and (2) returning “from” that dying to the entities of our world. This bivalent movement is primordial λόγος, “existential” σύνθεσις/διαίρεσις, and it grounds the bivalent possibility of “linguistic” σύνθεσις/διαίρεσις in the original sense of *Ansprechen*, “relating to something as something,” whether conatively or cognitively.

(B) The crucial question lies in the “*how*,” inasmuch as what was said above pertains to openness essentially and specifically, that is, in its species-being as an inter-communicating social co-openness (*Mitdasein*). Hence, to affirm that the world is “*ad hominem*” implies (1) that ideally (i.e., in essence) the entities of the world are (ontologically) equally available to all human beings and, all else being equal, no one of us has more claim than any other on the givenness of entities: being (both being-itself and beingness) is materially and formally “democratic”; (2) that entities are available to us specifically *in* our mortality; or, from the perspective of *Ansprechen*, that we address entities *from* our mortality and “speak” our own mortality *to* them; and (3) to refuse to address entities in this way, or better, to deny that in fact one always already does so, is to relate to them, and eventually to accumulate them, from the illusory point of the self as

In Heidegger's view, the troubling fact that nihilism is inevitable and unsurpassable follows ineluctably from the philosophical insight that being—from archaic Greek φύσις through classical Greek οὐσία, right down to Jünger's notion of work as the actualization of *Gestalt* and *Herrschaft* in planetary technology—has always been experienced in terms of *Anwesenheit*, "presence-unto" human being. And the hidden source of this presence-unto is *Ereignis*/appropriation, the evocation of human being that generates and sustains the fields of presence-unto. Heidegger writes to Jünger:

In the *Praesenz* [that announces itself in the Will to Power] and in the *Repraesentation* [or reproduction of the worker that Jünger discusses] there is manifested the basic trait of what has revealed itself to Western thinking as being. From the dawn of the Greek world down to the dusk of our own century "being" has meant one thing: presence-unto [*Anwesen*]. Every kind of *Praesenz* and *Praesentation* stems from the appropriation that issues in presence-unto [*dem Ereignis der Anwesenheit*].⁵⁸

But if every kind of presence-unto stems from the appropriating dispensation-of-beingness that retreats beneath erasure, then nihilism is not just inevitable but arguably inescapable. In fact it is *empowered* by the hidden essence of beingness and cannot be "overcome" at all.

V Beständig/ἀεί

The other word in Heidegger's key phrase *das beständige Anwesen*—the adjective *beständig*—points to the question of "time." *Beständig* is usually translated into English either as "stable" or as "constant," neither of which, as we shall see, is adequate. What does the adjective *beständig* add to *Anwesen qua* "presence-unto"? Is it merely a chance addition to the noun? Or does it contain the whole secret of the turn into the essence of nihilism?

Heidegger unfolds the meaning of *beständig* by means of a reflection on the meaning of the Greek adverb ἀεί, "eternally," and the adjective αἰδιος (a contraction of αἰδιος), "eternal, everlasting." This procedure appears logical enough, for do not stability and constancy necessarily point in the direction of eternity? This certainly has been the mainstream tradition in Western metaphysics—compare, for example, St. Augustine's "Id enim vere est, quod incommutabiliter

foundation/*fonds/caput/capital*—which is intimately bound up with a certain, and in fact historically relative, kind of appropriation.

⁵⁸ZS, p. 21/400, ET p. 63.

manet"⁵⁹ and Thomas Aquinas' "Esse autem est aliquid fixum et quietum in ente."⁶⁰ But it does not work that way for Heidegger.

Heidegger's explanation of αεί and thus *beständig* comes in his commentary on *Physics* B 1 at the point⁶¹ where Aristotle establishes the priority of μορφή over ὕλη by rejecting what Heidegger calls the "materialism" of the Sophist Antiphon, a materialism that, interestingly enough, was intimately bound up with Antiphon's radical repudiation of τέχνη. By way of anticipation we may say: Antiphon saw the constancy of presence as the hallmark of the really real and thus as the touchstone for discerning what is truly φύσις. Antiphon's approach does offer one way to escape τέχνη and the nihilism implied in it. His doctrine suggests that although, insofar as we are human, we must unfortunately live with τέχνη, nonetheless insofar as we are philosophers, we must be ever in retreat from τέχνη toward φύσις. And isn't that Heidegger's program as well?

In his fragmentary work Ἀλήθεια, Antiphon puts forth the thesis that what most deserves the name φύσις is the primary and most unshaped elemental matter—τὸ ἀρρύθμιστον πρῶτον: earth, water, air, and fire—rather than (1) anything (such as iron or wood or flesh) that derives from or is a reshaping of those primary elements, and (2) *a fortiori* anything, such as artifacts, that is further shaped from those secondary reshapings. It would be hard to find a more absolute rejection of technology.

Antiphon's reason for declaring the most basic elements to be φύσις is that they are αἰδία: they do not change of and by themselves (οὐ γὰρ

⁵⁹*Confessiones*, VII, 11 (17), PL XXXII (1861), p. 743. See his "De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae et de Moribus Manichaeorum," liber II, caput I, 1, PL XXXII, (1861), p. 1346: "Hoc enim maxime esse dicendum est, quod semper eodem modo sese habet, quod omnimodo sui simile est, quod nulla ex parte corrumpi ac mutari potest, quod non subjacet tempori, quod aliter nunc se habere quam habebat antea, non potest. Id enim est quod esse verissime dicitur." Compare *De Trinitate* liber V, caput II, 3, PL XLII, p. 912, where Augustine attributes change (mutatio) to substances that can include accidents (accidentia capere); however: "Deo autem aliquid ejusmodi accidere non potest; et ideo sola est incommutabilis substantia vel essentia, qui Deus est, cui perfectio ipsum esse, unde essentia nominata est, maxime ac verissime competit. Quod enim mutatur, non servat ipsum esse; et quod mutari potest, etsi non mutetur, potest quod fuerat non esse: ac per hoc illud solum quod non tantum non mutatur, verum etiam mutari omnino non potest, sine scrupulo occurrit quod verissime dicatur esse." See his "De Sermonibus Domini in Monte," liber 2, caput VII, 27, PL XXXIV, p. 1281, where Augustine contrasts "hodie" (i.e., "in hac temporali vita") with eternity ("ante illam scilicet immutationem").

⁶⁰*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 20, quarta objectio [24] in *Opera Omnia*, Parma edition of 1855 (New York: Musurgia, 1948-1949) V, 17A; ET *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Doubleday, 1955), I, pp. 112-113.

⁶¹*Wegmarken*, pp. 336-340/226-270; ET pp. 203-207.

εἶναι μεταβολὴν αὐτοῖς ἐξ αὐτῶν, 193 a 26-27). From Antiphon's use of the word, which Aristotle apparently accepts, it would seem that αἰδῖος must mean "eternal" or "everlasting." The most constant and most stable would be the eternal—and ultimately the divine. And even though Antiphon and Aristotle might radically disagree on the content of that ultimate "theological" entity—"materialistic" in the one case, "idealistic" in the other—they would nonetheless agree on the *form* of the theological: eternal self-presence. Antiphon's retreat from human τέχνη in the direction of a chthonic φύσις is a negative mirroring of Aristotle's sublation of human τέχνη in the direction of an Olympian φύσις.

But Heidegger confounds those simple certainties. In showing how that is so, I will not go into the way Aristotle incorporates Antiphon, as *Unwesen*, into his own interpretation of φύσις at *Physics* B 1, 193 a 21-31. (Briefly, we recall that Aristotle "wrests" from Antiphon's ἀρρῦθμιστον πρῶτον his own very different notion of πρώτη ὕλη, so-called "prime matter.") Rather, I will present only the gist of Heidegger's radical reinterpretation of the meaning of αἰεῖ in that same passage.

Heidegger begins by noting the astonishing ambivalence of the words αἰεῖ and αἰδῖος. At one end of the spectrum these two words can indeed mean "forever," with all the connotations of eternity and necessity which that word bears: "that which is *always* the case." At the other end of the spectrum, however, these words can refer simply to "whatever happens to be the case at a given time," as in Herodotus' ὁ αἰεῖ βασιλεύων, "the currently ruling king" or Aeschylus' ὁ αἰεῖ κρατῶν, "whoever is ruler" (*Prometheus Bound*, 937f., which David Grene masterfully renders "whatever king is king today").⁶² The same ambivalence is found in the English word "ever" (compare the German *jeweils*) that we use in translating αἰεῖ and αἰδῖος. On the one hand, "ever" can mean "always" and "eternally," with overtones of necessity (compare the Latin *ne-cesse*, "not withdrawing or yielding," from *ne+cedo*). Or on the other hand, the word can refer to any specific and non-perduring occasion: "Did you ever see so-in-so?" This latter meaning continues in the suffix of words like "whoever," "whenever," and

⁶²(A) Herodotus, *Historiae*, 3rd edition, ed. Charles Hude (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927, reprinted 1954), II.98 (vol. I) and IX.116, lines 1-2 (vol. II): "The Persians consider that the whole of Asia is the property of themselves and of τοῦ αἰεῖ βασιλεύοντος [i.e., whoever happens to be their king at the time]"—*not* "whoever is the eternal king," parallel to the (equally legitimate but here inapplicable) phrase ὁ αἰεῖ χρόνος. (B) Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, trans. David Grene, in *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), I, 345.

“however” (that last taken as an adverb, not a conjunction), where it has the sense of “any at all, from among infinite possibilities” as in the aforementioned phrase from Herodotus, a meaning certainly quite removed from any notion of eternity or necessity.

Ἄϊδιος and “ever” can, of course, have the sense of “perpetual” or “eternal.” Plato, for example, speaks of ἡ ἀίδιη οὐσία, “eternal being,” and Aristotle discusses ἀίδιος βασιλεία, “perpetual monarchy.”⁶³ However, ἀίδιος and “ever” do not necessarily refer to time and above all need not indicate eternity or endless duration. Rather, Heidegger overturns the presumptive meaning of ἀίδιος when he interprets *das beständige Anwesen* (ἡ ἀίδιη οὐσία) not primarily as stable, abiding self-identity, not as constant presence, but rather as *autonomously initiated* self-presentation:

With the word αἰί one has in view the notion of “staying for a while,” specifically in terms of becoming-and-being-present. Something is αἰίδιον if it becomes-and-is-present of and by itself without further assistance and for this reason perhaps is constantly present. [. . .] The decisive factor is that entities proper become-and-are-present of and by themselves and therefore are encountered as that which in every instance is *already* there in front of you—ὑποκείμενον πρῶτον.⁶⁴

In this remarkable passage we watch the meaning of the so-called “constancy” or permanence of beingness-*qua*-presence slide from *eternity* (“something constantly present”) to *autonomy* (“becomes-and-is-present of and by itself without further assistance”⁶⁵), only to end up as the *apriority of accessibility*, here discussed under the temporal guise of the “always-alreadiness” of the intelligible presence of things (“already there in front of you”).⁶⁶ But this apriority of accessibility is the same issue we saw in *Anwesen/οὐσία*. The confluence of these two topics both raises the question of the *source* of this apriori accessibility

⁶³*Timaeus* 37e; *Politics* V, 1, 1301 b 27: ἀίδιος γὰρ βασιλεία ἀνισος ἐάν ἡ ἐν ἴσοις. (Here, of course, the form ἀίδιος is feminine [ἀίδιος, -ον]; alternately: ἀίδιη.)

⁶⁴“Im αἰί ist es auf das Verweilen und zwar im Sinne der Anwesung abgesehen; das αἰίδιον ist das von sich her ohne sonstiges Zutun und *deshalb* möglicherweise ständig Anwesende [. . .] [D]as Entscheidende liegt vielmehr darin, daß das eigentlich Seiende von ihm selbst her anwest und deshalb als das je schon Vorliegende—ὑποκείμενον πρῶτον—angetroffen wird” *Wegmarken*, 339/269; ET p. 206 (translation amended and emphasis added).

⁶⁵Compare *Die Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie*, p. 172, “οὐσία: das eigenständig beständig Vorhandene” and p. 201, no. 26: “οὐσία: 1. eigenständige Beständigkeit”

⁶⁶Cf. Heidegger’s bold interpretation of αἰί as “eigentlich”: *Die Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie*, p. 179.

(Heidegger's answer to that question is: appropriation) and offers a hint of what it means to "turn into the essence" of nihilism.

In the above passage Heidegger is claiming that τὸ ὄν is ἀίδιον to the degree that it is responsible for its own presence-unto, i.e., insofar as it is *per se* accessible (*omne ens est verum*). The factor of "alreadiness" in an entity's "already being intelligibly present" indicates not some chronologically prior intelligibility (e.g., "it was intelligible even before human beings came on the scene") but rather the entity's *intrinsic* intelligibility, the *a priori* status of its ad-hominem disposition.

However, when Heidegger discusses the movement of an entity's "self"-presentation and accessibility, where does he think its apriority lies? On the one hand, it is clear that for Heidegger the self-presentation and availability of an entity is prior to, and not dependent on, any human being's existential engagement with that entity. All our involvement with the real is an "evoked" involvement, not merely in the trivial sense that it is a response to something already out there, but in the weighty sense that what enables any such involvement is the same as what enables the intelligibility of entities: *Ereignis*/appropriation. So too, on the other hand, an entity's *ability* to be engaged—that is, its beingness—is always correlative to the human ability to have access to entities, for otherwise knowing and being, lacking any intrinsic connection, would merely bump up against each other, only occasionally and always accidentally, as they go their separate ways. Furthermore, this beingness, while distinct from the human essence, cannot be separated from it. In short, because the human essence "goes to make up 'being'"⁶⁷ (both being-itself/*Ereignis* and the beingness/intelligibility of entities), at the very minimum there is a fated correlativity between the human ability to know and the ability of entities to be known; and more importantly, the human essence even *co-constitutes* the intelligibility of entities.

Heidegger refuses (or at least brackets) the traditional thesis about the origin of the relatedness of being and knowing, viz., that the two are ultimately one-and-the-same in God *qua* νόησις νοήσεως and that the meaning of being is thus that particular form of time called "unchanging presence" and finally "eternity." Nonetheless, Heidegger approaches that solution asymptotically. In the text cited above, he argues that the autonomy and apriority of self-presentation, which is indicated in its character of ἀιδιότης or *Beständigkeit*, rests not with

⁶⁷ZS, p. 27/407, ET p. 75. "... daß dieses Wesen [des Menschen] 'das Sein' mitausmacht."

the primacy of entities (or of the "beingness of entities") over human knowing, or with the primacy of human knowing over entities, but consists, rather, in the factual priority of the *correlation* of νοεῖν and εἶναι over either of the two correlata, which correlation in turn is grounded in appropriation. If there is any necessity, constancy, and stability that "temporally" determines the meaning of being, it is nothing but the "always-alreadiness" of *Ereignis*.

Therefore, the supposed "constancy" of presence-unto, the ἀεί-factor that serves as the touchstone of οὐσία in the Greek version of "being and time," in no way undoes the ad-hominem status of that presence. In fact it reconfirms it with the weightiest of inevitabilities. We might have thought that in the φύσις-centered cosmos of Antiphon and of Aristotle, the most real instance of reality would turn out to be that which is most removed from human beings—it would be the most unchanging and eternal, whether in the form of Antiphon's pre-technological "elemental" (τὸ ἀπρόθμιστον πρῶτον) or in the form of Aristotle's meta-technological divine (ὁ θεός). But Heidegger argues that the ruling issue in the analogical structure of coming-to-presence is not eternity but the "apriority" of the correlation between νοεῖν and εἶναι. Which, at the other end of Greek-Western history, means the virtual inevitability of nihilism.

If I have spent so much time on Antiphon's false solution to the problem of technology, it is because this "solution" is both consonant with, and in fact prototypical of, what I call the "Right Heideggerian" response to nihilism. The terms "Right Heideggerian" and "Left Heideggerian" go back to discussions that John Caputo and I had in the late 1970s, when I began using the term "Right Heideggerians" for those who argued (a) that being-itself is exhausted in presence, (b) that even the λήθη is an as-yet-hidden presence that might someday emerge from concealment in the "new dawn" of a secular parousia, and (c) that the as-yet-hidden presence that is being-itself could arguably be already present to itself in a transparent *Bei-sich-sein*, not unlike the God whom Thomas Aquinas allegedly experienced in a mystical ecstasy shortly before his death at Fossanova. I claimed to find traces of such Right Heideggerianism in Professor Caputo's first two books on, respectively, Heidegger and Eckhart and Heidegger and Aquinas.⁶⁸

⁶⁸John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, and New York: Fordham University Press), 1978; *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985). On the latter, see Thomas Sheehan, "A Way out of Metaphysics," *Research in Phenomenology*, 15 (1985), 229-234. In this early phase of the discussion, "Left Heideggerians" simply referred to those who under-

Some two decades later the Right Heideggerians have shifted a bit to the left. While a few hold-outs still await a parousia of *das Sein selbst* after the dark age of nihilism, the majority of the Right Heideggerian Establishment has by now assimilated the discourse about the lethic character of being-itself—while nonetheless (and unfortunately) continuing to hypostasize and metaphysicize that λήθη into an ultimately unknowable absence, ontologically situated somewhere beyond the reach of human projection. While that is bad enough, the current *Left* Heideggerian position is little better. Having, in one of its incarnations, learned something from poststructuralism and in the process disabused itself of the mythology of a hypostasized λήθη (or has it?⁶⁹), it ends up rewriting that λήθη as an untotalizable (and historically empty) asymmetry bound up with a de-historicized “happening” of post-ethical obligation. This version of Left Heideggerianism may be a necessary, but surely is an insufficient, half-step toward salvaging whatever potential remains in Heidegger’s discourse: necessary insofar as it tries to take social obligation seriously, insufficient insofar as it has no demonstrable resources for confronting history, either for understanding it in theory or engaging it in practice. Left Heideggerianism remains yet another but much thinner form of “German ideology.”

In the final analysis neither the solutions of the Right nor Left Heideggerians work as adequate responses to technology and nihilism, at least not if one follows Heidegger (and the facts) consistently. To take only the example of Antiphon: Like the Right Heideggerian reaction to fulfilled nihilism, Antiphon’s response to τέχνη is to search for something untouched, or relatively untouched, by human beings, a

stood being-itself as an “absence” that makes possible the presence of entities. The point was to get beyond both Left and Right Heideggerianism. Cf. Thomas Sheehan, “Derrida and Heidegger,” in *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (New York: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 201-218.

⁶⁹Some hyperbolic critiques (verging on parodies) seem to believe they have Heidegger in their sights when they accuse him of a “hypervalorization of *aletheia*” and claim that “[in the 1930s] Heidegger’s interest turned more and more toward the search for the Essential Being (*Wesen*) and Origin (*Ursprung*) of truth.” “[The *Kehre* consists in Heidegger’s turn to] a deep Essential Being,” “a deep, primordial, originary truth,” “removed from beings [and] purified of them,” such that now “Being waits for an open space and a new god, in German, which is where the saving God will undoubtedly arrive.” John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1993), pp. 21, 118, 119, 123. This tops even Simon Blackburn’s parody of Heidegger: “Modern humanity has lost the ‘nearness and shelter’ of Being; we are no longer at home in the world as primitive man was, thought is separated from being, and only a favored few have any hope of recapturing oneness with Being.” Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford U. P., 1994), p. 169.

φύσις with as little overlay of τέχνη as possible. Antiphon's strategy is to deny intrinsic reality to ποιούμενα, to retreat from them in the direction of φύσει ὄντα, as he searches for a world where being is defined by unchanging stability. But in Heidegger's telling, this strategy is self-contradictory.

First, the supposed eternity or unmovedness of Antiphon's underlying elemental stuff denies the very reality of the φύσις that Antiphon is trying to preserve. Φύσις means "movement-into-presence-unto" (*Anwesenung*, οὐσίωσις), whereas Antiphon's elemental stuff does not move at all, least of all in the direction of engagement by human beings. For Antiphon, any shaping of φύσις into a ποιούμενον is a violation of φύσις; and for him (or his modern Heideggerian counterparts) to follow this logic to its ultimate historical conclusions would mean becoming the mad ecologist, the Green gone berserk, who has to leave the earth in order to preserve it.

Secondly, the supposed eternal unmovedness of Antiphon's φύσις is also the guarantee of its pseudo-mysteriousness, its "ultimate unknowability." Insofar as φύσις, in Antiphon's scheme of things, does not move at all and keeps entirely to itself, it resists all appearance and escapes behind any attempt to shape it into εἶδος. For Antiphon the most real is the most unknowable, an "existent" prime matter without form,⁷⁰ a "something" without appearance. It is, therefore, an unknowable something, and thus in effect a nothing. Indeed, Antiphon's φύσις is the forerunner of the Right Heideggerians' λήθη: a something that is really nothing, or better, a nothing that *has* to be something insofar as it performs such mysterious acts as hiding itself, revealing itself, withdrawing itself, dispensing epochs of beingness, evoking post-metaphysical thought, sliding under erasure, articulating the call of the Victim, and on and on. This nothing/something cannot be known and yet somehow evokes memory of itself (at least among Heideggerians) by dropping hints of its withdrawal, arousing suspicions of its return, calling out, leaving traces, spreading scents . . . , the ultimate Cheshire Cat.

⁷⁰Compare Erigena: "Ea vero, quae per excellentiam suae naturae non solum ὄλιον, id est omnem sensum, sed etiam intellectum rationemque fugiunt, jure videri non esse." *De divisione naturae* (cf. *supra*) Liber I, chapter 3, *PL* CXXII (1865), p. 413.