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Heidegger on the “Futural” Poet Rilke Poetizing the Essential Truth of Being?

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Abstract

This essay poses and responds uniquely to the following crucial questions: Does Rilke’s poetry poetize the event of Being for Dasein? Does Rilke indicate that the human being can yet achieve such a mode of “historical” existence in relation to the Earth or the holy? Heidegger responds to the first query in the affirmative; Rilke does poetize this event, albeit through a “tempered” and somewhat traditional view of Western metaphysics. To the second query, it appears that Heidegger responds in a slightly cryptic and ambiguous manner, and to clarify this response, I turn to Heidegger’s interpretation of Rilke’s “Angel” as a prophetic “metaphysical” figure of futural hope.

Key Words

Heidegger’s Turn; Rilke; Phenomenology; Ontology; Destiny; Poetry, Language, Thought

In this essay, I am concerned with what type of poets Heidegger believes, other than and in addition to Hölderlin, might be up to the supreme task of poetizing Dasein’s historical transcendence beyond the *metaphysics of presence*. What Heidegger (1971) seeks is the poet for “destitute times” and what is necessary is the presence and intervention of those poets who “attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods” (94), those who poetize the truth of Being as this truth stands beyond the *metaphysics of presence* for the potential appropriation and enactment of the type of authentic historical dwelling Heidegger discusses. Although Heidegger engages the poetic works of Trakl, George, Meyer, Celan, I am focused on Heidegger’s readings of Rilke, specifically readings that appear in the *Parmenides* lecture (1941-42) and the 1946 essay, “What Are Poets For?” Although Heidegger is critical of Rilke in the *Parmenides* and *The “Ister,”* in the later, aforementioned essay, Heidegger finds greater value in Rilke’s poetry. Importantly, it is crucial to be aware of Heidegger’s (1971) ongoing concern with language, for the way in which humanity responds to language determines its new historical beginning and dwelling, which is dependent on the way Dasein “listens to the appeal of language” as this language emerges and “speaks in the element of poetry” (216). As Heidegger (1998) provides the criteria required for great poetry to attune those who would “listen” to the poetizing, it is clear that Heidegger’s understanding of “poetry” and the great poets, those *futural* poets who might hold hope for inaugurating “another beginning,” stands beyond the register of “aesthetic” criticism, and thus beyond any reading weighed down by metaphysics. Here, to consider Rilke a poet of substantial “ontological” value, there must be an attuned stance taken with respect to the divine, to the holy, to all that is enigmatic at the heart of the Being event, and his poetic

language must address in a reverential manner what is given as a “gift” and, as Heidegger (1971) stresses, the “more poetic a poet is – the freer (that is, the more open and ready for the unforeseen) his saying – the greater is the purity with which he submits what he says to an even more painstaking listening” (216).

Already, in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1927), referencing Rilke, Heidegger understands the power of poetry to reveal the “world” of Dasein as *Being-in-the-world*.¹ However, in the *Parmenides* (1941-42) and “What Are Poets For?” Heidegger considers whether or not Rilke is a poet for “destitute” times, a concern that grounds the remainder of this essay. Although Heidegger reconsiders the power of Rilke’s poetry in 1946 when he returns to interpret and reassess Rilke (“What Are Poets For?”), in the *Parmenides* course, Heidegger (1992) concludes that because Rilke’s thought and poetry (*Eighth Duino Elegy*) remains locked in the linguistic-conceptual schema of Western metaphysics, he remains blind or oblivious to the deep “mystery of the historical being” and so his “poetic words never attain the mountain height of a historically foundational decision” (160), and it is the “historical decision” (*Ereignis*), or *epoch grounding rejoinder* to the call of Being, which inspires a peoples’ attuned appropriation of their destiny, ushering in and making possible “another beginning.”² Although Rilke “relates to contemporary man with much seriousness and care,” there remains a certain “confusion, thoughtlessness, and flight” (161) associated with his work, and so Rilke, according to Heidegger’s reading in the *Parmenides* (§8e), is not a poet for *destitute times* because he fails to think and hence poetize the truth of the Being event, or as Heidegger refers to it in the *Parmenides*, the *originary* and *historical* phenomenon of “*ἀληθεία*” (*aletheia*). Contrarily, Rilke’s poetry reveals the endless or unrestrained progression of beings, which for Rilke is associated with Being and also encompasses the phenomenon of the “Open.” I explain Rilke’s understanding of the Open as it emerges from Heidegger’s reading below, but to begin, I turn to the beginning of the *Eighth Duino Elegy*:

With all eyes the creature [animal] sees
the open. Only our [human] eyes are
reversed and placed wholly around creatures

¹ Indeed, turning to Rilke’s *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Heidegger quotes a passage that vividly describes walls and rooms that remain within a decaying house, the façade of which is crumbled to expose the desolate interior of the building that once teemed with life. However, as Rilke observes, the “tenacious life of those rooms refused to let itself be trampled down,” and from out of this the “breath of this life stood out, the tough, sluggish, musty breath which no wind had yet dispersed” (Rilke as quoted in Heidegger 1988, 172). In his analysis, Heidegger focuses on the phenomenological description of the revelation of the system of relations that make up the world of the tenants that once occupied the flat, for through the poet’s description, “the world, being-in-the-world – Rilke calls it – leaps towards us from the things,” which would be revealed through our “natural comportmental relationship” to the rooms of the house (173). The poet “sees” and communicates the “original world” of Dasein in terms that are beyond normal/everyday descriptive terms, for the “lived space” poetized by Rilke is an experience that lives beyond the dimensions of Cartesian space. Phillips (2011) states that in *Basic Problems*, Heidegger, “prior to the commentaries of the mid-1930s, delineating a new beginning in the ontological mission of Hölderlin’s so-called hymns, the poet [Rilke] is already in advance of the philosopher. Philosophy has to catch up” (347). I extend this observation by claiming that in Rilke’s poetic description of the crumbling building and Heidegger subsequent interpretation thereof, the understanding of art as a mode of “truth-happening” is already prefigured. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, through the poetic word truth happens in the most *originary* manner due to the “revelatory power” of language as essential *Dichtung*, which grants art the ability to bring Dasein “into what is disclosed by the work, so as to bring our own essence itself to take a stand in the truth of beings,” and it is the case that building and all forms of plastic creation, occur only “in the open region of poetic saying and naming” (Heidegger 1993, 167).

as traps, around their free exit.
What *is* outside we know from the animal's
visage alone...(153)²

Here, Rilke introduces the Open, which is possible to grasp in terms of a vista into a transcendent realm of metaphysical truths that defy human reason. In addition, in these opening lines, Rilke also sets up the crucial distinction and irreconcilable opposition between the human being and the animal, between what is rational and irrational, between what is grounded in consciousness and what emerges through the unconscious, associated with the emotions as opposed to reason (*ratio*). For Rilke, it is the animal and *not* the human being that “sees” and experiences the Open, and so the animal is in this sense privileged over the human with regard to its freedom toward the Open, for Rilke’s prioritizing of “the unconscious over consciousness corresponds to the priority of the free animal over the imprisoned essence of man” (158).

Thus, as opposed to elevating the human being’s power of reason above the “a-rational creature,” Rilke “inverts the relationship of the power of man and of ‘creatures’ (i.e., animals and plants),” and indeed, as Heidegger contends, this hierarchical “inversion is what is precisely expressed by the elegy” (154). Despite the appearance of rejecting the view of scientific naturalism in the move to grant the animal and *not* the human privileged access to the Open, Rilke smuggles in a traditional metaphysical understanding of both animals and human beings. Importantly, Heidegger’s critical claim is that Rilke retains the metaphysical definition of the human as the *animal rationale* – rational “subject” set off and against “objects” (an endless progression of beings) – that “calculates, plans, turns to beings as objects, represents what is objective and orders it,” and in doing so the human comports itself by means of *machination* “everywhere to objects and in that way secures them...as something mastered, as his possession” (156). Taking this definition of the human as *rational animal* as the starting point, it follows that “animality,” as stated above, is understood in and through the comparison with rationality, and it is understood as that which is “irrational and without reason” (160), and beyond this, there is a “hominization of the animal, by which the animal, with respect to the original experience of beings as a whole [the Open], is even raised above man and becomes in a certain way a “super-man”” (161). This, as Foti (1992) recognizes, is Rilke’s failure, for “as opposed to rebellion against metaphysical hierarchy,” which would be indicative of Heidegger’s project, Rilke “privileges the figure of the animal and of unreflective ‘creation’ over human subjectivity by granting it immediate and perhaps exclusive access to the Open” (30). Thus, Rilke’s poetry retains the binary and hierarchical model of the linguistic-conceptual schema of

² As related to the *Parmenides* reading, in the 1942 lecture course *The Ister*, Heidegger (1996) remarks that the Open in Rilke differs radically from his own notion despite, as Heidegger laments, the “thoughtless lumping together” of his thought with Rilke’s, as if they were interchangeable (91, fn. 1). This is a view that is supported by Graff (1961) in his reading of Heidegger and Rilke: “[I]t would be easy to show that Heideggerian terminology can be applied to Rilke only by a transference of meaning from one universe of discourse in which it is genuine to another where it is out of focus. It cannot be done without doing injustice to Heidegger or to Rilke or to both. Rilke must be understood and interpreted in which are in tune with the vibrations of his own poetical symbols. There is no other way of protecting these from contamination, and of safeguarding their truth” (172). It is possible, because he adopts a “literary,” and hence metaphorical and symbolic approach to interpretation – or as Heidegger would say, “metaphysical” – that Graff’s reading fails to understand Heidegger’s later project. In addition, Graff’s entire analysis is carried out from the perspective of Heidegger’s *fundamental ontology of Being and Time*, a move I argue that is inconsistent with approaching Heidegger during the “Turn,” especially considering the most fecund encounters with Rilke’s poetry were occurring in the 1940s.

Western metaphysics, now privileging the irrational (the unconscious) above the rational (consciousness), and so Rilke still poetizes from out of a view that is attuned by and hence cannot overcome the *metaphysics of presence*.

In relation to the binary oppositional linguistic-conceptual schema of metaphysics introduced above, I draw attention to two crucial elements of Heidegger's critique of traditional Western philosophy in the *Parmenides*; one is intimated and the other remains "unsaid." First, Heidegger (1992), in his analysis of the human as "*το ζωον λογον εχον*," points out that in relation to rationality and the power of speech, as related to the revelation of truth (*το αποφαινεσθαι*), which is expressed by Plato and Aristotle as "*το δηλουν*, the revealing of the open...man, and he alone, is the being that looks into the open and sees the open in the sense of *αληθεζ*" (155). It is from the time of the "first beginning" that the human has assumed a privileged access to Being because of the power of reason, which, as Heidegger's critique runs, has in the history of Western philosophy led humans to hypostatize Being, to turn it into an abstract principle or "object" of the subject's intellectual thematization. Second, for Rilke to even invoke the notions of consciousness and the unconscious in his poetry, as Heidegger claims, is to already poetize in the "spirit of Schopenhauer's philosophy, mediated by Nietzsche and the doctrines of psychoanalysis" (158). This is problematic for Heidegger (although he does not explicitly formulate the following critique in the *Parmenides*, as stated, it remains "unsaid") because conscious/unconscious states, emotional states, *psychological states*, do not represent for Heidegger the most primordial modes of world *dis-closure* because they are derived from and dependent on states of deep attunement achieved through the transformative power of moods (*Stimmungen*). Thus, whereas Hölderlin is poetically aware of the essential necessity and *ek-static* potential of moods for transfiguring Dasein's understanding of the world and others (e.g., *das Festliche*), Rilke, in the *Eighth Duino Elegy*, appears oblivious to the phenomenon of human attunement, and so, as a shortcoming, his poetry and thought remain grounded in the understanding of the world and human being espoused, as Heidegger observes, by modern psychology.

As related to Rilke's understanding of the animal's privileged access to the Open, I bring attention to the fact that in the 1929-30 lecture course, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger (1995) provides an analysis of animals that is radically at odds with the modern understanding of animals found in and inherited from Descartes. Although refusing to reduce animals to mere "machines," Heidegger claims that as opposed to humans, because they are *world-forming*, animals experience life in terms of "*worldlessness, of poverty of world*" (178), for animals are unable to open and project a world in the same manner as the attuned Dasein. On Heidegger's (1992) reading, Rilke clearly links the Open with the animal's ability to see its environment and life in a way that frees the animal from the fear of its impending death, and it is in this *blindness-toward-death*, I will call it, that the animal finds a freedom that the human lacks:

the free animal
has its perishing constantly behind itself,
and in front of itself God, and when it moves it moves
in eternity, just as wells do (158).

The animal's freedom for Being, or the Open, is indeed granted because death is not and cannot be an issue, ontological or otherwise, for the animal. To call the animal *world-poor*, or

Dasein poor, in an important way, indicates that on Heidegger's reading the deep concern for its life in relation to death separates *Dasein* from the animal. Death must be an issue for *Dasein* in order to project its' authentic freedom in the first instance, and for Heidegger (1995) this is because the animal cannot "care" (*Sorge*) about its death and the implication of it for its' existence, i.e., its' Being cannot be an issue for concern, for the animal does not "possess the possibility of attending either to that being that itself is or to beings other than itself" (248). This is because the animal's life is structured by a highly restrictive and myopic scope of concern that Heidegger calls "captivation." The animal is "directed in its manifold instinctual activities on the basis of its captivation and of the totality of its capacities" (248). Heidegger, in terms relatable to both the *Parmenides* and *The Ister*, observes that animals do not "stand within a manifestation [the Open] of beings" (248). According to Heidegger (1992), the animal does not "see" or experience the Open, "not with a single one of all its eyes" (155) and as emerges from his analysis of Rilke's poetry, the animal does not participate in because it remains excluded from the essential unfolding of and *strife between* unconcealment and concealment (the truth of Being). The primary reason for the animal's exclusion from this realm is that it does not have language, it is *αλογος*, and thus cannot "say" or "name" Being and henceforth appropriate its life or world in a historical manner.

To conclude these thoughts on the *Parmenides*, providing a brief summation, I consider *why* and *how* it is that Heidegger comes to identify Rilke's conception of the Open with the endless procession or unfolding of beings. For it is certainly puzzling to say that Rilke poetizes the Open in terms of the "constant progression by beings themselves from beings to beings within beings" (152). As stated, Rilke's poetry is attuned by the *metaphysics of presence*, and as a "consequence of his alienation from *αληθεια*," Heidegger insists that Being "flows away from [Rilke] into the indeterminate totality of beings" (151). The Open, then, is limited to the realm where what moves into it does so strictly in terms of its status as an object, entity, or being, brought to stand within a "technical" mode of *dis-closure* as that which is *present-at-hand*. To understand the implications of this analysis, it is necessary to also be aware of Heidegger's (1977) critique of technology and take into account the mode of "seeing" that is attuned by the *metaphysics of presence*, through which all things show up as what is "present" before us as they are located in Cartesian space. Thus, much like the tradition in Western metaphysics, there is the concern for beings over Being, on *that which is present* as opposed to the primal mystery of *how* what is present manifests or *comes-to-presence* in the first instance, and so the concern for the truth of Being and primordial unconcealment are ignored, thus the Being event remains in "oblivion." On this reading, Rilke's poetry cannot gesture or point beyond the *metaphysics of presence* and so it perpetuates the "destitution" of the age. To the point, Rilke, in relation to the truth of Being, according to Heidegger, "talks thoughtlessly about the 'open' and does not question what the significance might be for the openness of the open" (161).

However, the *oblivion of Being* is not the fatalistic end of the story for *Dasein*, for according to Heidegger, despite this state of "destitution," the hidden relationship to Being, *from whose bestowal man cannot withdraw* persists and is waiting to be re-discovered by great poets. As Heidegger's critical confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Rilke evolves in the later essay, "What Are Poets For?", Heidegger (1971) reassesses Rilke's potential value as a great poet, where Heidegger concludes that Rilke's poetry is "valid," although remaining cloaked "in the shadow of a tempered Nietzschean metaphysics" (108). Phillips (2010), in overly optimistic terms, erroneously claims that in 1946, "Heidegger ranks Rilke alongside Hölderlin as a poet

who heeds the task of poetry in the time of the indigence of nihilism” (347).³ Foti (1992) argues, in terms more consistent with my reading, that in the *Parmenides* Rilke fails to intimate the Open in terms that relate to Heidegger’s understanding of Being, in that Rilke poetizes the hierarchy of polar oppositions consistent with the linguistic-conceptual schema of Western metaphysics. In Foti’s reading of “What Are Poets For?,” a “labored and difficult essay,” it is concluded that Rilke achieves a “partial overcoming” of the *metaphysics of presence*, and yet despite this poetic accomplishment, “the later essay achieves resolution neither concerning Rilke’s role as a poet in a destitute time” nor on the issue concerning Rilke’s relationship with what “one can call Hölderlin’s ‘unsurpassable prescript’” (32).

Turning to Heidegger (1971), it is possible to conclude that although deeming Rilke’s poetry “valid,” it does not in Heidegger’s estimation rise to “Hölderlin’s in its rank and position in the course of the history of Being” (96). Rilke is thus a poet with undeniably impressive powers, but they are unequal when compared to those of Hölderlin; Rilke’s poetry is inadequate for the task required to *found* and *ground* a new beginning for historical Dasein in “destitute times.” Pursuing this issue, my reading serves to cut a middle path between Phillips and Foti, defending the claim it is *possible*, if remaining true to an interpretation of Heideggerian concepts, themes, and language developed and related to poetry, authentic destiny, and the Being event, Rilke might be thought of, in a positive manner - perhaps in contrast to Heidegger’s conclusion, or lack thereof - as intimating, by providing a fleeting glimpse into, a view of Being and Dasein that transcends the linguistic-conceptual schema of metaphysics. In essence, with Rilke’s thought of the Open, as a vast expanse or region of Being, he gestures toward a non-objective and hence non-metaphysical view of Being, and thus Rilke might be

³ Phillip’s (2011) offers a critique of Heidegger’s reading of Rilke in the *Parmenides*, elements of which are inconsistent with Heidegger’s renewed project during the “Turn.” For example, there are concerns relating to the presentation of Heidegger’s view of language of the 1930s, and, especially the 1940s, because it is during this time that Heidegger engages Rilke’s poetry with two distinct interpretations emerging of the potential benefit of Rilke for challenging the reign of technology and the *metaphysics of presence*. Phillips acknowledges the difference between the language of *Being and Time* and that of the “Turn” - despite the “Turn” not being explicitly named - but views it in a critical and pejorative light, e.g., labelling the writings of the “Turn” “protracted, impenetrable and lumbering reflections on the coming of the gods” (354). Yet, when approaching Heidegger’s essential problem with Rilke’s poetry in the *Parmenides*, Phillips’ reading is grounded in the transcendental analysis (*fundamental ontology*) of *Being in Time*. Phillips is correct to point out the problem with Rilke’s naturalism and the poetizing of the “open,” as the “metaphysics lying at the foundation of the biologism of the nineteenth century of psychoanalysis, namely, the metaphysics of the complete oblivion of Being” (Heidegger, 1992, 152). However, when Phillips (2010) identifies Rilke’s “mistake,” the poetry’s “deficiency,” he points to the poet’s failure to articulate “the ontological difference” (349). Phillips plainly states that Rilke’s poetry, emerging from Heidegger’s critique in the *Parmenides*, conveys the “fleshless intellectualism of modern metaphysics, with which Heidegger’s analysis of Being-in-the-world is in conflict in *Being and Time*” (350). Even if Rilke would have intimated the difference between the realms of the *ontic* and *ontological*, which he does not, considering his explicit concern with finding Being in beings, he would have still fallen short of Heidegger’s understanding of great and historical founding poetry in “destitute times.” As I attempt to demonstrate, it is not the understanding or poetizing of the *ontological difference* that separates great art and poetry from their opposite, i.e., separating Hölderlin and Rilke from other lesser poets in Heidegger’s reading in the *Parmenides*. Rather, as Heidegger (1992) makes clear, it is the fact that Rilke makes reference to “personal lived experiences and impressions, which is implied in the appeal to the poet himself as the ultimate source of the validity of his word,” and this for Heidegger, “is too little,” for what is required for poets in desperate or “needy times,” is nothing less than the appeal to the experience and understanding of *αληθεια*, the “essence and the truth of being and nonbeing themselves” (159). Beyond the *ontological difference* as understood metaphysically, it is the poet failing to “open,” and thus *found* and *ground* the truth of Being in the *word* that is “at stake” (159).

said, although in no way equaling Hölderlin, to rise to the level of a potential “*futural* poet” for “destitute times.” I now turn the reader’s attention to elucidating this issue.

Since there are many ways to approach “What Are Poets For?”, my focus is on developing several key concepts that set this reading apart from Heidegger’s critique of Rilke in the *Parmenides*: The Open, as the vast expanse of Being and Dasein as the one who “ventures” forth from out of the primordial essence of Being – the *Abgrund* – for these two concerns relate to authentic dwelling, *Being-toward-death*, and the attunement (conversion) of Dasein’s world beyond the *metaphysics of presence*. To poetize in destitute times, the poet must have both the courage and insight to locate, reach into, and abide - standing firm within the “abyss,” or *Abgrund*, in order to poetize the origin of the Being event. Ground for Heidegger (1971), is not merely related to the earth’s soil beneath our feet, it is also, in connection with the work of art and Hölderlin’s poetry, the founding “holy” ground upon which, in relation to the rising of “holy” Earth, a historical people open a new world and time in order to raise their dwelling in a poetic manner. Indeed, the authentic *potential* for Dasein’s unique and singular response and appropriation of its destiny “hangs in the abyss” (92). The abyss, or absence of ground (*Abgrund*), harbors the potential for Dasein’s destiny, which is held and sent forth, and it is the abyss, the ground-less ground of Being, which “holds and remarks everything” (93). To reiterate, “absence” or the “nothing” in this instance is never “no-thing-ness,” rather it is the *hidden plenitude of Being*. Here, we note that *αληθεια* as referenced in Heidegger’s reading of Rilke in the *Parmenides* can now be understood in this later essay of 1946 in terms that point to Rilke’s non-metaphysical understanding of “truth,” i.e., *not* in terms of what is purely *present* – the *endless procession of beings before us* - but instead an intimated concern for primordial “hiddenness” (*lethe*), the original concealment that lies behind all instances of “truth-happening.”

Rilke’s “improvised verses” opens and invites us into the potential encounter with a non-metaphysical understanding of Dasein’s attuned relation to world and Earth, which gestures beyond the explicit embrace of the *ontological difference*: Reading Rilke, Heidegger elucidates the concepts of Nature, Venture, and the Open. Nature and the Venture in Rilke might be linked to Being or the Open (*Lichtung des Seins*), or the essential truth of Being in the event of its unfolding. With the concept of Nature, Rilke is no longer concerned with the division between the human and animal, and rather, as Heidegger observes, Nature is the “ground of beings,” and as poetized by Rilke, Nature is not to be equated with the subject studied by the natural sciences, instead it is “the ground for history and art and nature in the narrower sense” (101). Nature, for Rilke, is “the *vis primitiva active*” (100), *the most primitive active force*, which holds the *originary* power of what the Greeks experienced and reverentially termed *physis*, which should be understood in the mode of the infinitival, in terms of the event or active process of the “bringing forth” a phenomenon in its unfolding, its coming into the Open, its revelation as “that which arises” (101). Nature in Rilke is best grasped in terms that are different than and beyond Heidegger’s (1962) description of nature in *Being and Time*, as a phenomenon that “‘stirs and strives’, which assails us and enthralls us as landscape” (100/70), and instead in terms of Heidegger’s more mature interpretation of the Earth in the “Origin of the Work of Art” and Hölderlin lectures, the *presence* of which the poet’s word holds the power to call forth.

For Rilke, Nature is the “*Urgrund*,” the *originary* ground of beings determining the manner in which they *come-to-presence*. Heidegger states that humans, animals, and plants all share the ground of Nature. Yet there is a crucial difference with respect to the relationship that each shares with Nature as *originary* ground, and here I ask readers to consider Heidegger’s

(1971) differentiation between animal and Dasein in the face of Being, which can be understood in terms of the manner in which “Being each time ‘gives’ particular beings ‘over to venture,’” i.e., when Being frees Dasein for the precarious, unpredictable and dangerous pursuit of its destiny, which is bold and “daring” in nature. However, as Heidegger points out, “man reaches more deeply into the ground of beings than do other beings” (101), and this pertains to Dasein’s unique relationship to the truth of Being. The idea of Venturing in this reading is relatable to a process or event of release and return, or as Heidegger names it, a “flinging loose” (102) or letting “beings loose into the daring venture” (101) in anticipation of their return, which might be understood in terms of Being releasing Dasein into the Open realm of unconcealment while at once drawing it back into the essential nature (*Abgrund*) from which it arises, i.e., the abyssal ground, primordial concealment or *finitude*. This is consistent with Heidegger’s philosophy in *Contributions to Philosophy*, wherein he describes the movement and process of the Being event in terms of *Entrückung* and *Berückung*, where the former is associated with the recess of Being into *finitude* and the latter refers to what *comes-to-presence* in the withdrawal of Being as *Entrückung*. This is the two-fold counter-striving movement at the center, or *Abgrund*, of Being, and what is generated through this counter-striving activity is the “draft” (the pulling-force) amidst the “sway” of Being’s unfolding. Drawing from a late poem by Rilke, “The Force of Gravity,” Heidegger finds this concept poetized: “The venture,” Heidegger observes, is “the drawing and all-mediating center of beings – is the power that lends weight, a gravity to the ventured beings” (104). To lend weight and gravity indicates that as beings are released or flung into “the venture” of unconcealment, they are at once drawn back into the center, they are held fast in the sway of Being, this Heidegger calls the “balance” (105), and

Being, which holds all beings in the balance, thus always draws particular beings in the balance, thus always draws particular beings toward itself – toward itself as the center. Being, as the venture, holds all beings, as being ventured, in this draft. But this center [*Abgrund*] of the attracting drawing withdraws at the same time from all beings (105).

Although Heidegger does not make this comparison with respect to this movement, the event itself, in relation to beings and unconcealment/concealment, the Being event unfolding through the moments/movements of *Entrückung* and *Berückung*, might be related to his reading of the Greek understanding of *arche*, as it appears in the 1939 essay, “On the Essence of the Concept of *Φύσις* in Aristotle’s *Physics* B, I.” From Heidegger’s unique etymology of *arche* we get the sense of the *movement out from and return to a sheltering center*, where what is released or “let loose” is under a controlling power, which in addition to serving as a guiding force also serves as the origin of that which emerges from it. It is common to translate *arche* in terms of *beginning* or *original principle of order*, but on Heidegger’s (1998) reading, as should be no surprise, *arche* is a bit more nuanced

On the one hand *arche* means that from which something has its origin and beginning; on the other hand it means that which, *as* this origin and beginning, like-wise keeps reign *over*, i.e., restrains and therefore dominates, something else that emerges from it. “*Arche*” means, at once and the same time, beginning and control...origin and ordering. In order to express the unity that oscillates between the two, we can translate *arche* as originating ordering and as ordering origin (189).

Heidegger is clear that what *comes-to-presence*, although emerging from and so connected to that source, is not sheltered in such a way as to be kept wholly safe from potential danger, which is why Heidegger refers to the venture as the “daring venture.” Indeed, as Heidegger (1971) observes, “If that which has been flung were to remain out of danger, it would not have been ventured” (102). Yet within this danger, or “unshieldedness,” there is a sense of safety linked with Dasein’s relationship to the Open, or what might be understood as the truth of the Being event, which I address below in relation to the Open and the concept of *Being-toward-death*. Although plant, animal, and Dasein are “ventured,” because of the differences in the way their existence unfolds, there is a difference in both the level of danger they face and the protection they are afforded. Because Dasein is the being that is “spoken” by language, with the potential to open and found a world and historical age, it is opened to the danger of non-Being, and since Dasein is the only being that cares (*Sorge*) for its Being and death (mortality), there is a more intense and radical sense of unprotectedness or vulnerability that haunts its *Being-in-the-world*. There is also the danger, as Young (2001) observes, to which Rilke himself fell victim on Heidegger’s reading in the *Parmenides*, that humans will “become completely insensible to the ‘Open’ and its ‘pull,’ cut off,” by the metaphysics of naturalism” (144). I note that a running theme within Heidegger (1971) is his persistent warnings that technology (*Ge-stell*) intensifies and “extends the realm of danger that man will lose his selfhood to unconditional production,” and through the “imposition of the objectifying of the world” Dasein “completely blocks [its] path, already obscured,” as a result of the *oblivion of Being*, “into the Open” (115-116).

When interpreting the Open in Rilke, Heidegger states emphatically that it is not to be confused with “openness in the sense of the unconcealedness of beings that lets beings as such be present” (106), for such a reading places emphasis on both “unconcealment” and that which manifests in the light of Being in terms of its *present-at-hand* reality, its *standing forth*. To adopt such a view - a view that is similar to Rilke’s understanding of the Open as the *endless progression of beings* - would be much like focusing on the “globe of Being,” or a celestial body such as the moon, and taking the lighted side, the side *present* to our view, for the complete picture. Thus, obscuring both the “sphericity” of the moon and all that is hidden from view, and this limited view is at odds with Rilke’s poetizing in Heidegger’s later essay, which he labels the “thought of the Open in the sense of essentially more primal lightening of Being” (108), i.e., in terms already discussed, Rilke intimates a concern for the primordial force, or Being’s essential recession into *finitude*, which makes possible and facilitates the phenomenon of unconcealment in the first instance. This might be said to demonstrate the richness of Rilke’s thinking and poetizing. The Open is equitable with the “whole draft” of the unbounded unfolding of the Being event that holds within it the potential lighting and concealing of “beings as a whole.” Dasein’s authentic relationship to the Open is instantiated in the ever-renewed process of “venturing” out from and subsequently being returned to or pulled back in order to “fit into the unlightened whole of the drawings of the pure draft,” for the Open, much like Heidegger’s rendering of the truth of Being in *Contributions*, has the “character of an including attraction [the “draft”], in the manner of the gravity of the pure forces” (107). One of the crucial aspects of Rilke’s poetizing of the Open is that it remains non-objectified, it resists the reduction to a hypostatized entity or essence (as substance - *substantia*), and so Rilke’s poetizing points beyond a view of Being constrained and distorted by the “object-character of technological dominion” (114).

As stated, bound up with the revelation of the relatedness of Dasein to Being is Dasein’s potential for the appropriation of its destiny, and although Heidegger neither mentions

historicality or *Geschick* with respect to the Open, and in addition, although incorporating what can be read as strange and arcane terms, what he draws from Rilke poetry is expressive of, in ways familiar to the readers of Heidegger, the opening of a world, a beginning, a new time and historical age – the birth and establishment of an *originary* community. Here, as related to the work of art and the Hölderlin lectures, this communal gathering of Dasein is beholden to that which *exceeds them*, and because of this they are united, for the Open, “lets the beings ventured into the pure draft draw as they are drawn, so that they variously draw on one another and draw together” and “they fuse with the boundless, the infinite,” or the groundless *Abgrund* of Being, and yet they do not “dissolve into void nothingness, but they redeem themselves into the whole of the Open” (106). It is to the “boundless” and “infinite, the Open in all of its expanse, that Dasein’s authentic *Being-in-the-world*, with its *Being-toward-death*, belongs, which relates to the “danger” of venturing forth, Dasein’s “unshieldedness,” as discussed above.

I’ve discussed earlier the sense of safety and protection that Dasein unshieldedness harbors, which is known only to Dasein when attuned (converted) to the Open, for the safety, the shelter, lies in the “seeing” that facilitates a “turning” back toward an *originary* relationship to the Open, which is the precise relationship to the Open that has been covered over, forgotten in the age of destitution, for as stated, it is the *metaphysics of presence* that “threatens our nature with the loss of belonging to the Open” (122). This “turning” occurs as a “conversion” or re-attunement that Heidegger calls an event of “having seen” that which was previously lost. It might be understood in terms of the *thinking-and-poetizing* that begins in the return (“turns”) to the experience of the *oblivion of Being*, as Heidegger writes in “Letter on Humanism.” The manner in which Dasein takes on the burden of its unshieldedness is crucial to determining its relationship to the Being event, the manner in which it responds to the address of Being, and this includes, importantly, *how* Dasein relates to death. The fear of death leads to the “negation of death” through “technical objectification” (125), where death is viewed as something “negative,” and so there is a *fleeing-in-the-face* of its impending certainty. Although never overcoming or outstripping death, when attuned in and through the poet’s images and words, we understand death as belonging to Being and so it is something we share collectively with all Dasein in terms of a belonging to the Open. Heidegger states, “Death is what touches mortals in their nature” (126), and just as in *Contributions*, *Being-toward-death* is the essence of Dasein’s nature, and it connects or “sets” Dasein on its “way to the other side of life,” i.e., beyond the realm and mode of *pure presence* and into the concealed nature and the plenitude of the *mystery*, “into the whole of the pure draft” (126), into the truth and sway of Being’s primordial unfolding. Heidegger claims, in this 1946 essay, that death is a gathering force, and it is the Law that establishes the “place within the widest orbit into which we can admit the converted unshieldedness positively into the whole of what is” (126). To find shelter, safety, and resolve in unshieldedness as related to the Open, is to *be-at-home* in terms of “what is,” i.e., to dwell within the authentic understanding that Dasein ultimately resides, as one who is ventured, existing “outside all protection” (126) that might come by means of the forces of human *machination* or technical mastery, e.g., death cannot be outstripped by any form of scientific or technical intervention. To find this authentic shelter in the safety of unshieldedness, in terms of the nature of Dasein, might be understood as a form of “homeliness” (*Heimische*) within the more primordial mode of *not-being-at-home* (*Unheimische*) in the world, a theme developed in considerable detail by Heidegger in *The Ister* (1942).

The authentic *Being-toward-death* comes by way of a “conversion” (attunement-*Stimmung*), which Heidegger identifies as a turning within/to the “heart’s space,” the turn

toward “what is inward and invisible” (129). This movement or “turning” from outer to inner should not be conceived as the subjective closing off or interiorizing of Dasein, a retreat into an inner, impenetrable sanctuary of the mind, it is also not to be thought of in terms of the metaphysical understanding Dasein’s “existential solipsism” (*solus ipse*) of *Being and Time*. Rather the “turning” from modes of *dis-closure* that objectify the world and Dasein’s existence to a more reflective (*meditative*) and poetic “saying” of existence assumes the form of a “singing,” which “converts that [technological] nature of ours which merely wills to impose, together with its objects, into the innermost invisible region of the heart’s space” (130). To be attuned to the invisible region of the heart, to the primal mysteries of existence, is indicative of a renewed relation to Being, which might be understood in terms of returning to and allowing ourselves to dwell in close proximity to the *Abgrund* of Being. For despite its invisibility, despite its ineffable nature, is not to be equated with “nothing,” because it is the center or seat of Dasein’s *futural* potential, located within the great expanse (the Open), from which Dasein is pushed (thrown) out and pulled back by the gravitational force generated by the unfolding, or in terms of Dasein’s authentic historical “enowning” (*Ereignis*), the *destining* of Being in the truth of its oscillating “swaying” or unfolding.

With this in mind, I pose the following crucial questions: Does Rilke’s poetry poetize the event of Being for Dasein? Does he indicate that the human being can yet achieve such a mode of “historical” existence in relation to the Earth or the holy? Heidegger responds to the first query in the affirmative; Rilke does poetize this event, albeit through a “tempered” view of Western metaphysics. To the second query, it appears that Heidegger responds in a somewhat ambiguous manner, and to clarify this response I turn to consider Heidegger’s interpretation of Rilke’s “Angel” as a prophetic “metaphysical” figure of *futural* hope. Citing a letter that Rilke wrote (November 13, 1925), Heidegger quotes, “The Angel of the *Elegies* is that creature in whom the transmutation of the visible into the invisible” occurs, i.e., a form of fundamental “turning” in attunement, which we might hope to achieve, “seems already accomplished” by the Angel (134). The Angel appears as the paradigmatic being (or “bodiless” presence) that has reached the state of conversion in advance of the human, and Heidegger makes the observation that the Angel, “despite all difference in content, is *metaphysically the same* as the figure of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra” (134).⁴ In this view, the Angel is separated from the human being in

⁴ To compare Rilke’s Angel to Nietzsche’s Zarathustra from a metaphysical perspective relates to Heidegger’s (1979) “metaphysical” reading(s) of Nietzsche during the 1930s. Zarathustra the prophet stands at the end of metaphysics and foresees a future human being (*Urbmensch*) who will be superior to the “herd animal” and even the “last man,” and so, much like Rilke’s Angel, Zarathustra points the way to a *futural transcendence* that is beyond *Platonism* (Western metaphysics). The Angel in Heidegger’s interpretation of Rilke has already experienced the authentic relationship to Being that is foreign and unknown to the Dasein of the “destitute” age, and serves, in a prophetic manner, as an inspiration for the overcoming of the *metaphysics of presence*. The notion of “venturing forth” and returning, finding “safety” in the human’s lot as the most unshielded of beings, amidst the unfolding of Being (as belonging to the Open), resembles thematically Heidegger’s analysis and interpretation of Zarathustra’s relationship to Being and the “Overman.” The Overman’s authentic philosophical-creative activity emerges from out of the fundamental attunement (*the not-at-home*) elicited by the most burdensome thought of the eternal return. Attuned fundamentally in the mood of *das Unheimlichkeit*, the Overman is driven by the urge to be at home everywhere, and at all times, and this concept reflects Zarathustra’s existential movement, which is indeed what Heidegger reads as the authentic way in which the Overman shall inherit, appropriate, and enact his existence through “down-going” (*der Untergang*) and “transition” (*der Ubergang*). With these terms and concepts, Heidegger emphasizes the oscillation and movement of human existence (“becoming finite”), which is always either in the process of being directed out from its “solitude” toward beings as a whole (world), or in the process of returning to its solitude, which Heidegger (1995) calls the “resting in a gravity that drives us downward” (6). Nietzsche’s

that it lives “the stilled repose of the balanced oneness of the two realms within the world’s inner space,” whereas the human continually remains blind to the truth of the Open, and “the balance of danger is in essence unstilled” (135). It is possible to imagine the attunement of Rilke’s poetry as first initiating the “conversion” of Dasein, in light of the Angel’s *presencing* as related to the “holy,” or beyond this, *as* a manifestation of the “holy” itself as poetized by Rilke, and not merely a symbolic or imaginatively poetic (metaphysical) re-presentation of the holy. The presence of the Angel is for Rilke, the event or accomplishment of the transmutation of the “visible into the invisible,” the historical transformation of Dasein’s metaphysical seeing and thinking into to an authentic poetic dwelling on the Earth in relation to the “holy.” Indeed, Heidegger’s words suggest such a reading, for it is in the “invisible of the world’s inner space” revealed by the poet that the Angel first appears, and at this attuned moment “the haleness of worldly beings becomes visible” (141), i.e., they are transformed and transfigured (converted-attuned) in the light and presence of the “holy,” the ground is once again consecrated, *the gods that have fled are preparing their return*. Just as the holy ground must be prepared and readied for the gods, Rilke’s poetry must attune and transform Dasein in readiness for the appearance of the Angel, the presence of the “holy” necessary for the gods’ return.

Since the Angel is revealed in and through the poet’s “song,” poets are needed, those who fearlessly venture forth, those who are most “venturesome” who do not merely “say,” that is speak *about* Being, but rather those who “venture Being itself” in poetic language, who are “saying to a greater degree,” poets such as Rilke dare to encounter Being and poetically speak *of* it. The most daring poets hold the power to attune us and because the poets “convert the parting against the Open and inwardly recall its unholiness into a sound whole,” they “sing the healing when in the midst of the unholy” (140) as they poetize from out of the *oblivion of Being* in the age of the loss of the holy, in order to catch sight of what “has been” lost and what might potentially be recaptured and returned, and it is their song that turns our “unprotected being into the Open” (140), returning us in a transformed manner, readied to confront our lost relationship with the truth of Being. The poet’s singing, inspiring our conversion, is grounded in the experience of being attuned to the “unholy *as* unholy,” and the poet’s song “beckons to the holy, calling it,” and in doing so, “draws the god near” (141). In order for the poet’s song to “hail” the “integrity of the globe of Being,” or the truth of Being in all of its mystery and fullness, inspiring the manifestation of the holy and the imminent *return of the gods* in a time of destitution, the poet must in the most extreme and insightful manner take on – as a practice of “down-going” (*der Untergang*) – the experience of supreme unshieldedness in the midst of the unholy, i.e., experiencing and living the absence of the holy in order to return courageously to the haunting *experience of the oblivion of Being* and emerge triumphantly. For it is only in this moment, context, and space, that the poet might reveal and capture in his saying, in order to pass along to the people, the barely perceptible murmurs of the voices and faint traces of the lingering and shadowy memories of the fugitive gods who have fled in the epochal abandonment of Dasein.

To reiterate, Rilke does not rise to the level of Hölderlin, alone worthy of the moniker “poet of poets,” who continues to tower above other poets in Heidegger’s estimation. Hölderlin

philosophy, on Heidegger’s reading, never succeeds in transcending metaphysics, and much like Zarathustra, he stands at the culmination of metaphysics, and so as Heidegger contends, although prophesized in the figure of the Overman, Nietzsche’s thought, as radical as it is, fails to usher in the “other beginning” – which for Nietzsche represented the *overturning of Platonism* and the *trans-valuation of values*.

represents for Heidegger (1971), “the pre-cursor of the poets in a destitute time” and this is “why no poet of this era can overtake him” (142). To poetize the truth of Being as a historical *founding* and *grounding* phenomenon is still, for Heidegger, an event that “arrives out of the future, in such a way that the future is present only in the arrival of his words” (142). To talk of a “pure arrival” or authentic arrival is to reference the ultimate “need in times of destitution” of not only the poetic word but also, the preservers of the word, who for Heidegger are irreducible to the “everyman” and have not as of yet arrived on the scene, or more accurately, are *already* present but are not appropriately attuned to the *originary* power of the poetic word. Despite the absence of those worthy of participating in and preserving Hölderlin’s poetry, his message and inspiration will not “perish,” for his “poetry remains a once-present being” (142), a reminder of the time when the *fire from Heaven* permeated the ether and the gods dwelled with humanity. To reiterate, Foti (1992) argues that Heidegger does not provide a definitive response to whether or not Rilke is a great poet, a sufficient poet, for “destitute times,” in the sense of being able draw in and attune preservers to his “song” in terms of inspiring the “other beginning,” thereby heralding the *return of the gods* in the overcoming of the *metaphysics of presence*. Heidegger concludes the essay, “What Are Poets For?” with what reads as open-ended speculation, and it appears it is left for interpreters to decide and adjudicate Rilke’s fate and rank, based on the exhaustive and labyrinthine reading Heidegger offers: “If Rilke is a ‘poet in a destitute time,’” then “destiny decides what remains fateful within his poetry (142).

In response to Heidegger, I have argued that Rilke is a poet that points the way beyond “the world’s night,” for his thought might be said to break the “bounds” of the *metaphysics of presence*. That Rilke is able to intimate a potential non-metaphysical understanding of the human in relation to the truth of Being, there is much inherent value and as of yet “untapped” potential in his poetizing. Thus, Rilke rises to the level of a poet that *should be read* by future generations of thinkers for there is an abundance of wealth to be drawn from his poetry concerning our relationship to the Earth, world, and others through critical interpretation. Indeed, this is precisely what Heidegger’s *Auseinandersetzung* works to accomplish, and similarly this is what my *confrontation* with Heidegger’s (1979) reading of Rilke hoped to achieve, i.e., to offer criticism that does not primarily censure or *tear down*, but rather as “genuine critique,” I sought to carefully trace that which is thought (and perhaps what remains “unthought”) and poetized by Rilke “in its effective force and not its weakness” (5), facilitating the release of the work’s power in a language that allows the *pure presence of the poetry* to shine forth. What “remains fateful” is still to come, and this necessitates our continued engagement with poets such as Hölderlin and Rilke.

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