

Death's Presents

Derrida – Haunting Hegel

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If we do not really die, it would be impossible for us really to rise again: a true resurrection depends on the irresolvable finality of death. If the “soul” of any given being is already eternal, then death is (however unpleasantly accomplished) a mere transition-point to the eternity not that awaits it, but that is in some sense already present for it. For, as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) himself argues, eternity cannot come “after” time, or else eternity would be a point in time. Eternity must already be in some sense present *to* time.¹ Thought like this, exactly as Hegel thinks it, eternity is a function of the absolute: it *is* how the absolute *is*. Eternity is therefore understood through being, not time. Karl Ludwig Michelet’s (1801–1893) *Zusatz* to Hegel’s text explains that “the true present is thus eternity”.²

In “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials”, Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) addressed Martin Heidegger’s (1889–1976) well-known comment “if I *were* yet to *write* a theology – which I am sometimes tempted to do – the word ‘being’ *would* not occur in it”. Among many other things Derrida says of

1. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830) (GW20), Hamburg 1992, 248: “Der Begriff der Ewigkeit muß aber nicht negative so gefaßt werden, als die Abstraction von der Zeit [...] ohnehin nicht in dem Sinn, als ob die Ewigkeit nach der Zeit komme; so würde die Ewigkeit zur Zukunft, einem Momente der Zeit, gemacht.”

2. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften II* (TWA9), Frankfurt 1986, 55: “Die wahrhafte Gegenwart ist somit die Ewigkeit.” All translations from German, French, Greek, and Latin are mine.

this remark, one stands out. Derrida asks, if Heidegger were to write a theology, “where does this then take place?”³ When Derrida turns to Heidegger to understand the meaning of such a remark, he does so assuming that such a theology would be beyond metaphysics, and so outside the history of metaphysics as it has unfolded, and taken into its folds Christianity itself. It is significant that Derrida tells us what this means: “Here, the dimension of being open to the experience of God who is not or whose being is neither essence nor ground.”⁴ It seems to me with this phrase Derrida falls back into the very place from which Heidegger wants to depart. For to speak of a God “whose being is...”, even if that being is *neither* this *nor* that, is to speak of God *and* being together, all over again.

I want to propose that Derrida has, perhaps, mis-heard what Heidegger has said. For Derrida does not ask the obvious question: if you (Heidegger) will write a theology without the word “being” appearing in it, who has already written such a theology, and why? Who already says “being” is the essence of God? And Derrida has, perhaps, not attended sufficiently to the sharpness of his own question: where, indeed *when*, would such a theology as Heidegger’s take place? For it must take place “presently”, but I will suggest, not in the present as conceived by those who wrote being into the essence of God, but rather, such a theology must reveal itself in *present* being, being as it discloses itself, not somewhere else, not “in eternity”, but in the “here” that “is” (*Da-sein*). It must disclose itself in finite life, and to do that, it must confront the question of death. I want to suggest that Derrida’s “hauntology” is the last, ghostly, moment of a persisting ontotheology, which, if abandoned, will allow us to read all over again two things in Heidegger to which Derrida did attend with care. One is the meaning of *Sein zum Tode* (being towards death), the other is Heidegger’s “striking through” of beXyng. My suggestion is that if we do so, we can uncover that place from where Heidegger believed a theology after metaphysics could be written.

Ontotheology is a word at least as old as Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). When it appears late in the *Critique of Pure Reason*,⁵ Kant says little to

3. Jacques Derrida, *Psyché: Invention de l'autre*, vol. 2, Paris 2003, 196: “Si je devais encore écrire une théologie, comme je suis parfois tenté de le faire, le mot ‘être’ *devrait* ne pas y apparaître. [...] Où cela a-t-il-donc lieu?” Italics in original.

4. Derrida, *Psyché*, 197: “Ici, la dimension de l’être ouvre à l’expérience de Dieu qui n’est pas ou dont l’être n’est ni l’essence ni le fondement.”

5. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (AA3/AA4), Berlin 1911, A632/B630.

amplify what he means by it. The word appears more often in his notes on metaphysics, but receives a full discussion in his lectures on rational theology.⁶ Kant's most ontotheological text, however, is a so-called "pre-critical" text written in 1763, eighteen years before the publication of the First Critique, *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, in which the word ontotheology does not appear even once. However, Kant later refers to the argument he presents in this text as "my ontotheological proof",⁷ and Heidegger, considering this text in detail in "Kant's Thesis about Being", speaks of ontotheology at the very point where he names Kant's text. Heidegger explains that "through the course of the history of ontotheological questioning the task has arisen not only of showing what the highest being is but to prove that this most beingful of beings *is*, and that God exists. The words existence, *Dasein*, actuality, name a mode of being".⁸ Heidegger argues that the thesis about being in the First Critique (that "being is not a real predicate") concurs with the thesis in this earlier text – indeed that the earlier text explains what is meant by what the *Critique of Pure Reason* says about being as a real predicate. Kant grounds being in logic, not formal logic, but, as Heidegger says, the logic in which transcendental philosophy has its ground, and so "from that logic determined as the original synthetic unity of transcendental apperception. In such logic ontology is grounded".⁹ Being is not a real, "ontic", predicate because it is the pre-eminently ontological predicate. It is properly not used relatively, that is of particulars, but absolutely, and so of the *ens realissimum*, the most real being – God.

Heidegger ordinarily uses the word ontotheology not referring to Kant, but to Hegel. Although Hegel knows the term, he never uses it of himself. Commentators who have noticed ontotheology's long history argue that Heidegger speaks of it differently compared to Kant.¹⁰ Markus Gabriel claims that "Kant [...] understands 'ontotheology' as the proof of the

6. Karl Heinrich Ludwig Pölitz, *Immanuel Kant's Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, Leipzig 1817. See Immanuel Kant, *Vorlesungen über Metaphysik und Rationaltheologie* (AA28.2.2), Berlin 1972, 993–1120.

7. Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysik Nachlaß I* (AA17), Berlin 1926, 624: "Mein ontotheologischer Beweis."

8. Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), Frankfurt 1976, 450: "Im Verlauf der Geschichte des ontotheologischen Fragens entsteht die Aufgabe, nicht nur zu erweisen, was das höchste Seiende ist, sondern zu beweisen, daß dieses Seiendste des Seien den ist, daß Gott existiert. Die Worte Existenz, Dasein, Wirklichkeit nennen eine Weise des Seins."

9. Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 462: "Die aus der ursprünglichen synthetischen Einheit der transzendentalen Apperzeption bestimmte Logik."

10. Tom Sheehan, "Heidegger's *Lehrjahre*", in John C. Sallis, Giuseppina Moneta & Jacques Taminiaux (eds.), *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum: The First Ten Years*, Amsterdam 1988, 131, n. 98, says of ontotheology: "that word was first used by Kant, but in a different sense."

existence of God [...] On the other hand, I understand with Heidegger [...] that ‘ontotheology’ fundamentally means the reduction of theologic and ontology”.¹¹ It is clear that Heidegger derives his understanding of Kant’s use of ontotheology from Kant’s “proof”, and likewise Heidegger associates ontotheology in the first instance with Hegel’s lectures on the proofs for the existence of God.¹² There is not space here to consider the question in the close detail that it requires, but there can be no doubt that Heidegger understood ontotheology to be the pinnacle of metaphysics to think the *ens realissimum*, the most real being, as that thinking of being which understands the world to be mere appearance, and which understands being as other than, and the negation of, presence. Ontotheology argues that being can only be thought of as some absolute plenitude, some “more” than immediate presence: some place where *present* being attains final fulfilment. Gabriel leaves unclarified the reduction he names with “theologic” and ontology. On the basis of a centuries-long theistic thinking, we presume that theology reduces and overcomes ontology. In fact the reverse is the case, and even from the outset. For the *ens realissimum* is not a name for God, but God is merely a name for the highest and most real form of being. This means that even when “God” is dead, what has been accomplished in the description of the *ens realissimum* remains. Being reduces theologic to itself, and this *is* the history of ontotheology. “God” need only be a secondary, dependent, name for the absolute.

What has this to do with death? In Hegel’s lectures on the proofs for the existence of God he states quite early that the real purpose is to take particular being *up*, and so into absolute being. Simultaneously the fulfilment of metaphysics is equated with the Christian ideal. In *Faith and Knowledge* Hegel had mocked Kant for his failure to show how the resolution of the idea of the highest subjectivity is an absolute objectivity that does not “terminate in faith, but is the only possible departure point of philosophy”.¹³ In the lectures on the proofs Hegel’s purpose – the goal of his entire philosophy – becomes clear: logic, thought itself, must and will elevate itself from the particular to the absolute. He argues that “this elevation of the thinking

11. Markus Gabriel, *Der Mensch im Mythos: Untersuchungen über Ontotheologie, Anthropologie und Selbstbewußtseinsgeschichte in Schellings ‘Philosophie der Mythologie’*, Berlin 2006, 196, n. 52: “Kant [versteht] unter ‘Ontotheologie’ den Beweis des Daseins Gottes [...] Dagegen verstehe ich mit Heidegger [...] unter ‘Ontotheologie’ grundsätzlich die Engführung von Theologik und Ontologie.”

12. See Heidegger’s remarks on ontotheology and Franz Anton Staudenmaier’s (1800–1856) 1836 critique of Karl von Hegel’s (1813–1901) posthumous publication of his father’s lectures on the proofs for the existence of God in his preparatory notes for the 1930 lecture “Hegel und das Problem der Metaphysik” in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge* (GA80.1), Frankfurt 2016, 32.

13. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Jenaer kritische Schriften* (GW4), Hamburg 1968, 325: “Statt [...] im Glauben zu enden, ganz allein die Philosophie anzufangen.”

Geist [the particular subject] to that of which it is itself the highest thought, to God [absolute subjectivity] is thus what we wish to consider”.¹⁴ In holding out how the particular subject could elevate itself to think absolute subjectivity, Hegel evacuated death, because the thinking subject always has a path to the eternal through the elevating activity of thought itself.

Death, for Hegel, is the moment of absolute negation of particular subjectivity become absolute subjectivity as final freedom and universality.¹⁵ Death resolves nothing, and is the harbinger of nothing in particular (the pure concept). Derrida, in *Spectres de Marx*, recalls the lines in Hamlet that mark a divide between two worlds: Hamlet’s present (on the one hand) and the “proper” world (on the other) from where alone the truth is whole, the world where his father in some sense now “is”, and whose ghost has come to call those inhabiting the present to a wider truth. Hamlet is forced to acknowledge a limit when (Derrida says he says): “I’ll go no further”, to which the ghost replies “I am thy father’s spirit”.¹⁶ Derrida speaks of the ghost as a repetition: to be “thy father” and “thy father’s spirit” are not identical, but how? Derrida speaks merely of the way in which “each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Entirely other. Composition for an end to history. We call this a *hauntology*. This logic of haunting would not only be more ample and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of being”, it would “comprehend them, but incomprehensibly”.¹⁷ To comprehend is to stretch the hand right over and engulf, as well as to understand. Only a ghost could make such a vastness comprehensible.

Derrida raises here the spectre of what we think is “really” real. For we, who live not yet “comprehended” (not yet finished, not yet dead, not yet confided to the shame of the whole, and all our untruth within it) can “see” this whole only without full comprehension. The spectral character of ghosts, therefore, draws us to comprehend our own spectrality and

14. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1816–1831)* (GW18), Hamburg 1995, 234: “Diese Erhebung des denkenden Geistes zu dem, der selbst der höchste Gedanke ist, zu Gott, ist es also, was wir betrachten wollen.”

15. See Hegel, *Jenaer kritische Schriften* (GW4), 448: “So ist [die Einzelheit schlechthin] der Begriff ihrer selbst, also unendlich und das Gegentheil ihrer selbst, oder absolute Befreyung, und die reine Einzelheit, die im Tode ist, ist ihr eigenes Gegentheil, die Allgemeinheit.” (“Thus [i.e. in death] is this pure individuality its own concept, and therefore infinite, and the contrary of itself: or absolute liberation, and sheer individuality, which when in death is its own contrary, is universality.”)

16. William Shakespeare, “Hamlet”, 1.5, 1.9.

17. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: L’Etat de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, Paris 1983, 31: “Chaque fois, c’est l’événement même, une première fois est une dernière fois. Toute autre. Mise en scène pour une fin de l’histoire. Appelés cela une *hauntologie*. Cette logique de la hantise ne serait pas seulement plus ample et plus puissante qu’une ontologie ou qu’une pensée de l’être. [...] Elle les *comprendrait*, mais incompréhensiblement.” Italics in original.

provisionality, the present's ghostly kind of being-true, before the end of history, which the fuller world beyond this one already fully knows, and knows as whole. Ghosts, the messengers of amplified finality, of the all as *all*, appear from this perfected place only as (for us) evanescent spirits, fracturing and blurring the stability and certainty we think as being our own. These spectres are mirrors (their silvering worn), whose indeterminacy, partial transparency, render us not only transparent to ourselves, but as confused, as comprehending-incomprehensibly. They rob me of the certainty I think my self is. It is impossible not to see in these ghosts of Derrida's the personifications of Hegel's negations. Indeed, it is impossible not to see the pure trace, as *différance*, as that which does not exist, as the placeholder of the metaphysical understanding of nothing, the μή ὄν. Derrida describes the trace as "*in effect the absolute origin of sense in general*" even if "*we must return to saying, yet again, that there is no origin of sense in general*".¹⁸ Is this not how metaphysics marks all present presence with a nullity, a nothingness that deprives it of its originary power, and yet is greater than anything we have so far and up to this present point yet owned?¹⁹

Derrida through his hauntology manages to capture, however fleetingly, the apocalypticism of Karl Marx (1818–1883) and make his (Derrida's) own the claim (incomprehensibly) to comprehend the end of history. Derrida is well aware of the meaning of his gesture: *Spectres de Marx* is peppered with references to Francis Fukuyama and to Hegel, and Derrida himself reminds us in *Spectres de Marx* of his 1980 lecture and essay "The Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy".²⁰ He knows (rather better than the editors and introducers of the English translation, *Specters of Marx*)²¹ that Fukuyama's reference to the "end of history" is a reference to a certain reading of Hegel, and to, not an event (that "history" is "done"), but the manner of a *continuing* presence (that history is, before our very eyes, fulfilling itself as present doing). Fukuyama's "end of history" is itself the hinting, teasing, ghost of Hegel's metaphysics, following its Marxist adventure, now in more classically liberal attire. This presence takes a multitude of names: this ghost is not

18. Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, Paris 1967, 92, 95: "*La trace est en effet l'origine absolue du sens en général. Ce qui revient à dire, encore une fois, qu'il n'y a pas d'origine absolue du sens en général. La trace est la différence.*" Italics in original.

19. Is this not why Hegel says we are never yet "subject", and why Heidegger says we have never yet been *Da-sein*? Not, in other words, that "we", subjecthood, *Dasein*, have so far scored low marks in the test that life itself *is*, but that the presence of the present as such is always somehow provisional and incomplete, even in its origins?

20. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 37.

21. Who, oddly, persist in the belief that the phrase "the end of history" means that history has come to an end, when Derrida's own reading is clearly attuned to Fukuyama's actual sense. See "Introduction" to Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, New York 1994, vii.

nameless on account of having no name, but is impossible to name simply because it can own so many (its subject is multiplicity). Derrida cites Maurice Blanchot (1907–2003) as calling it the “end of philosophy” (but he was not the first),²² but to this name we could add Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844–1900) will to power, or eternal recurrence.²³ Hegel himself, according to Eduard Gans (1797–1839), called it “the path of God through the world”,²⁴ and Fukuyama “Hegel’s non-materialist account of history”,²⁵ drawing attention all over again to the immateriality, the phantasmagoric being, of *Geist*.²⁶

Derrida, as much as he does not admit, cannot really conceal, that this amplitude which is greater than ontology, and from which ultimate truth flows (incomprehensibly), is the metaphysical ground of presence as such. As an end, it allows the beginning to come into view all over again, and yet does not admit of beginnings or ends (we comprehend we cannot comprehend “it all”). Derrida’s suggestion “could one *address one’s self in general* if already some phantom did not come back?”,²⁷ concedes that what Fukuyama names as Hegel’s “struggle for recognition” is dependent, not only on presence as such, but on presence-in-general, the presence that lies beyond the present, the only possible source of “final” truth (even if such a “possible” is really an “im/possible”): the truth to which ghosts witness, the truth of *Geist* as such, a truth whose certainty we must dis-own. Here one would have to concede that the “metaphysics of presence” is not quite as Derrida had named it in *De la grammatologie*, as the “ambiguity of the Heideggerian situation” which encompasses “all the metaphysical determinations of truth and even that beyond metaphysical onto-theology which Heidegger evokes”.²⁸ What is it Derrida had failed to name? What remains uncomprehended, outside Derrida’s playful, but still otherwise total, grasp?

Derrida’s assault on “the metaphysics of presence” – logocentrism, onto-theology, the origin of grounds – does not itself escape from understanding presence in a very specific way, since it is an attempt to comprehend every kind of presence, even the fictional presence of im/possibility. This is not

22. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 67, citing a text of Blanchot’s of 1959.

23. In which being (*das Sein*) itself is no more than steam and a vapour.

24. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (TWA7), Frankfurt 1986, 403, note: “[Die] Gang Gottes in der Welt.”

25. Francis Fukuyama, “By Way of an Introduction” to the 20th Anniversary Edition of *The End of History and the Last Man*, London 2012, xvi.

26. A point also not lost on Derrida. Comparing the spectre of communism (“das Gespenst des Kommunismus”) with Hegel, Marx notes that “la sémantique du Gespenst hante elle-même la sémantique du Geist”. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 175.

27. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 279: “Peut-on s’adresser en général si quelque fantôme déjà ne revient pas?” Italics in original.

28. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 21: “Toutes les déterminations métaphysiques de la vérité et même celle à laquelle nous rappelle Heidegger, par-delà l’onto-théologie métaphysique.”

“criticism” of Derrida, and far less than that, any kind of refutation. It is inherent to presence itself that we are both bound to presence and seek escape from what is binding. This is not a mere “failure” in our psychology, or cleverness, or capacity to think, but belongs to our becoming present. In the drive to escape what threatens to bind us, it is world itself (and not *self*-presence) that opens up; all our certainty is gone when we are faced with mortal threat. For Derrida’s constant drawing us back to the instability, the playfulness, *différance*, and the provisionality of presence is itself the mark of a metaphysics that both draws attention to its overcoming, and to our inability to bring this overcoming about merely because we might “will it” to be so. For the concern with the metaphysics of presence *is* the persistent presence of ontotheology, or rather, is indicative of not being able to step away from the persistence in philosophy of that understanding of presence that ontotheology itself *is*. The only way we find out how to step away is when we are driven off. Mortal threat is one such drivenness. It is not *what* presence *is* that is ever in question, but, had we enough time to begin the question, the *how?*, the manner of presence’s presencing. Ontotheology assigns the meaning and ground of presence to somewhere else, “beyond present being in importance and power”,²⁹ whether that is to “the good” for Plato (c. 428–c. 348 BCE), or “becoming” for Nietzsche, or “negation” for Hegel. Indeed, Hegel makes explicit that “the world heads towards a being which is only illusory, not the true being, not absolute truth”, and so not the “absolute” of ontotheology, towards which the world can only point.³⁰ In each case, as Heidegger has indicated, the basic tendency of metaphysics is a place or a concept of permanent presence that understands present presence as non-being and less-than-being. Does the *trace* escape this description? The consequence of this, Heidegger argues, is to be found in Aristotle’s (384–322 BCE) understanding of θεωρεῖν, wisdom (σοφία) itself, or an “abiding with what is eternal” such that “there exists for humanity, therefore, a certain possibility of ἀθανατίζειν, a mode of being for humanity in which it has the highest possibility of not coming to an end”.³¹ Ἀθανατίζειν means here both “becoming immortal”, divine, and “deathlessness”. Heidegger remarks that this is the extreme position which Plato and Aristotle foresaw for human existence. Metaphysics has at its very origins, and in its end, in speculation (θεωρεῖν) and in absolute subjectivity, the

29. Plato, *Republic* VI.509b: ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει.

30. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (GW20), 88.

31. Martin Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* (GA19), Frankfurt 1992, 177–178: “Sich Aufhalten beim Immersein, das θεωρεῖν [...] Darin besteht für den Menschen eine gewisse Möglichkeit des ἀθανατίζειν (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1177 b 33), eine Seinsart des Menschen, in der er die höchste Möglichkeit hat, nicht zu Ende zu gehen.”

grandiose purpose of overcoming death, and providing access to an eternal, immortalizing mode of being. Moreover, mortality, the advance of death, manifests as an outermost, an extreme, of presence, within which finally we struggle to the utmost to hold fast. A metaphysical deferral of death and mortality, and its capacity for making absence present, is hardly difficult to understand in such an age as ours, which refuses the “beyond” of where we might live “after” death, and so clings fervently, either to present presence, or resigns itself to negation, nothing at all.

If we find the totality of presence itself assigned *somewhere else*, other than within present presence, what would this mean for death? Surely it would mean that death is not really death: say, if death were the mark, not of an impassable limit, but a to-whence, a place “beyond”, at which a different kind of presence were assigned – let us say, in an eternal life (elsewhere), or even eternal punishment (eternity of a kind, however nasty). If we abandon this other place, does this mean that all there is, is immediacy of the moment, eternal presencing of the “now”? Or does it not rather mean what the Greeks originally meant by the allotted time of a life: αἰών, which Aristotle once said was first identical with what was also said by means of ψυχή, a life, a soul.³²

When we do not stand over-against the totality of presence (which is the mark of metaphysics’ presencing, the co-appearing and yet irresolvability of the particular *with* the universal which points to something more than either of them, and yet cannot point to *how*), presence-as-a-whole makes itself present in a way quite other. Mortal death, which threatens to tear the presencing of present presence away from me, and so presences *as* this threat, as absence presencing, brings forward this *how*. *How is it* that this befalls me, or befalls another, *without escape*?

If the recognition that death is a central concept in Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* is a commonplace,³³ no one, to my knowledge, has recognized that Heidegger’s phrase “Sein zum Tode”, “being towards death”, is not a neologism or innovation, but quite the contrary, a return: to the originary Greek understanding (at least from Homer out) of the human being as θνητός. The dictionary definition for this word is not only “mortal”, for which θνητός is shorthand, but more properly means “liable to death”, death as “what comes towards us”.³⁴ θνητός stands out as alongside and belonging

32. Homer in several places equates soul (ψυχή) with αἰών, which Aristotle discusses at length in *De caelo*, 279 a 5–279 b 5.

33. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (GA2), Frankfurt 1977.

34. Definition from Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, 9th ed., Oxford 1996, 802. Johann Gottlob Schneider, *Handwörterbuch der Griechischen Sprache*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1819, 712: “einem Menschen zukommend” (“what comes towards a man”).

to that other name for those, central to the Greek understanding of world, ἀθάνατοι, the deathless gods. Of this, Heidegger has nothing specific to say in *Sein und Zeit*, although well aware of it. Why does a particular possibility of understanding death enter philosophy with Heidegger? Or rather, why is it possible for Heidegger to allow an understanding of death to re-emerge, from having already been there at the beginning? Many commentators who have understood especially the period from the early modern thinkers up to Romanticism as a period preoccupied with death, a “necrophiliac time”, have singled out Heidegger’s “being towards death” as evidence of the death-drive that they find at the heart of Western, modern, thought. These observations often heavily depend on the history of literature. They do not help us: even if literature lends form to thought, thinking far exceeds the genealogy of literary form.

What Heidegger *does* say in the course of the long preparation for what became the publication of *Sein und Zeit* is that only since Nietzsche’s proclamation of the “death of God” has a return to an understanding of human existence as “being towards death” been reopened for thinking. It is this that Heidegger means when he announces that “philosophical research is and remains atheism”,³⁵ connecting this argument directly with Nietzsche’s *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in which his death of God first came into print.³⁶ The death of God means the end of a manner of presence: that is to say, *that* understanding of presence that says in the *mens Dei* all being and all time are held and comprehended in the simultaneity of a single act of knowledge.³⁷ What makes Heidegger a singular reader of the Greeks is that he recognized in the completion of metaphysics, in the coming into its end of a centuries-long way in which presence itself had unfolded, the way was newly opened for thinking to experience all over again the inceptual place from out of which that metaphysics had itself begun, and, taking sight of that place, to ask what it would mean to open up this beginning again. It asks this question not as a genealogical task, a history and litany of erudite

35. Martin Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (GA20), Frankfurt 1979, 109–110: “Philosophische Forschung ist und bleibt Atheismus.” See also p. 110: “Und gerade in diesem Atheismus wird sie zu dem, was ein Großer einmal sagte, zur ‘Fröhlichen Wissenschaft’.”

36. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Chemnitz 1882.

37. Aquinas formulates this in the following way: “Deus autem omnia videt in uno, quod est ipse. [...] Unde simul, et non successive omnia videt.” (“God therefore sees all things in one, which is himself. Therefore he sees them simultaneously, and not successively.”) *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 14, art. 7, resp. He adds: “Deus [...] cognoscat omnia simul.” (“God knows everything simultaneously.”) *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 14, art. 12, ad 2. Aquinas, citing Boëthius (c. 480–c. 524), similarly argues that eternity is an act of being, not of temporality: “Quia eternitas est mensura esse permanentis.” (“Since eternity is the measure of permanent being.”) *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 10, art. 4, resp.

forms, but as a *demand*, the demand that the present *is*, and so “presents”. We do not, idly, think up new ways of thinking; rather thinking makes on us a thoughtful demand.

Essential is the possibility of a renewed appropriation of the meaning of being as such. Being is always understood by Heidegger as presence, *Anwesenheit*, which he continually and repeatedly asserts is the basis of the Greek experience of being. This understanding of presence returns us to the *Da*, the “here”, of *Da-sein*, here-being. What preoccupies Heidegger, and what causes him at a certain point in *Sein und Zeit* to hyphenate the ordinary German term *Dasein* (“existence”) as *Da-sein*, here-being, is the emphasis on the *Da* of *Da-sein* as the meaning of the present “being” of presence, *Anwesenheit*.³⁸ It is within this *Da*, this present-presence, that death advances towards and comes to befall each human being in turn. From this understanding Heidegger explores with patient care in the pages of *Sein und Zeit* the horizon of the finitude of being, as the way in which the death of another opens each one of us to the limitation to our own future existence, and this at death.³⁹

Other than *Sein und Zeit*, the phrase *Sein zum Tode* is mentioned once, in only one other work published in Heidegger’s lifetime, and hardly ever in his Freiburg lecture courses (two brief references only, from what we know). In contrast, in several places in the *Nachlaß* material of his unpublished writing from the same period (now almost all available in print), the enduring importance of “being towards death” in his later thinking is very clear.⁴⁰ Perhaps the most fundamental transition in Heidegger’s thought over this period is from the notion of *Dasein* as the being of being-human, to *Da-sein*, as the enquiry into presence that constitutes the being of the “here”, or *Da*.⁴¹ Around 1936 it appears Heidegger prepared a recapitulation, or set of “current remarks”, on the text of *Sein und Zeit* in which he sets aside the notion of “being towards death” as the “concealed ground of the historicity of *Dasein*” as an enquiry that is “metaphysical” in its intention, in favour of the enquiry into *Da-sein*, “here-being”, as the transition that is

38. See, for a full discussion of this, Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* (GA19), 466–467.

39. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (GA2), 314–331. This is the opening of the discussion of “*Dasein* and Temporality”.

40. The reason for the disappearance, Heidegger suggests in many places in the *Nachlaß* material, has to do with the taking over of *Sein zum Tode*, not as a determination of presence and *Da-sein*, but through *Weltanschauung*, a “world-view”. See especially Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (GA65), Frankfurt 1989, 282–286.

41. It is too little noticed that the hyphenation of *Da-sein*, in all its forms, with all its different italicizations, is an attempt to explicate a mode of *being*, of *present-being* (*Da-sein*), not a masked “anthropology” of the “human being”.

in itself historical, the unfolding of “the event” (*das Ereignis*).⁴² These notes are often written in an almost cryptic shorthand, difficult to decipher, and revolving around the central formulations of the later Heidegger.

It is startlingly clear from a little-known text of three lectures from 1925 that by *Dasein*, Heidegger had originally meant the specific “being” that the individual human being “is”, even if this being can only be defined as “a living being that always has before it a not-yet-being”.⁴³ The understanding of *Dasein* elucidated in *Sein und Zeit* is this specific “being”. It is this “being” that Heidegger specifically defines as “being towards death”, as only completed *at* death, and therefore to be mortal, oriented on death, is to fulfil one’s “being” (*das Sein*). What is “metaphysical” in this understanding, however, is that there remains in this understanding the continued and explicit tendency for “presence” (*die Anwesenheit*) to be understood as what this being (*ein Seiendes*) brings to presence “for itself” even as a “not yet”, as something not yet fully accomplished, because the completion of this presence lies in the future (at death). At this point Heidegger’s understanding of *Sein zum Tode* depends, yet again, on a “not yet”, a deferral, an ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας or “beyond present being” (we see immediately the parallels between the earlier Heidegger and Derrida’s thought of the trace). Quite the reverse, however, turns out to be the case: the “not yet” is itself dependent on immediate presence, on the presencing of present presence. But *I* am not the presencing of present presence, but rather, my mortality, and even more the present understanding of it, is only possible because of the compelling and always-emerging presence of *present* presence itself.

It is with this understanding that we can make sense of the only other reference to “being towards death” published in Heidegger’s lifetime, in the 1949 publication of an *Introduction*, added to the text of Heidegger’s lecture on the nothing of 1929, *What is Metaphysics*. Here Heidegger talks of “the standing-out within the openness of being”, which is characterized by the twin poles of “the sustaining of standing-out (care), and enduring in the outermost (being towards death), together and as the full unfolding of existence”. The German of “standing-out” is “das Innestehen”, which has the resonance of *innerste* (“innermost”) of taking into care, but actually means a “standing-fast”, so that Heidegger characterizes existence as the stretch across an opposition, and so between what is most inward and what is

42. Martin Heidegger, *Zu eigenen Veröffentlichungen* (GA82), Frankfurt 2018, 133: “S. 386: ‘der verborgene Grund der Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins’: ‘das eigentliche Sein zum Tode’, ‘die Endlichkeit der Zeitlichkeit.’ Was ist damit gemeint? Metaphysisch! Das *Da-sein* als Übergang in das Ereignis ist *in sich geschichtlich*, genauer – das *Da-sein*.” Italics in original.

43. Heidegger, *Vorträge* (GA80.1), 128, 138: “[Das Dasein] immer nur bestimmen als ein Lebendiges, das immer noch ein Noch-nicht-Sein vor sich hat.” Surely, this is what Heidegger means when he says several times in later texts that no one has ever yet been *Dasein*.

outermost. A note added to this sentence records a remark in Heidegger's own edition of the text: "Letting death come towards oneself, composing oneself for the arrival of death within the compass of being."⁴⁴

"Being towards death" means the preparedness for being able to die, and so preparedness to bear the finitude that death brings. Again, there is much that could be said here, if we had the time. Derrida himself had noted the connection Heidegger had wanted to indicate between the crossing-through of being and *das Geviert*, the fourfold of heaven and earth, mortals (*die Sterblichen*, θνητοί) and divinities (ἀθάνατοι), that Heidegger had first introduced to a public audience in the 1949 lecture "Das Ding".⁴⁵ In a note from around 1936, Heidegger identifies a series of connections between "being towards death", the 1929 essay "On the Essence of Ground", and Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), which together prepare the ground for "the originary and unvocalized relations that are to be grasped – between the unfolding (*Wesen*) of *beyng* (*das Seyn*) and its grounding within *Da-sein*".⁴⁶ These connections effectively name a path of the development of his own thinking. They begin with "being towards death", the original exploration of the different ways in which in *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger had developed an understanding of the differing modes of the presencing of presence for "oneself", and "for another". The reference to "On the Essence of Ground" represents the culmination of Heidegger's working-out of the meaning of the "nothing" and of the "not" in the explication of the finitude of *Dasein*, and what Heidegger calls the "abyss" of freedom. What of the final step, named here with Hölderlin? In ways that have hardly yet been paid sufficient attention, it becomes clear that Heidegger found in Hölderlin the possibility for developing the original elucidation of the inter-relations of the fourfold. Heidegger does not ever say that Hölderlin *is* the source or origination of the thought of the fourfold, rather he shows what Heidegger himself has found. He says, "presumably" in Hölderlin the paired pair of earth and heaven, mortals and deathless ones, is constantly in play.⁴⁷

44. Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), 374: "Das Innestehen in der Offenheit des Seins, das Austragen des Innestehens (Sorge) und das Ausdauern im Äußersten (Sein zum Tode) zusammen und als das volle Wesen der Existenz." The note [a] adds: "Auf sich zu-kommen lassen den Tod, sich halten in der Ankunft des Todes als des Ge-Birgs des SeiXns." We should note how close what is said here is to the definition of θνητός in Schneider, *Handwörterbuch der Griechischen Sprache*.

45. Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question*, Paris 1987, 82. See Martin Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (GA79), Frankfurt 1994, 12.

46. Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen II–VI (Schwarze Hefie 1931–1938)* (GA94), Frankfurt 2014, 290: "Die ursprünglichen und unausgesprochenen Bezüge zu begreifen – diejenigen zwischen dem Wesen des *Seyns* und seiner Gründung im *Da-sein*." Italics in original.

47. Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (GA4), Frankfurt 1981, 163: "Wir achten jetzt nur auf die Worte 'wirklich / Ganzem Verhältniß, samt der Mitt' und

Heidegger vocalizes what lies unvocalized (*unausgesprochen*), unthematized, in Hölderlin, but still presences within what he has to say, and so is “there” (*Da*). Heidegger names how he became aware of a persisting presence. Not one that has a “rationale”, one that could have been predicted in advance, but the very opposite: one that simply unfolds itself and waits to be vocalized, and yet is determinative for world. This presence, however, reaches all the way back to the Greeks themselves. For Heidegger argues repeatedly that Hölderlin far surpasses even Hegel in elucidating the very origins of Western thought through his engagement with the Greeks. It is this that is “unvocalized”, but nevertheless present. The fourfold is this founding, ever-present, presence.

The fourfold, for which early sketches appear in Heidegger’s *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, and whose elements are discussed in the 1935 lecture course published as *Einführung in die Metaphysik*,⁴⁸ can indeed be seen already present in its elemental relations in the fragments we have of the poet Sappho (c. 630–c. 570 BCE), and also, for instance, in the *Iliad*.⁴⁹ Heidegger’s later consideration of “being towards death”, hidden from public view and so barely present in his published works, continues apace throughout the *Nachlaß* notebooks, and its connection with being-mortal (*θνητός*) is at times made absolutely explicit, and with direct reference to the crossing through of beXing: “As world-fourfold humanity in-dwells, if it becomes properly joined to it as mortal. Human *Dasein*, experienced as being towards death, is the thoughtful intimation of the presence of being-mortal.”⁵⁰ This is to some extent a loose translation. What is said here only makes sense if it is understood as also a comment on *Sein und Zeit*, and so on the passageway from the conceptualization of “being towards death” to a return to an originary understanding of *θνητός*, being-mortal.

Derrida was intrigued by Heidegger’s practice of the striking-through of beXing. He had available to him only a few scattered occasions in print where Heidegger had made the gesture. During his lifetime, and in published work, Heidegger made reference only to being as *das Sein*, but in the extensive, indeed almost ubiquitous, uses in the *Nachlaß* material Heidegger strikes through only his archaic use, *das Seyn*. There has been some

verstehen sie vermutungsweise als den Namen für jenes Ganze von Erde und Himmel, Gott und Mensch.”

48. Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (GA65), 310; Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (GA40), Frankfurt 1983, 17.

49. Homer, *Iliad* III.276–279.

50. Martin Heidegger, *Vier Hefte I und II (Schwarze Hefte 1947–1950)* (GA99), Frankfurt 2019, 116: “Welt-Geviert erwohnt der Mensch, wenn er zum Sterblichen eigens geeignet worden. Menschliches Dasein, als Sein zum Tode erfahren, ist der gedachte Wink in das Wesen des Sterblichen.”

debate among Heidegger scholars about what difference Heidegger intended to indicate between *das Sein* and *das Seyn*, with some even claiming that Heidegger is confused. There is, in fact, no confusion: by *das Sein* Heidegger means that understanding of being that belongs to the difference between *das Sein*, being, and *das Seiende*, which is often translated (in order to distinguish it) as “beings”. It is this that he had originally characterized as the “ontological difference”. *Das Seiende* does not mean “beings” in their thingliness, it means the being of what is here-present: in short, *Anwesenheit*, presence as such, the presence of the present, which can manifest in a present being, but can also manifest as what the Greeks mean by τὰ ὄντα (which is a plural), or just (singular) τὸ πᾶν, “the singularly all that is present”. *Das Seyn*, in contrast, is a shorthand, and really means “Wahrheit des Seyns”, the originarily unfolding truth of being, that lets presence “presence”. With the emergence of the fourfold, Heidegger allows the interpretation of the ontological difference to fall back, in favour of what emerges through the fourfold, namely the “in-between” (*Inzwischen*), the “relation” (*der Bezug*) that is the clearing (*die Lichtung*) that opens out within the fourfold. Presence presences, as the emerging of whatever emerges, in this “relation”. The most originary name of this emerging is φύσις, the presencing of the self-emerging, what unfolds for itself and brings itself out and into the light. The other name Heidegger finds among the Greeks for this is τὸ ζῆν. As this place (relation), it is also the place where what emerges and presences also passes away, a place of presence as γένεσις and φθορά.

Derrida interprets the striking-through that came to prominence in “Zur Seinsfrage”⁵¹ (and that the *Nachlaß* notes of the period is shot through with) in contrast to a much earlier striking-through of Heidegger’s (that in fact just precedes the first of the *Nachlaß* notebooks), and that appears in a lecture course of around 1929. What interests Derrida is a certain “erasure of the name”, whereby the “the striking-through speaks not only of something other and taking something as other: but generally not accessible *as present being*”.⁵² Derrida wants to interpret the two strikings-through as radically opposed to each other. It would seem he is in a particularly strong position to do so, especially since the first relates to Heidegger’s claims about animals and poverty of world (even worldlessness), and the second concerns the fourfold. However, in 1929 Heidegger is actually drawing attention to the phenomenological access to what presences in presence, and this is

51. Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), 385–426.

52. Derrida, *De l'esprit*, 83: “Rature du nom.” Derrida cites Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit* (GA29/30), Frankfurt 1983, 291–292: “Die Durchstreichung besagt nicht nur: etwas anderes und als etwas anderes genommen, sondern: überhaupt nicht *als Seiendes* zugänglich.” Italics in original.

also what is at issue in the striking-through of beXyng in the fourfold. In 1929 what Heidegger is concerned with is our capacity to see that there are both poorer and richer ways of the appropriation of presence, in its self-emergence. In each case, both the poorer and the richer sense relies on the full presence of the emergent, but on a presence that is to varying degrees marked by absence. We have already seen what it means, mortally to be faced with death and seek to escape its grasp, to run away from death even as it presences before us, as that presence that threatens to tear us away from life itself. What, however, of when, confronted with presence, we succeed in escaping, or, more to the point, when, confronted with presence, we do not recognize the how, the character of the presence itself? Even in 1929 it is not really what the animal sees that is at issue, but what *we see, in watching the animal*. Seeing the manner in which the animal is deprived of the full meaning of the presence that presences, what we actually notice is the presence of world, not of the thing that has emerged within that world, such that the animal can only take it in a limited way. Since we see a *different* way in which presence is less present (“poorer”), this time, however, without the fright and terror of mortal death. Such a recognition would be our own preliminary access to a phenomenon that also confronts us, namely the capacity of presence not only to present itself, but also to hide and withdraw from – not the animal so much – as us, ourselves.

In a late note, Heidegger argues the fundamental connection between death itself, and “being towards death”, hints at the seemingly difficult to grasp connections between *Sein und Zeit* and *das Seyn* and the striking-through of beXyng. Heidegger asks: “Can humanity think the outermost? Does it stand already, as human-essence, in such recollection? How does it stand with a correctly experienced thinking of death? Is not this uttermost recollection ‘being towards death’ itself?” After repeating the phrase “death is the compass of beXyng”, he concludes (in parentheses) “why did *Sein und Zeit* deal with ‘being towards death’? In order, perhaps, to give some thoughtless time to nihilism? Or rather, or *only*, so that *Sein und Zeit* could think about beXyng?”⁵³ Heidegger names here the fundamental conundrum of the text *Sein und Zeit* itself, both for him and all its subsequent readership. Is it to be read as “earlier” Heidegger and metaphysics? Or could it only say what it said because it was already so much on the way to

53. Martin Heidegger, *Anmerkungen VI–IX (Schwarze Hefie 1948/49–1951)* (GA98), Frankfurt 2018, 140: “Kann der Mensch das Äußerste denken? Steht er schon, als Menschenwesen, in solchem Andenken? Wie steht es mit dem recht erfahrenen Denken an den Tod? Ist nicht dieses äußerste Andenken das ‘Sein zum Tode’? Tod aber ist das Gebirg des SeyXns. [...] (Warum handelt ‘Sein und Zeit’ vom ‘Sein zum Tode’? Vielleicht um einer gedankenlosen Zeit zum Nihilismus zu verhelfen? Oder gar, oder *nur*; um in ‘Sein und Zeit’ an das SeXyn zu denken?).” Italics in original.

naming, not being (*das Sein*), but beyng (*das Seyn*) and the fourfold relation of presence's present? How you answer this question will determine who you are as a thinker, even if you yourself are Heidegger.

Is death, finding ourselves ones living from out of death's advance towards us, living as mortals (ordered towards death), precisely *what* allows us to understand the truth of being at all? Was it "being towards death" itself, the re-emergence of humanity as θνητός, that enabled *Sein und Zeit* to reach beyond the language of metaphysics (in which, to some extent, it still spoke)?

In one of the texts I cited earlier Heidegger describes the striking-through of beXyng not only in the way we have already encountered, but as an opposition between "scrimping" and an "originary freeing".⁵⁴ The "scrimping" and withholding that characterizes an impoverishment is also a human experience of worldlessness, of the *loss* of the meaning of being-mortal and the flight of the gods, of the expenditure of the earth and the dullness and dreariness of a sky long emptied of the dazzling sun. In such a world-impoverished world presence is marked by a not-ness, by a deathliness that is not death itself, but a life in death. In such a world the originary truth of being withdraws and is covered over, struck-out. In such a world things emerge or are wrested into presence in an only ghostly way, shadows of themselves. Only such a possibility of being can explain how presence presences across a twofold, from both the splendour of its emerging, to what can only emerge by remaining hidden and covered over. Are ghosts the harbingers of our poverty in the presence of the present?

Indeed, this is how Heidegger describes the unfolding of the fourfold. In his spoken preface to a public delivery of his lecture "Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry", Heidegger offers to bring those who listen (and I translate here very freely) "out of the conscripted technological word (*das Ge-stell*) which is the self-withdrawing eventuality of the fourfold".⁵⁵ The fourfold must also be the originary ground, not only of the paired pairs of mortals and immortals, earth and heavens, but *also* world's withdrawal, as the will to will and the "essence of technology". These too, must be explained and stand on an originary fourfold ground which is present in poverty, present in withdrawal.

Presence hides itself from us as ones surrounded by ghosts, or allows us to stand out within a world, but only as fully mortal. How we encounter mortality is never a direct path, for the path itself is beset with flight and

54. Heidegger, *Vier Hefte I und II* (GA99), 116: "Das Zwischen von Erde und Himmel durchkreuzt die Nachbarschaft von Sparnis und Freye."

55. Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (GA4), 153: "Aus dem Ge-Stell als dem sich selbst verstellenden Ereignis des Gevierts."

distraction, until we have no choice but to be caught, and caught up, in dread mortality (which is always most of all my own, *jemeinig*). Only when dread mortality is uncovered for me and I cannot elude it, do I encounter our mortality, do we prepare for death and let death advance upon us *in* and *as* the splendour of life itself.

To write a theology requires an adequate account of being. Being, however, belongs only to the unfolding essence of *present* presence, its only place; it does not occur “elsewhere”, “beyond” or even as the place of the eternal or absolute, as the essential ground of gods, or God. Being, *present* being, is that place alone wherein gods and God appear. Being would not appear in the description of gods, or God’s essence, since essencing, being, is the wherein of their coming-forth and appearing (and withdrawal and flight). ▲

SUMMARY

This paper examines the ontological question that persists in Derrida's conception of a "hauntology", proposing that it is the last echo of the very "metaphysics of presence" that Derrida himself proposes to leave behind. The paper suggests that in the phrase "metaphysics of presence", Derrida had presumed that what was to be overcome was "presence", whereas for Heidegger all thinking is in fact an overcoming of "metaphysics" that allows presence (*Anwesenheit*) to be understood in both its most originary (as the "truth of being" or *Wahrheit des Seyns*) and its most futural (as the *Da* of *Da-sein*) senses. The paper re-examines two phrases central to Derrida's reading of Heidegger: one is the meaning of *Sein zum Tode* (being towards death), the other is Heidegger's "striking through" of being, and proposes that, through our being unable to evade the most extreme moment of having to face death as the ineluctability of being-no-longer present, we are able finally to unveil the meaning presence for itself.