

GOETHE'S ›FAUST‹ AND HEIDEGGER: COMMONALITIES

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Nach Auffassung Heideggers verlaufen philosophische Diskurse oftmals entlang vorgeprägter Bahnen akademischer Disziplinen und ideengeschichtlicher Traditionen. Diese Studie versucht zu zeigen, dass Goethe und Heidegger durch verwandte Bezüge auf analoge erkenntnistheoretische Fragestellungen und ontologische Anschauungen miteinander verbunden sind. Dabei eröffnen die in Heideggers Philosophie wiederkehrenden und weiterverarbeiteten Gedankenfiguren ihrerseits erweiterte Lesarten von Goethes ›Faust‹ als Entwurf einer Existenz, deren ›Beharren im Sein‹ ein Verlangen nach ›Erlösung‹ im Sinne von ›Auflösung‹ in das ›Nichts‹ innewohnt.

As Heidegger maintained, intellectual discourse often follows the pre-cut channels of conventional academic disciplines and standard conceptual norms. This essay aims to show that Goethe and Heidegger share a common discourse and address related ontological concerns. It suggests that a reading of ›Faust‹ with Heideggerian concepts in mind may add to our understanding of Goethe's work. Faust, who struggles against human finitude while jousting with his diabolical companion, is driven by a longing, for ›Erlösung‹ into a boundless and timeless Nothing, that parallels the devil's will to destroy everything.

I.

There is an interesting coincidence between the review of the four faculties of the traditional European university in Faust's opening monologue: philosophy, jurisprudence (ironical: *Juristereit*), medicine, and theology, and Heidegger's discussion of what the scholarly disciplines, the *Wissenschaften*, have in common – in his inaugural address at the University of Freiburg in 1929: ›Was ist Metaphysik?‹ If we may be allowed to compare a fictional character with a real person, both Faust and Heidegger are dissatisfied with the focus of conventional scholarship on what *is*. In ›Was ist Metaphysik?‹ Heidegger describes the orientation of modern scholarship in a trinity of propositions, each of them ending with the word “nichts”. What unites all of the *Wissenschaften*, according to Heidegger – in addition to being organized into a university curriculum – is that they are all concerned with “das Seiende” ‘that which is’. Their focus on what is “and nothing else”:

Worauf der Weltbezug geht, ist das Seiende selbst – und sonst nichts.

Wovon alle Haltung ihre Führung nimmt, ist das Seiende selbst – und weiter nichts.

Womit die forschende Auseinandersetzung im Einbruch geschieht, ist das Seiende selbst – und darüber hinaus nichts.

“Aber merkwürdig”, says Heidegger, “gerade in dem wie der wissenschaftliche Mensch sich seines Eigensten versichert, spricht er, ob ausdrücklich oder nicht, von einem Anderen”. “Wie steht es um dieses Nichts”? Heidegger asks,¹⁾ now demarking the subject of his question as a substantive. The nothing into which “*das Dasein* [...] *sich hineinhält*” (GA 9: 115, 121) is itself never noticed. We ask: What am I, and what is out there beyond the boundaries of myself? But we stop short of asking what encompasses that beyond, and what holds our world together from the inside.

In his masterwork ›*Sein und Zeit*‹ Martin Heidegger makes the point that *Dasein* – his term for the specifically human form of being – is always already “in the world”, the world being an unsurveyable set of circumstances, meanings and associations, governed by nature and history and limited only by one’s personal finitude. I will here suggest some ways in which Goethe helped create a world which Heidegger himself came to inhabit. It is neither my purpose to trace a direct transitive influence, such as was exerted by Leibniz, Kant, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Brentano, Husserl, and Hölderlin, nor to discuss whether Goethe’s writings were adequately received by Heidegger. Heidegger once called Goethe “ein Verhängnis” for having made Greek culture inaccessible by mixing up Aischylos-Sophocles and Shakespeare, who represent “unvergleichbare Welten”²⁾, and he wrote to Karl Jaspers on August 12, 1949: “Ich selbst habe freilich immer noch kein zureichendes Verhältnis zu Goethe. Das ist ein wirklicher Mangel, aber nur einer unter vielen.”³⁾ As Walter Kaufmann observes, however, “nineteenth-century German philosophy consisted to a considerable extent in a series of efforts to assimilate the phenomenon of Goethe.”⁴⁾

Assimilation occurs gradually and often follows a twisted path. Heidegger’s writings, like Freud’s, are peppered with quotations and examples from Goethe or about Goethe, showing not only his overall familiarity with Goethe’s life and works but also his close attention to minute details. Thus he discusses the archaic lexeme “Bedingnis” in Goethe⁵⁾ and, in “The Question Concerning Technology”, what he calls Goethe’s “geheimnisvolle[s]” word “fortgewähren” in place of the usual “fortwähren.”⁶⁾ These examples could be multiplied, and, indeed, Günther

¹⁾ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, Gesamtausgabe, or Collected Edition. 88 (of 102) vols., Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann 1975ff. Cited as GA.

²⁾ In his ›*Parmenides*‹ lecture, “Kriegswinter” semester of 1942/43 (GA 54: 108).

³⁾ MARTIN HEIDEGGER/KARL JASPERS, Briefwechsel 1920–1963, hrsg. von WALTER BIEMEL und HANS SANER, Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann 1990, p. 180.

⁴⁾ WALTER KAUFMANN, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Anchor Books 1960, pp. 58f.

⁵⁾ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, GA 12; auch Pfullingen: Günter Neske 1959 (7th ed., 1982), pp. 232f., 151. – See GERALD L. BRUNS, *Heidegger’s Estrangements*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1989, p. 179.

⁶⁾ ›*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*‹, II. Teil, 10. Kap.: „Die wunderlichen Nachbarskinder. Novelle”; HEIDEGGER, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (GA 7: 31). Heidegger observes that Goethe had

Martin, acknowledging Heidegger's "profunde Kenntnis von Goethes Werk"⁷⁾, ponders many of Heidegger's Goethe citations in support of the thesis that he misunderstood Goethe, mistaking him, first, for a mere versifier⁸⁾ and then for a philosophical "Newtonian" (Goethe's rejection of Newton's "mathematical, physical objectification of nature" notwithstanding⁹⁾), and then, after the so-called "Kehre," denying Goethe's essential Platonism, again mistakenly. The focus here will be on elements of Heidegger's discourse that seem to descend from Goethe and his world, even when altered in meaning or reversed in valence, and without undue worry about the fact that Heidegger did not much admire Goethe, – until it became politic to change his tune, as Martin scurrilously implies¹⁰⁾.

Writing in 1996, Martin was right that the important question of Goethe and Heidegger had not yet been answered. Nor can I hope to answer this question here. My present aim is not to judge whether Heidegger was a good judge of poetry or whether he was fair to Goethe, but only to illustrate how certain words, phrases, and issues virtuosically deployed by Goethe resound in Heidegger and how a glance at Goethe's ›Faust‹ with Heideggerian concepts in mind may add to our understanding of that monumental work. Given every educated German's familiarity with ›Faust‹ (it has been said that more World War I soldiers carried ›Faust‹ in their knapsack than carried the Bible), there can be no doubt that Goethe's words and phrases rang in Heidegger's ears throughout his life and colored, or helped configure, his thought. Highlighting elements of their shared vocabulary and discursive patterns may enhance our understanding of both writers and may confirm what Heidegger profoundly understood – that there are broader and deeper kinds of "influence" than are shown in direct imitation or quotation. Deliberately "borrowing" the phrase "the ecstasy of influence" from Richard Dienst, Jonathan Lethem offers a broadly illustrated exploration of the pervasiveness and the benefits of plagiarism, borrowings and, yes, influences, in one of ›The Best American Essays‹ of 2008¹¹⁾. To *be* in a world is to interact with a legacy from predecessors and with the discourse of other residents and participants, past and present.¹²⁾

a special fondness for J. P. Hebel's story ›Gespenst an der Kanderer Strasse‹ in which the old word *die Weserei* occurs (GA 7: 31).

7) GÜNTHER MARTIN, Von der weltanschaulichen Differenz Heidegger und Goethe, in: Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 70 (1996), pp. 475–500, here: p. 496.

8) In ›Hölderlins Hymnen ›Germanien‹ und ›Der Rhein‹ (1934/35) Heidegger says that even what seems to be prose in ›Germanien‹ is "dichterischer als das glatteste Versgehüpf und Reimgeklengel eines Goetheschen Liedes" (GA 39: 16f., Anm. 13. – See MARTIN, cit. fn. 7, p. 479).

9) MARTIN, Von der weltanschaulichen Differenz (cit. fn. 7), p. 480.

¹⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

¹¹⁾ Eds. ROBERT ATWAN, ADAM GOPNICK, Boston: Houghton Mifflin 2008.

¹²⁾ What Heidegger calls a "denkende[s] Gespräch mit einer uns erregenden, fördersamen Überlieferung" (Der Satz vom Grund, GA 10: 22). "Die Überlieferung ist Gegenwart" (83). He cites references to Angelus Silesius by Leibniz and Hegel as illustrations of thoughtful dialogue with earlier participants in a shared tradition (53f.).

It is like breathing the same air¹³) or availing oneself of an “open source’ culture”.¹⁴)

Let us consider one example of Goethe’s use of the antipodes “Nichts” and “Sein.” The final lines of a late poem ›Eins und Alles‹ (1821) are: “Denn alles muß in Nichts zerfallen, | Wenn es im Sein beharren will” (FA 1,2: 494f.)¹⁵). Whether this maxim articulates a threat or a promise – whether disintegrating into nothing should be understood as a penalty for embracing *Sein* and resisting *Werden* or, alternatively, whether “dying” is a necessary pre-condition of becoming, in the sense of “Stirb und werde!”, is a question I have discussed elsewhere.¹⁶) Indisputably, Goethe’s Faust, in contemplating suicide as a possible route “zu neuen Sphären reiner Tätigkeit”, understands that this desperate project might fail and that, instead of gaining transcendence, he might deliquesce and flow into Nothing: “Und wär’ es mit Gefahr, in’s Nichts dahin zu fließen” (line 719), yet it is a risk that, until given pause by Easter music from a nearby church, he is willing to take.

Faust’s soliloquy is part of a sexualized metaphorical field, for in the passage just quoted “Nichts” is imagined as a receptacle – a female *something* and an agent of engulfment or absorption – in contrast to Mephisto’s taunting of Faust about his lusty male fantasy of “swelling to the level of a divinity, probing the marrow of the earth and then blissfully [*liebewonniglich*] flowing into *everything*”¹⁷) (words punctuated by an obscene gesture [lines 3285–3289 and stage direction 3291/3292; my emphasis]). In Gretchen’s bedroom, too, Faust reproaches himself in terms of the same imagery of deliquescence and flowing: “Mich drang’s so g’rade zu genießen, | Und fühle mich in Liebestraum zerfließen!” (lines 2722f.). Much later, as Faust embarks on a journey to “the Mothers,” he says to Mephistopheles, “In deinem Nichts hoff’ ich das All zu finden” (line 6256). That Goethe was availing himself of a convention in which “Nichts” is gendered as female is confirmed by Mephistopheles’s account of the creation of the world. This “spirit of denial” (line 1338) is a force bent on reversing the *ex nihilo* creation of the universe and restoring “Mutter Nacht” to her rightful place and dominion. So far he has failed. “Was sich dem Nichts entgegenstellt, | Das Etwas, diese plumpe Welt, | So viel als ich schon unternommen, | Ich wußte nicht ihr

¹³) This is Heidegger’s own metaphor, e. g.: “Durch die damalige Herrschaft der Hegelschen Philosophie und seiner Schule [lag] die Bedeutung von ‘scheinen’ im Sinne von ‘leuchtendes sich zeigen des Anwesenden’ in der Luft” (MARTIN HEIDEGGER, Ein Briefwechsel mit Martin Heidegger, in: Die Kunst der Interpretation, Zürich 1955, pp. 34–49, here: p. 41. Translated as: An Exchange of Letters between Staiger and Heidegger, in: PMLA 105 (May 1990), pp. 409–434, here: p. 423.

¹⁴) The Ecstasy of Influence, ed. ADAM GOPNIK, Boston: Houghton Mifflin 2008, pp. 105–133, here: p. 108; originally in Harper’s Magazine, February 2007, pp. 59–71.

¹⁵) JOHANN WOLFGANG GOETHE, Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche (Frankfurter Ausgabe), I. Abt. Bd. 1–27; II. Abt. Bd. 1–13. Frankfurt/M. 1985ff. (Cited as FA).

¹⁶) E. g. in ›Eins und Alles‹ and ›Vermächtnis‹: Two „weltanschauliche Gedichte“, in: German Studies Association, Oakland, CA, October 8, 2010. Read by HORST LANGE. – See also ROBERT ELLIS DYE, The Easter Cantata and the Idea of Mediation in Goethe’s *Faust*, in: PMLA 92 (1977), pp. 963–976.

¹⁷) Cf. “alles” in the title and the text of ›Eins und Alles‹ (FA 1,2: 494f.).

beizukommen” (lines 1363–1366). But he has not given up, attached now to Faust, whose desire to experience an “eternal moment” is tantamount to a death wish, hence a microcosmic mirror of the macrocosmic nihilism of his diabolical companion: “[...] denn alles was entsteht | Ist werth daß es zugrunde geht” (lines 1339f.). Mephistopheles knows this, and Faust knows that he knows (lines 1360f.): “Du kannst im Großen nichts vernichten | Und fängst es nun im Kleinen an” (lines 1360f.).

If we are cognizant of the conventional association of femaleness with formlessness (like any liquid, she conforms to the vessel she inhabits), we’re obliged to recognize that nothingness is imagined as female by Heidegger as well as in Goethe (“Mutter Nacht”). In any case, Goethe, like Heidegger, conceives of the human drama in terms of Being and nothingness, whether expressed as the microcosmic dilemma of a finite individual or as the devil’s will to destroy everything. We note this in passing, without intending to classify Goethe as a poet of *Sein* or, as many Goethe scholars prefer, one of *Werden*¹⁸), and without trying to decide whether his stance toward human finitude is affirmative or negative – i. e. whether the ›Faust‹ drama celebrates a limited, temporal existence in the sense of “Die Erde hat mich wieder” (line 784) or, on the other hand, praises a blessed longing, a “Selige Sehnsucht” to overcome finitude through self-submergence in the boundless and the timeless – what Erich Trunz refers to as “ein Regressus der Emanatio”.¹⁹)

“Nichts” cannot, of course, *be* anything, as Heidegger points out in ›Was ist Metaphysik?‹ But Mephistopheles conceives of “das Etwas, diese plumpe Welt” as originating from and within “Nichts” as “her” offspring and adversary.

Goethe and Heidegger share an interest in the inherited and conventional configurations of Being. According to Heidegger, Being (*ὄν(τ)α*) has been construed since Plato to mean what is present to consciousness as an object.²⁰) The

¹⁸) Anglet resolves the paradox by arguing that being and becoming are not antithetical – that there is nothing so constant as change (ANDREAS ANGET, *Der „ewige“ Augenblick: Studien zur Struktur und Funktion eines Denkbildes bei Goethe*, Weimar 1991, pp. 57–62.)

¹⁹) GOETHE, *Werke*. Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden, ed. ERICH TRUNZ. 17 vols. München: C. H. Beck 1981, 1: 732. Cited as HA.

²⁰) In ›Was heißt Denken?‹ Heidegger accredits Parmenides with a more adequate view of Being as opening itself up to man who, belonging to Being, opens himself up to receive it: *ταὐτὸν δ’ ἔστι νοεῖν τε καὶ οὐνεκεν ἔστι νοημὰ. οὐ γὰρ ἄνευ τοῦ ἐόντος ἐν ψῖ πεφατισμένον ἔστιν εὐρήσεις τὸ νοεῖν* (GA 7: 140f.). – Heidegger argues that *Τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἔστιν τε καὶ εἶναι – To gar auto noein estin te kai einai* (Parmenides) means not simply that “thinking and being are the same thing” (which is the usual translation—see ›Einführung in die Metaphysik‹, GA 2, 40: 145), but that to *Sein* belongs the apprehending of what is. “It is not due to subjective perception that what is first enters into being. Rather it is man who is looked upon by what is, i. e., by that which opens itself up to what is gathered together in his presence. [...] Man is obliged [...] to gather (*λέγειν – legein*) and salvage (*σώζειν – sōzein*), to catch and preserve in its openness what opens itself, and to remain exposed (*ἀληθεύειν – alētheuein*) to all its sundering confusions. Greek man *is* as the one who apprehends what is, and this is why, in Greek antiquity, the world cannot become a picture. For Plato, by contrast, the being of what *is* is defined as *εἶδος – eidos* (appearance, look). This was the pre-condition, long ago sent on its way and indirectly holding sway throughout Western thought, for the world having to become a picture” (*Die Zeit des Weltbildes*, GA 5: 90f. See OTTO PÖGGELER, Martin

conception of Being as “presence” arises out of an ocularcentric orientation and erects a partition between subject and object, inside and outside. This partition begets our existential loneliness and accounts for what Kant called the “scandal of philosophy” – the common misunderstanding that Kant’s thinking called into question whether there is anything beyond the boundaries of the self and that he regretted the lack of any proof of the existence of an extra-subjective reality. Kant’s point, on the contrary, was that, given the structure of human consciousness and our epistemological limitations, we cannot know the essence of things in themselves. The bare existence of a reality beyond the self, however, is not in doubt.²¹⁾

The division between self and non-self, advisedly no longer called “*man and his world*”, implies, however, an opposition that discomfits Goethe and his younger contemporaries and one that Heidegger pervasively questions. This ancient opposition – humans versus “nature” – informs, for example, Francis Bacon’s aim to extract nature’s secrets through “torture”.²²⁾ Both Goethe and Heidegger want to understand “man’s” relationship to the world in a different way – not as one of dominance and submission, but as complete, intimate blending, absorption, or entwinement.

The opposition between self and world has other implications than that of an adversarial relationship between subject and object or of an untraversable limit to our understanding, as seen in Goethe’s ›Faust‹ and his ›Werther‹. The belief in an autonomous, self-contained subject directs our gaze inward and generates the reflexive model of self-consciousness, which consists in a subject being aware of itself as an object. That is, what is inside becomes something external, which it is our frustrated desire to get to know better.

Fichte showed the reflexive model of self-consciousness to be circular, for only if the self already possessed a non-reflexive awareness of itself could it know that the

Heidegger’s *Path of Thinking*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ, Humanities Press International, 1987, rpt. 1989 [originally: *Der Denkweg* Martin Heideggers, Pfullingen: Neske 1963], pp. 30, 37f., 40, 60, 119, 121, 141, 158ff.).

²¹⁾ Cf. Kant: “[...] so bleibt es immer ein Skandal der Philosophie und allgemeinen Menschenvernunft, das Dasein außer uns [...] bloß *auf Glauben* annehmen zu müssen, und, wenn es jemand einfällt, es zu bezweifeln, ihm keinen genugthuenden Beweis entgegenstellen zu können (IMMANUEL KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. 2 Vols., Wiesbaden: Insel 1956: Vorrede zur zweiten Auflage, vol. 1, p. 38. As Heinrich von Kleist put his (mis)understanding in a letter to his sister Wilhelmine (22. März 1801): “Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaftig Wahrheit ist, oder ob es uns nur so scheint”. (HEINRICH VON KLEIST, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, hrsg. von ILSE-MARIE BARTH, KLAUS MÜLLER-SALGET, STEFAN ORMANN und HINRICH C. SEEBA, 4 Bde., Frankfurt/M. 1987–1997, Bd. 4, S. 205.)

²²⁾ Much as, in his treatise on ›Daemonologie‹ in 1597, the Scottish King James VI (since 1603 James I of England and Scotland), with whom Bacon corresponded, called for in the interrogation of a witch, as Frederick Amrine shows. Amrine contrasts the synergy between the king and Francis Bacon in ›The Advancement of Learning‹ with Goethe’s approach to nature (FREDERICK AMRINE, ‘The Unconscious of Nature’: Analyzing Disenchantment in *Faust I*. 2009, in: *Goethe Yearbook* 17 (2010): 117–132.

conscious subject and its object are the same self, that is, *myself*,²³) while Hölderlin reflects in a letter to Hegel, 26 Januar 1795, that “das absolute Ich,” as conceived by Fichte, can have no object, for then it would not contain all reality within itself. But since a consciousness without objects is inconceivable, “das absolute Ich” could not be conscious. Yet without consciousness I am nothing, and (for me) “das absolute Ich” is Nothing – “Nichts”!²⁴) If we had no limits, says the sage in the metric version of Hölderlin's ›Hyperion‹, “wir fühlten uns und andre nicht. | Sich aber nicht zu fühlen, ist der Tod, | Von *nichts* zu wissen, und *vernichtet* seyn | Ist Eins für uns”.²⁵)

These reflections by Fichte and Hölderlin are formulated in terms of the subject-object dichotomy, to which Western thinkers, including Kant and Edmund Husserl, Heidegger's teacher, have remained in thrall since Descartes. The challenge for Goethe, and one pursued by Heidegger with a vengeance, is to configure knowledge in some other way than as a subject knowing an object of possible experience – a *Gegenstand* in Kant's vocabulary (in contradistinction to an *Objekt*, which possesses objective validity but not necessarily “objective reality”²⁶): “Alles was im Subjekt ist,” says Goethe in a characteristic passage, “ist im Objekt und noch etwas mehr. | Alles was im Objekt ist, ist im Subjekt und noch etwas mehr. | Wir sind auf doppelte Weise verloren oder geborgen: Gestehen wir dem Objekt sein Mehr zu, pochen wir auf unser Subjekt” (FA 1,13: 219).²⁷)

Heidegger exposes the subject-object relationship as a false dichotomy, saying that the great scandal of philosophy is *not* that we cannot prove that there is a world beyond our selves (an *objective Realität*, in Kant's vocabulary). The scandal is the misconception that seems to place this in doubt.²⁸) Heidegger writes in ›Brief über den Humanismus‹: “Der Mensch ist nie zunächst diesseits der Welt Mensch als ein ‘Subjekt’, sei dies als ‘Ich’ oder als ‘Wir’ gemeint. Er ist auch nie erst nur Subjekt,

²³) “Um sich als dem Reflektierten gleich beurteilen zu können, muß das Reflektierende schon zuvor Kenntnis von sich gehabt haben”. Quoted from MANFRED FRANK, *Selbstbewußtseinstheorien von Fichte bis Sartre*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1991, p. 497.

²⁴) FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Frankfurt/M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1992, 3 vols., here: vol. 3, p. 176.

²⁵) Lines 143–146, my emphasis. After the words: “Nun fühlen wir die Schranken unsers Wesens | Und die gehemmte Kraft sträubt ungeduldig | Sich gegen ihre Fesseln, und es sehnt der Geist | Zum ungetrübten Aether sich zurück” (HÖLDERLIN, *Sämtliche Werke*, cit. fn. 24, vol. 2, p. 212f.; lines 136–139).

²⁶) HENRY E. ALLISON, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1983, p. 134f.

²⁷) Also ›Maximen und Reflexionen‹ 1376; Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, ed. ERNST BEUTLER. 24 vols. Zürich 1948–1954, here: vol. 9, p. 673; and Hamburger Ausgabe, vol. 12, p. 436 (No. 515). Cf. Weimarer Ausgabe 2,11, p. 162.

²⁸) “Die Frage, ob überhaupt eine Welt sei und ob deren Sein bewiesen werden könne, ist als Frage, die das *Dasein* als In-der-Welt-sein stellt – und wer anders sollte sie stellen? – ohne Sinn. [...] Der ‘Skandal der Philosophie’ besteht nicht darin, daß dieser Beweis bislang noch aussteht, sondern *darin, daß solche Beweise immer wieder erwartet und versucht werden*. Dergleichen Erwartungen, Absichten und Forderungen erwachsen einer ontologisch unzureichenden Ansetzung *dessen, davon unabhängig und ‘außerhalb’* eine ‘Welt’ als vorhandene bewiesen werden soll” (Sein und Zeit, pp. 202, 205; Heidegger's emphasis).

das sich zwar immer zugleich auch auf Objekte bezieht, so daß sein Wesen in der Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung läge" (GA 9: 350).

In ›Die Zeit des Weltbildes‹ Heidegger explains that "jeder Subjektivismus ist in der griechischen Sophistik unmöglich, weil hier der Mensch nie Subjectum sein kann; er kann dies nicht werden, weil das Sein hier Anwesen und die Wahrheit Unverborgenheit ist" (GA 5: 106). "Nicht daß der Mensch sich von den bisherigen Bindungen zu sich selbst befreit, ist das Entscheidende, sondern daß das Wesen des Menschen überhaupt sich wandelt, indem der Mensch zum Subjekt wird. Dieses Wort Subjectum müssen wir freilich als die Übersetzung des griechischen ὑποκειμενον [hypokeimenon] verstehen. Das Wort nennt das Vor-Liegende, das als Grund alles auf sich sammelt. Diese metaphysische Bedeutung des Subjektbegriffes hat zunächst keinen betonten Bezug zum Menschen und vollends nicht zum Ich" (GA 5: 88). Paradoxically, the freedom to be oneself entails man's imprisonment within the self – "Man kann das Wesen der Neuzeit darin sehen, daß der Mensch sich von den mittelalterlichen Bindungen befreit, indem er sich zu sich selbst befreit" (GA 5: 87).

II.

Goethe's ›Faust‹ explores its protagonist's frustration with the limits of the self, as this has been conceived since Descartes. In ›Sources of the Self‹ Charles Taylor employs the term "punctual self" to describe the conception of the self predominating in Locke and the Enlightenment thinkers.²⁹⁾

At the play's beginning Faust is frustrated. Locked in the prison of his own subjectivity³⁰⁾ and dissatisfied with the limitations of traditional scholarship, he searches for a new understanding, unbeckoned by "Wissensqualm" (line 396).³¹⁾ Faust's concern is not ontological but epistemological: "Daß ich *erkenne*, was die Welt | Im Innersten zusammenhält" (lines 382f.).³²⁾ He wants to discover the

²⁹⁾ Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1989.

³⁰⁾ Cf. Goethe's ›Werther‹ (22. Mai 1771). Faust's and Werther's use of the term "Kerker" reflects an evolution from the ancient metaphor of the body as the prison of the soul to a conception of the self as imprisoned in first-person consciousness. The "Ich" as such has become the prison. Hatem, in Goethe's ›West-östlicher Divan‹, evokes the traditional usage: "Du weißt, daß der Leib ein Kerker ist; | Die Seele hat man hinein betrogen" (FA 1,3/1:106). See also the "schöne Seele" of ›Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre‹: "Mein Leib kann wie ein Kleid zerreißen, aber das Ich, das wohlbekannte Ich, Ich bin" (FA 1,9: 788). Cf. also: "In dieser Armut, welche Fülle! | In diesem Kerker, welche Seligkeit!" (Faust, lines 2693f.). On alternative meanings of "Einschränkung" = 'confinement' or 'containment', see GÉZA VON MOLNAR, Confinement or Containment: Goethe's ›Werther‹ and the Concept of Limitation, in: German Life and Letters 23 (1970), pp. 226–234.

³¹⁾ My emphasis. Cf. "Name ist Schall und Rauch | Umnebelnd Himmelsglut" (Faust, lines 3457f.).

³²⁾ Cf. Wagner: "Allein die Welt! Des Menschen Herz und Geist! | Möcht' jeglicher doch was davon *erkennen*". (lines 586f.) Faust: "Ja, was man so *erkennen* heißt! | Wer darf das Kind beim rechten Namen nennen? | Die wenigen, die was davon *erkennt* | [...] Hat man von je gekreuzigt und verbrannt" (lines 588–593; my emphasis).

connections at the heart of things. He neither doubts that there is an integrated world nor questions its coherence. It *is*, and something inside must hold it together. Whatever this something is, it cannot be nothing. Yet Faust's experience with the four scholarly faculties, like Heidegger's experience with the scholarly faculties generally, has taught him only "daß wir *nichts* wissen können" (line 364, my emphasis). Heidegger's different claim, of course, is that we neglect to inquire about the *Nichts*. In any case, neither of the paracurricular sources to which Faust turns – first, the iconic sign of the macrocosm, then the Earth Spirit whom he conjures up – sheds any light on the subject of his greatest concern. He rails against "die Pein | des engen Erlebens" (lines 1544f.) and against his own inability to transcend the limits of the self: "Der Gott, der mir im Busen wohnt, | [...] | Er kann nach außen nichts bewegen" (lines 1566/1569).³³

Faust longs to transcend the barrier between self and world, to stride over mountain tops in the moonlight, hover weightless among spirits around mountain caverns, and refresh himself in the morning dew (lines 392–398). He wishes he could levitate and follow the sun along its course. (lines 1074–1089). But he is locked up in his own finite selfhood, its window on the world as obfuscating as the colored window panes in his study. (lines 400f.) He is a "subject" for whom the world *is* as an "object" – something opposed and apart which both invites and obstructs entry. Faust is sometimes an insider looking out and sometimes an outsider looking in – or, like other scholars, looking *at*. He is engaged in *theōria*, of which method Mephistopheles will express his scorn to an eager freshman: "Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie, | Und grün des Lebens goldner Baum" (lines 2038f.).

The late Goethe poem ›Epirrhema‹ echoes Faust's lament about the barrier between the world and the *Dasein* of scientists and exhorts them to study nature as an encompassing and pervasive whole: Müsset im Naturbetrachten | Immer eins wie alles achten; | Nichts ist drinnen, nichts ist draußen: | Denn was innen das ist außen. | So ergreifet ohne Säumniß | Heilig öffentlich Geheimniß. [...].³⁴

Derrida will eventually declare the "inside-outside" dichotomy to be the basis of all other binary oppositions,³⁵ but already Goethe says this is a false paradigm, for nothing is either only inside or outside. "Denn das ist der Natur Gehalt | Daß außen gilt was innen galt" (Zahme Xenien, FA 1,2: 677). ›Epirrhema‹ anticipates Heidegger's point that being in the world is not like being in a building or a country with its clearly defined walls or boundaries – or even like being locked inside the

³³) Goethe's Werther refers to "Einschränkung" and "unsere Eingeschränktheit" (with opposite connotations) in his letter of 21 Junius 1771; and again, as well as to "die Grenzen der Menschheit" in his letter of 12 August 1771. See MOLNAR (cit. fn. 30).

³⁴) Weimarer Ausgabe I, 3: 88, lines 1–6. The poem continues: "Freuet euch des wahren Scheins, | Euch des ernstesten Spieles: | Kein Lebendiges ist ein Eins, | Immer ist's ein Vieles".

³⁵) Dissemination, trans. BARBARA JOHNSON, Chicago: University Press 1981, p. 103. "For Heidegger", says Richard Polt, "human existence is not inside a private precinct at all, but is 'in the world', so we have to jettison the crude dichotomy of inner and outer" (RICHARD POLT, Heidegger: An Introduction, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1999, pp. 56f.)

prison of the self. Rather, the preposition “in” refers to Dasein’s essential entanglement in a web of signification, its submersion in an undifferentiated whole, which, since Being is finite, must *be*, or must at least refer to, nothingness. Goethe stresses the identity of ›Eins und Alles‹ – in the poem so titled (1821) – in the paradoxical words: “Denn alles muß in Nichts zerfallen, | Wenn es im Sein beharren will.” *Nothing* as the preserve of Being! This may simply be a paraphrase of Luke 9.24: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (King James version), but I agree with Erich Trunz (and disagree with Emil Staiger, Karl Eibl, Bernhard Sorg, the author of the article on ›Eins und Alles‹ in the ›Goethe Handbuch‹). Trunz emphasizes the line “sich aufzugeben ist Genuß” and reads the poem as articulating the paradox that only as submerged in the *All*, understood as a boundless *Nothing*, can we persist in *Being*.³⁶ An individual self can truly *be* only as absorbed in an infinite, enveloping context, including the context of that context, i. e. Nothing, which is to say that without plenty of Nothing we ourselves are Nothing.³⁷ One must fall apart (*zerfallen*) as an isolated *Subjectum* in order to *become* as part of the whole. As Goethe elsewhere puts it, “Unser ganzes Kunststück besteht darin, daß wir unsere Existenz aufgeben, um zu existieren” (FA 1,13: 32).

No being is separate from its world, for without its world it would not be. A stand-alone wooden box does not a lectern make, says Heidegger in an early university lecture. A lectern exists as a lectern only as an implement in an institution.³⁸ To the Being of the peasant woman’s shoes depicted in van Gogh’s paintings belongs not just their material and form – the leather out of which the shoes were cut and shaped, but

the stowed up tenacity of her slow trudge through the long, uniform furrows of a field swept by a raw wind. The dampness and darkness of the soil. The loneliness of the field path. [...] In these shoes vibrates the unspoken call of the earth, its silent giving of ripening grain and its unexplained denial of its gift in the desolate fallowness of the wintry field [...], the uncomplaining worry about having enough bread, the wordless joy at once again having survived want, the trembling before the impending childbirth and the shuddering at the surrounding threat of death. (The Origin of the Work of Art; GA 5: 19)

To draw a boundary around these shoes and set them apart as mere objects is to annihilate their peculiar essence and with them part of the peasant woman’s world.

³⁶) ERICH TRUNZ: “[...] das Eingehen in höhere Region bedeutet ein Aufgeben der irdischen Existenzform als einzelner, und damit auch ein Aufhören jedes Affekts (4/5), da ein solcher nur aus der Bedingtheit, Begrenztheit entspringt” (HA 1: 731).

³⁷) The word “und” in the title marks the identity of “eins” and “alles,” as in the English hendiadys “one and all,” as well as the relation between an individual and a class or a group. The word “alles” seems to refer to the sum of all particulars, each of which must fall into “Nichts”.

³⁸) Heidegger asks his students what a peasant from the upper Schwarzwald would see a lectern as being. How much of what we see belongs to the object as such, and how much, or how little, do we bring with us to our perception of the “object”? (Die Idee der Philosophie und das Weltanschauungsproblem, Kriegsnottsemester, 1919; GA 56/57: 71).

Goethe's Faust and his Werther both exhibit the tension between embracing life and limitation, on the one hand, and the longing to transcend what Hölderlin calls the "Schranken unsers Wesens"³⁹⁾ on the other. Heidegger explains that a "Schranke" and a "Grenze" "are not alike [...]. The word *Grenze*, according to its ancient Greek meaning, has the character throughout of gathering, of not cutting off. A *Grenze* is that from which and in which something begins and rises up as what it is."⁴⁰⁾ In nothingness there can be no boundaries, by definition: it is "die völlige Unterschiedslosigkeit" (Was ist Metaphysik? GA 9: 109). Anything that *is*, however, must be distinct, therefore separable, must it not? – temporally as well as spatially, and beings are distinct from nothingness. The universe is finite, just as the present moment is distinct from its "before" and its "after," although, as Heidegger points out, the past reaches into the present and gets its meaning from one's projection of a future.⁴¹⁾ Faust's frustration as he reaches for the vial of poison on Easter morning results from past conflicts and failures. Late in the play, his vision of a happy *future* society on land he has wrested from the sea generates a bliss that would enable him to say to the *present* moment: "Verweile doch, du bist so schön!" (line 11582).

As noted, Faust's desire to transcend the limits of one individual's finite selfhood parallels, at the microcosmic level, Mephistopheles's macrocosmic project of destroying all finite beings: "denn alles was entsteht | Ist wert daß es zu Grunde geht" (lines 1339f.). This formulation is repeated in line 1357 and again in Faust's wager with Mephistopheles: "Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn!" (line 1702). Heidegger's pun: "Wer auf solchem Weg zum Grund geht, dessen Denken läuft Gefahr, daß es dabei zugrunde geht" suggests that following an infinite regress in search of the bottom (i. e. the foundation) of things (thus seeking to know their "unerschütterlichen Grund" or "fundamentum inconcussum")⁴²⁾ and Faust's search for "was die Welt | Im Innersten zusammenhält") may amount to the same thing. Faust, for his part, is reprising a characteristic intuition, having already considered that trying to penetrate ("durchdringen") the ether via suicide and arrive at "neue Sphären reiner Tätigkeit" (lines 704f.) might result instead in flowing into nothingness (line 719).

³⁹⁾ HÖLDERLIN, *Sämtliche Werke* (cit. fn. 24), 2: 212f.; lines 136–139).

⁴⁰⁾ Heidegger: "Schranke und Grenze sind nicht das gleiche [...]. Aber die Grenze hat – nach dem alten griechischen Sinn – durchaus den Charakter des Versammelns, nicht des Abschneidens. Grenze ist jenes, von woher und worin etwas anfängt, aufgeht als das, was es ist" (GA 10: 106).

⁴¹⁾ Thus, as Heidegger notes, "der Name Leibniz steht deshalb in unseren Überlegungen nicht als Bezeichnung für ein vergangenes System der Philosophie. Der Name nennt die Gegenwart eines Denkens, dessen Stärke noch nicht ausgestanden ist, eine Gegenwart, die uns noch entgegenwartet" (GA 10: 51).

⁴²⁾ Descartes, as quoted by Heidegger, who suggests that if our thought seeks not only the "Grund" of everything, but also the "Grund" of the "Satz vom Grund" and then the "Grund" of this "Grund," it would fall "unaufhaltsam ins Grundlose" (GA 10: 18).

III.

Let us review Faust's *Lebenslauf* in broad outline. Having rejected the sign of the macrocosm as only a spectacle and having himself been rebuked by the Earth Spirit, Faust would escape through suicide from the earth's restrictions and rise "zu neuen Sphären reiner Tätigkeit" (line 705). He understands that this is a desperate gamble, that, instead of achieving transcendence, he might deliquesce and flow into a boundless Nothing: "Und wär' es mit Gefahr, in's Nichts dahin zu fließen" (line 719), but it is a risk that he is willing to take.

Since to say what Nothing *is* would be a contradiction in terms, Heidegger invents the verb "*nichtet*" (GA 9: 114), which is sometimes cited as proof that Heidegger's language as nothing but gobbledy-gook,⁴³ a reification of negation. Heidegger argues, however, that that "Nichts" is ontologically prior to negation, a point illustrated by Jean-Paul Sartre with his famous example of Pierre not showing up at the café. Since nobody expected the Duke of Wellington or Paul Valery, the statement: "Paul Valery is not here", would, indeed, be nothing but an instance of negation. The failure of the reliable Pierre to show up, however, is a genuine disclosure, like our shock when a practical joker removes a chair on which we would sit down. It discloses the nothingness of which we are usually unaware but into which Being always irrupts and with which it coexists – although Nothing cannot actually *exist*.⁴⁴) The Nothing shows itself when something we take for granted is amiss.⁴⁵)

Faust puts down the poison on Easter morning and resigns himself to the limits of terrestrial life. Yet he remains frustrated. The goods offered by this world are all ephemeral: "red gold that runs through your fingers, the girl in my arms making eyes at a neighbor, fruit that rots before it's picked" (lines 1679–1686). It is then that Mephistopheles sees an opportunity and proposes a bargain, which Faust counters by suggesting a wager instead. The first line of his counter-proposal is an alexandrine, which underscores the baroque associations of the term "Faulbett" or voluptuary's couch.⁴⁶) "Werd' ich beruhigt je mich auf ein Faulbett legen [...]"

⁴³) E.g. RUDOLF CARNAP, *Die Überwindung der Metaphysik durch Logische Analyse der Sprache*. Translation by ARTHUR PAPAS, *The Overcoming of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language*. Logical Positivism Ed. A. J. AYER, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press 1959, pp. 60–81.

⁴⁴) "This example is sufficient to show that non-being does not come to things by a negative judgment", writes Sartre. "It is the negative judgment, on the contrary, which is conditioned and supported by non-being" (JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, *Basic Writings*, ed. STEPHEN PRIEST, London and New York: Routledge 2001, p. 146).

⁴⁵) Sartre attempts to improve on Heidegger's formulation in ›Was ist Metaphysik: "Das Nichts selbst nichtet" by making it passive and, as Sartre supposes, thereby avoiding the attribution of agency to Nothingness (ibid., p. 136).

⁴⁶) Thomas Mann's Naphta in ›Der Zauberberg‹ extols a series described by Bernhard of Clairvaux, from "Mühle" → to "Acker" → to "Ruhebett". In this progression the mill symbolizes worldly life "Weltleben"; the ploughed field ("Acker") refers to the believer's soul, which the Christian pastor cultivates; and the bed, which Settembrini, like Faust, pejoratively refers

(line 1692). The series of terms stipulated by Faust culminates in his vision of an “ewiger Augenblick”⁴⁷⁾ – a moment of such intense beauty that Faust will not want it to end. It is because Faust longs to escape from his constricted and transitory selfhood that time metaphors dominate his proposal to Mephistopheles: “Werd’ ich zum Augenblicke sagen: | Verweile doch! Du bist so schön! | Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen, | Dann will ich gern *zu Grunde gehn!* | Dann mag die Totenglocke schallen, | Dann bist du deines Dienstes frei, | Die Uhr mag stehn, der Zeiger fallen, | Es sei die Zeit für mich vorbei!” (lines 1699–1706; my emphasis.)

How can this be? How can time be past, except as demarcated from the present on a continuing time line? But this objection applies only if time is conceived as a series of discrete, atomistic “nows”, which neither Goethe nor Heidegger thinks is a meaningful way to think of time. Faust, of course, is speaking only of his own finite being. “Es sei die Zeit *für mich* vorbei”. Time may march on, but Faust would no longer be in its grip. He doubts, of course, that he will ever express the fatal words, but if he should be wrong and lose the wager, time will end – end for him, at least, which is the outcome he longs for, in any case. For Mephistopheles, too, the annihilation of Faust would be a good start, for Faust is no ordinary man but God’s own special servant (line 300). In order to achieve the result they both want, however, Mephistopheles must produce a moment of ecstasy for Faust – a term which means standing out – outside the world, outside of time, outside of oneself – a “Hinaussein über das Seiende”, according to Heidegger’s definition of “Transzendenz”.⁴⁸⁾ If Faust loves ecstatically, the clock will stop. He will lose not only the wager but also his life, which is why the ecstasy of self-surrender in sexual orgasm is known as “la petite mort”. But he will lose nothing more, for there is nothing more to lose than his existence as an individual self, and what he has to gain is absorption in something larger and better, i.e. in the Nothing. Note, by the way, how the verb “zerfallen” in the line from “Eins und Alles”: “Denn alles muß in Nichts zerfallen, | Wenn es im Sein beharren will”, echoes Faust’s word “zerfließen”, spoken in Margaret’s bedroom. These metaphors describe a selfhood spilling out into the void, like the life spilling out of the boy who has sliced off his hand in Frost’s poem “Out, Out”: “Little – less – nothing!”

to as a “Faulbett” (also “Lotterbett”) is, in Naphta’s formulation, “der Ort der Beiwohnung des Minnenden mit dem Gemeinten.” It is a symbol of the “beschauliche Abgeschiedenheit von Welt und Kreatur zum Zwecke der Beiwohnung mit Gott,” in Naphta’s mischievous equation of *unio mystica* with sexual intercourse (Chapter Six: “Noch Jemand”). Cf. Tristan and Isolde’s “höchste Liebeslust”; also Meister Eckhart on rest and bliss (JOHN D. CAPUTO, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought*, New York: Fordham UP 1986, p. 198).

⁴⁷⁾ ANGLER, *Der „ewige“ Augenblick* (cit. fn. 18).

⁴⁸⁾ ›Was ist Metaphysik?, GA 9: 115. “To suffer ecstasy means to be placed outside oneself. [...] A man is said to be placed outside himself, when he is placed outside the knowledge proper to him. This may be due to his being raised to a higher knowledge; thus, a man is said to suffer ecstasy, inasmuch as he is placed outside the connatural apprehension of his sense and reason [...]”. (SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols. New York: Benziger Brothers 1946–1948, here: vol. 1, p. 711.)

They agree on the terms. The joy that Mephistopheles contracts to deliver is a pleasure so exquisite that Faust will strive for nothing more, having gained “die unbedingte Ruh” that humans ultimately seek. (line 341) Goethe’s ›Faust‹ is, in one of its aspects, a story of the concupiscence of humankind, of our quest for quiescence in a higher mating – for blending and eternal bliss, like the blessed longing of the moth in the poem ›Selige Sehnsucht‹, or like Homunculus shattering his vial against Galatee’s mussel throne: “NEREUS: Bald lodert es mächtig, bald lieblich bald süße, | Als wär’ es von Pulsen der Liebe gerührt?” “THALES: [...] Es sind die Symptome des herrischen Sehnsens, [...] Jetzt flammt es, nun blitzt es, ergießet sich schon”. (lines 8467–8473) Marriage vows employ the same topos – that every true mating entails the escape from egoism and the unreserved submergence of husband and wife in a higher unity. This is what Aquinas calls “mutual indwelling, [...] inasmuch as the lover is not satisfied with a superficial apprehension of the beloved, but strives to gain an intimate knowledge of everything pertaining to the beloved, so as to penetrate into his very soul”⁴⁹).

The quest for intimate knowledge of one’s beloved exacts not just an epistemological price but an ontological one as well. When Goethe writes, “Denn alles muß in Nichts zerfallen”, the verb “zerfallen” denotes not just the collapse of the usual way of representing a being, i. e., the disintegration of something standing opposed and apart – a *Gegen-stand* – but the dissolution of subjectivity as such, which will no longer *be*, except as “erlöst” = redeemed / released / dissolved, paradigmatically in a *female* “All”. We are looking ahead to the final lines of the play: “Das Ewig-Weibliche | Zieht uns hinan” (lines 12110f.).

IV.

What does knowledge have to do with nothingness? We have taken note of Hölderlin’s point that to know nothing is to *be* nothing. But it is also true that to encounter Nothing is to grow in knowledge. What does it tell us about Pierre, or about his circumstances, if he fails to show up in the cafe? Perhaps nothing more than that he was inadvertently detained or that he has lost track of the time – uncharacteristically – although there is a world of other alarming possibilities. All we can know for sure is that he is not here, that where he usually is, today there is nothing. To know Nothing deeply and authentically, however, one must jettison relational conceptions of knowledge. Goethe’s ›Faust‹ anticipates Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysics of presence and the ocularcentric conception of knowledge: “Ach, ein Schauspiel nur” (line 454), says Faust on contemplating the sign of the macrocosm. “Nur *sehn* [ist] der geringste Antheil, den wir an einer Sache nehmen können”, said the “Augenmensch” Goethe,⁵⁰ who also expressed

⁴⁹) *Ibd.*, p. 710.

⁵⁰) *Der junge Goethe*, ed. HANNA FISCHER-LAMBERG, 6 vols., Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963–1974, here: vol. 2, p. 271.

his faith in “eine zarte Empirie, die sich mit dem Gegenstand innigst identisch macht” (FA 1,13: 149). Like Hölderlin and Novalis,⁵¹⁾ Faust longs for an absolute identity, with no division and no duality, an erasure of finite structures in the subject's merger with the object, indeed, a complete demolition of the subject-object dichotomy. Absolute truth dissolves the separations on which every representational conception of truth depends. Truth as “identical to the divine” (FA 1,25: 274) is unrepresentational, therefore non-relational, and only comes to a seeker who no longer *is* as an opposed, self-conscious subjectivity. Knowing consumes the knower. Or, rather, there is no longer any difference between the knower and the known. To “know” someone or Nature or the world “im Innersten” is to know “her” in a way unachievable by scientific research – where “Erkenntnis” is sought through the interrogation of something “present at hand” (as Heidegger's term “vorhanden” is conventionally translated). Mechanical instruments are inherently distortive. You cannot rob Nature of her veil with levers and thumb screws (›Faust‹, lines 672–675). To know Nature is to experience her ways and powers in a manner that is conceptually akin to Heidegger's example of interacting with others (*Mitdasein*) or building something with a tool that is an extension of oneself, as opposed to dissecting an object in a laboratory or inspecting something in a museum showcase. As Faust says, “Wer will was lebendig's erkennen und beschreiben, | Sucht erst den Geist heraus zu treiben, | Dann hat er die Teile in seiner Hand, | Fehlt leider! nur das geistige Band” (lines 1936–1940). For the punctual self with its clear but artificial boundaries, truth can only be a blue flower beckoning unreachably from afar, hence inspiring longing. This applies to Gretchen as much as to Faust, e. g. when she yearns for a love-death in his embrace while working at her spinning wheel – “an seinen Küssen | Vergehen sollt” (lines 3374–3413). But the price of blending with someone or something and knowing it from within is to be “vernichtet”, as Hölderlin notes and as Gretchen explicitly desires, and annihilation is an ontological consequence, as well as an epistemological resolution.⁵²⁾

The way to knowledge, then, is not pre-programmed and intrusive scientific research, but, rather, a kind of “will-less thinking”⁵³⁾ – openness, to God, to the world and its worlding, or to a lover, even to technology. It is what Heidegger

⁵¹⁾ “Hölderlin und Novalis [...] werden zeigen, daß, wenn einmal eine Dualität von Momenten in die Dimension des Selbstbewußtseins eingeführt ist, ihre Präreflexivität nicht mehr erklärt werden kann. Niemals könnte eine Zweiheit als Grund von strenger Identität aufgeboten werden. Diese Kritik setzt eine Radikalisierung der Bedeutung des Terms ‘Identität’ voraus, denn Identität ist in der Tradition durchaus als Relation bestimmt worden” (FRANK, Selbstbewußtseinstheorien, cit. fn. 23, p. 450).

⁵²⁾ Heidegger makes this important distinction in ›Der Satz vom Grund‹ in arguing that the *principium reddendae rationis* is not only a “Prinzip des Erkennens,” it is “gerade als Grundsatz des Erkennens das Prinzip [...] für jegliches, was *ist*” (GA 10: 36).

⁵³⁾ WILLIAM LOVITT and HARRIET BRUNDAGE LOVITT, *Modern Technology in the Heideggerian Perspective*, vol. 2, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press 1995, pp. 544f., 599.

will eventually call “Gelassenheit” – a letting be or “letting go of willing [...] By letting-go of willing, we actually give ourselves the possibility of being open to *Gelassenheit* and, in *Gelassenheit*, we remain open for be-ing itself”.⁵⁴) None of this means that either Being or Nothingness is an entity, only that beings partake of Being – that they *are*, as, inevitably, absorbed into Nothingness – and that in becoming Nothing themselves: “in Nichts zerfallen”, they cease to *be*. There is a something deeper than lust in Faust’s love for Margaret and hers for him. Their union will be an instance of what Heidegger in his propositions about the Nothing calls an *Einbruch* – a breaking-in which in its own way enables a breaking-out, a helping what is to become what it is (GA 9: 105.) It will be like Homunculus’s self-immersion in the liquid vastness of the Aegean brine in hopes that he may “originate” (line 8246). In “the Neo-Platonic, mystical literature of the Middle Ages”, writes Ernst Cassirer,

the act of knowledge and the act of love have one and the same goal, for both strive to overcome the separation in the elements of being and return to the point of their original unity. [...] To know an object means to annihilate the distance between the object and consciousness. It means [...] to become *one* with the object: “*cognitio nihil est aliud, quam Coitio quaedam cum suo cognobili*”.⁵⁵)

But for the subject to become one with the object is to erase the division between subjects and objects, and to usher in the indifferentness/indifferentiation of which Heidegger speaks (GA 9: 109f.) and which Mephistopheles, “des Chaos wunderlicher Sohn!” (line 1384) wants to restore – a night in which all cows are black.⁵⁶) It will reinstate “Mutter Nacht” upon her throne.⁵⁷)

⁵⁴) BARBARA DALLE PEZZE, Heidegger on Gelassenheit, in: *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 10 (2006), pp. 94–122; here: pp. 109f.

⁵⁵) “Knowledge is [...] a form of striving, for the ‘intention’ towards its object is essential to all knowledge (*intensio cognoscentis in cognoscibile*)” (ERNST CASSIRER, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*. Translation by MARIO DOMANDI, New York: Barnes and Noble 1963, p. 134). “Für Augustin, Anselm von Canterbury wie für Thomas von Aquin ist Lieben mit einem Erkenntnisvorgang gekoppelt: *Nullus potest amare aliquid incognitum* (‘Niemand liebt ihm völlig Unbekanntes’). *Amare* und *cognoscere* sind untrennbar verbunden. ‘Was man ganz und gar nicht kennt, kann man in keiner Weise lieben’, schreibt Augustin (De trinitate X 1). Für Gregor den Großen ist ‘die Liebe selbst Erkenntnis’ (*Amor ipse cognitio est*)” (RÜDIGER SCHNELL, *Suche nach Wahrheit: Gottfrieds Tristan und Isolde als erkenntniskritischer Roman* [= *Hermaea: Germanistische Forschungen, Neue Folge*], Tübingen: Niemeyer 1902, pp. 226f.).

⁵⁶) In Hegel’s term, “Vorrede,” in: *Phänomenologie des Geistes, Hauptwerke in sechs Bänden*, vol. 2, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1980, p. 17.

⁵⁷) “[...] zehre mit Geisterglut meinen Leib”, wrote Novalis, “daß ich luftig mit dir inniger mich mische und dann ewig die Brautnacht währ” (Hymnen an die Nacht, 1., Athenaeumsdruck, in: NOVALIS, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, ed. by HANS-JOACHIM MÄHL und RICHARD SAMUEL, vol. 1–3. München, Wien 1978, vol. 1, p. 149). Novalis equates the benefits of wine, benzaldehyde, and opium with the intoxicating allure of a maiden’s womb and bosom in a darkness devoid of “leuchtende Kugeln” – the bodies illuminated by “das stolze Licht” which Mephistopheles, too, would extinguish (lines 1349–1358).

V.

Among the most famous lines in ›Faust‹ are those spoken by the angels in the final scene: “Wer immer strebend sich bemüht, | Den können wir erlösen” (lines 11936f.). Wilhelm Böhm and Albrecht Schöne convincingly argue that the angels’ words do not so much justify Faust’s “striving” as announce their intent to lift him out of the struggle.⁵⁸⁾ Striving has been overrated in the history of Goethe scholarship. It is not the point of Goethe’s drama to vindicate Faust by adducing his persistent and unsated “striving” as a sufficient compensatory merit for his crimes. It is not *through* striving but *from* striving that Faust is saved. What the angels offer through the agency of the eternal feminine is not *redemption* as *absolution* but *resolution* as *dissolution*,⁵⁹⁾ salvation as assimilation, as absorption. Longing for dissolution and deliquescence informs the apostrophe to the moon of one of the most famous of Goethe’s lyrical personae – “Lösest endlich auch einmal | Meine Seele ganz” (›An den Mond‹). This is why Faust’s monologue in Gretchen’s bedroom “closely echoes that first longing speech to the moonlight. [...] Margarete represents the same thing to Faust as the moonlight”.⁶⁰⁾ With the metaphor of dissolution – by “eternal love” (line 11964), the *menstruum universale* or “universal solvent” in ›Faust‹ – Romanticism designates its “ideal of dissolving established limitations and determinations”⁶¹⁾ – the opposition to nature as an object, above all. As Amrine points out, “it is precisely [the] notion of science as the torture and violation of nature that Goethe’s Faust rejects”⁶²⁾. “Geheimnisvoll am lichten Tag | Läßt sich Natur des Schleiers nicht berauben, | Und was sie deinem Geist nicht offenbaren mag, | Das zwingst du ihr nicht ab mit Hebeln und mit Schrauben” (Faust, lines 672–675) One must hold oneself open to whatever Nature or Being may reveal of her own accord. As in “Zueignung,” Goethe’s introductory allegory to collections of his poetry, the right stance is one of grateful acceptance. Only when

⁵⁸⁾ “*Wer immer* [...] meint kaum: *Wer* unaufhörlich [...], sondern: *Wer* auch *immer strebend sich bemüht*”, i. e. ‘Whoever it may be who, always striving, exerts himself’ (ALBRECHT SCHÖNE, FA 1, 7/2: 801; ref. to WILHELM BÖHM, Goethes Faust in neuer Deutung: Ein Kommentar für unsere Zeit, Köln: E. A. Seemann 1949, p. 297). Cf. ERICH TRUNZ: “*Erlösen* ist hier: Frei-Machen, ein Ablösen der Entelechie vom Erdhaften, Starren, Dunkeln, Mephistophelischen; und ist Auflösung ins Lichte, Geisthafte, Göttliche” (HA 3: 738).

⁵⁹⁾ Note the links, both etymological and semantic, between “lösen” and its expanded forms: “*erlösen*,” “*ablösen*” and “*auflösen*”. The metaphors of dissolution and release have been neglected in interpretations of the angels’ words. Trunz draws attention to the term “*Erlösung*” in the sense of “*sich auflösen*” or dissipation of the clouds in “*Cirrus*,” one of the poems dedicated to Luke Howard (HA 3: 738). Karl Eibl comments: “Gewiss ist die ‘*Erlösung*’ eine ‘*Ablösung*’ vom ‘*Erdenrest*’, und damit eine ‘*Auflösung*’ der Person” [...]. “Dem entspricht auch, dass die seligen Knaben die ‘*Flocken*?’ der im ‘*Puppenstand*’ befindlichen Seele, also den Kokon ‘*lösen*’ (line 11985)” (KARL EIBL, Das monumentale Ich: Wege zu Goethes ›Faust‹, Frankfurt/M.: Insel 2000, p. 337).

⁶⁰⁾ JANE BROWN, Faust: Theater of the World, New York: Twayne 1992, p. 63.

⁶¹⁾ JOCHEN SCHULTE-SASSE, Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1997, p. 30.

⁶²⁾ FREDERICK AMRINE, ‘The Unconscious of Nature’ (cit. fn. 23), p. 8.

duly humbled is this poem's vainglorious seeker given "der Dichtung Schleier aus der Hand der Wahrheit". There is no better example of *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια), the Greek term for truth favored by Heidegger. Truth is not a matter of correspondence between a proposition and a reality as apprehended by a human subject, this is merely correctness. Before correspondence can be corroborated, Being must first unveil itself to whoever is open to it. But "whoever" is not synonymous with "subjectivity".

Goethe and Heidegger have in common with a long line of great German mystics their conception of themselves as recipients of gifts from transcendent sources – as "Aufgetane," if I may import (and make plural) a crucial word from Rilke's poem about Leda awaiting the swan, her mood serenely "gelassen" in Goethe's rendition of the same myth (Faust, line 6914). For Goethe and for Heidegger femaleness is the norm. To be sure, anyone may seek entrances and openings into Being, however gratuitous, unequivocal, and unpredictable its revelations and withholdings may be. We are here concerned, however, neither with psychology nor with naked, unmediated beliefs about God and the world nor even with Being, but with a discourse that our two thinkers share, and with the question of conceptual figuration, with the way thinking is "enframed", as Heidegger's word "ge-stellt" is usually translated, hence, in Heidegger's sense of the term, with the historical "world" after all. But Being, which Hegel says is the same thing as Nothing,⁶³ invites and receives, discloses and encloses.

"Nichts" to traditional philosophy, like the conventional sexist conception of what female means to a man, is a void that no man can fill and in which all particular beings are engulfed and disappear.⁶⁴ In risking flowing into Nothingness, Faust recognizes Nothingness as the larger reality in the return to whose womb transcendence or annihilation may occur. But, in contrast to Werther (who thinks he can achieve transcendence on his own initiative), he resists the temptation to attempt a self-propelled translation. The proper stance is one of acceptance. We most hold ourselves open not only to the Being of *beings* – what Heidegger calls "ein Empfangen vom Sein her"⁶⁵ – but to the very *giving* of the Being of beings. "Heidegger is concerned with disentangling the thing in order for Being to cast

⁶³) MICHAEL INWOOD, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell 1999, p. 145. Heidegger both agrees and disagrees with Hegel. "Pure Being and pure Nothing are, then, the same thing." This sentence of Hegel's (*Wissenschaft der Logik*, I. Buch, *WW III*: 74) is right," says Heidegger. "Being and Nothing belong together, but not because both of them – considered from Hegel's way of thinking – coincide in their indefiniteness and immediacy, but rather because Being itself is essentially finite and because it reveals itself only in the transcendence of that which holds itself out into the Nothing."

⁶⁴) MAGGIE KILGOUR, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation*, Princeton University Press 1990, p. 90.

⁶⁵) GA 10: 126. – "The essence of what is [...] cannot be perceived (*wahrgenommen*) it can only be received (*vernommen*) out of the unconcealedness or presence of what is in general". REINER SCHÜRSMANN, *Heidegger and Meister Eckhart on Releasement*, in: *Heidegger Re-examined*, eds. HUBERT DREYFUS and MARK WRATHALL, New York and London: Routledge 2003, Vol 3, pp. 295–319, here: pp. 304f.

itself towards thought”⁶⁶). “This event is ‘historical’, in Heidegger’s sense, [...] because it would seize us in a unique, urgent moment”.⁶⁷) As Goethe puts it in another of his ›*Zahme Xenien*‹: “Ja, das ist das rechte Gleis, | Daß man nicht weiß | Was man denkt, | Wenn man denkt; | Alles ist wie geschenkt” (FA 1,2: 631). The paradoxes of the spirit are “Gaben und Gunsten des Augenblicks, die nur unangefordert erscheinen und nur [...] nach langer Vorbereitung”.⁶⁸) Thinking and thanking are the same thing (GA 8: 142, 144–146). “Zum Gedanc gehört der Dank”.⁶⁹) Indeed, their common understanding of knowledge as a gift, not as the harvest of intrusive research, is one of the most important ways in which Goethe and Heidegger are allied.⁷⁰)

Richard Rorty makes fun of Heidegger’s language when he says, “Heideggerese is only Heidegger’s gift to us, not Being’s gift to Heidegger”,⁷¹) but Rorty’s witticism acknowledges that Heidegger, and Goethe, too, I think, portrays truth, understanding, and *Erlösung* as gifts granted or withheld by transcendent agencies, personified as women in *Faust* – Gretchen, her penitent sisters,⁷²) the Mater Gloriosa. Thus Faust’s “Unsterbliches” (stage direction 11933/34) is transported by “das Ewig-Weibliche” into an indefinite beyond. Far from being captains of their fate, human beings “are ‘thrown’ into a situation that is not of our own making”⁷³), and by the end of Goethe’s play Faust comes to understand that one cannot unilaterally project oneself into higher spheres: “Nach drüben ist die Aussicht uns verrannt: | Tor, wer dorthin die Augen blinzelnd richtet.”⁷⁴) The resurrected Gretchen says that Faust “ahnet kaum das frische Leben” ahead (line 12086). She

⁶⁶) Ibid., p. 303.

⁶⁷) RICHARD POLT, *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 2006, p. 100.

⁶⁸) DOROTHEA HÖLSCHER-LOHMEYER, *Die Entwicklung des Goetheschen Naturdenkens im Spiegel seiner Lyrik – am Beispiel der Gedichte ›Mailied‹ – ›Selige Sehnsucht‹ – ›Eins und Alles‹*, in: *Goethe Jahrbuch* 99 (1982), pp. 11–31. – In his note to Riemer 28 Oktober 1821 Goethe writes the words: “Ich werde selbst fast des Glaubens, daß es der Dichtkunst vielleicht allein gelingen könne, solche Geheimnisse gewissermaßen auszudrücken, die in Prosa gewöhnlich absurd erscheinen, weil sie sich nur in Widersprüchen ausdrücken lassen, welche dem Menschenverstand nicht einwollen” (FA 1,2: 1085). – Cf. F. Schlegel: “Hat man nun einmal die Liebhaberei fürs Absolute und kann nicht davon lassen, so bleibt einem kein Ausweg, als sich selbst immer zu widersprechen und entgegengesetzte Extreme zu verbinden” (FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL, *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by ERNST BEHLER et. al., München, Paderborn, Wien 1958ff., vol. 2, p. 164: Blütenstaub, no. 26).

⁶⁹) See SCHÜRMAN, *Heidegger and Meister Eckhart* (cit. fn. 65), p. 299, n. 7.

⁷⁰) POLT, *The Emergency* (cit. fn. 35), notes “the quietism that hovers over [Heidegger’s] post-war works” (p. 250). A serene acceptance of contingency informs Goethe’s writings as well.

⁷¹) RICHARD RORTY, *Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Reification of Language*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. CHARLES B. GUIGNON, Cambridge UP, 1993, pp. 337–357, here: p. 353.

⁷²) *Magna Peccatrix*. (St. Lucae VII 36); *Mulier Samaritana* (St. Joh. IV.), and *Maria Aegyptica*. *Acta Sanctorum* (*Faust*, lines 12032–12068).

⁷³) POLT, *The Emergency* (cit. fn. 35), p. 121.

⁷⁴) See ROBERT ELLIS DYE, *The Easter Cantata and the Idea of Mediation in Goethe’s Faust*, in: *PMLA* 92 (1977), pp. 963–976; here: p. 973.

is confident that “aus ätherischem Gewande | [...] tritt erste Jugendkraft [hervor]” (lines 12090f.).

Faust’s claim in the early scene “Nacht” of being “bereit, | Auf neuer Bahn den Äther zu durchdringen, | Zu neuen Sphären reiner Tätigkeit” (lines 703ff.) was precipitous – and brutally phallogocentric – based on the presumption that a man may enter any door at will (see Dye, “Easter”, 966). (The metaphor “durchdringen” is only slightly less violent than “durchwühlen”; line 3286). Now the Mater Gloriosa promises a fulfillment of Faust’s own desire: “Komm! hebe dich zu höhern Sphären!” she says to Gretchen. “Wenn er dich ahnet, folget er nach” (lines 12094f.).

Faust, in the scene “Mitternacht,” is finally ready to accept whatever may be in store. But, ready or not, openness is the right posture, and, indeed, the only available one. As Heidegger puts it, “if the essence of unconcealment of what is belongs in any way to Being itself” (cf. ›Sein und Zeit, §44), this lets the *Spielraum* of openness come to us from its essence and ushers it in *as a space* where every being emerges in its own way” (GA 5: 49). This is a virtual definition of “grace,” not necessarily bestowed by the anthropomorphic “Lord” of “Prologue in Heaven”. Rather, truth may be granted by Being as such – call it nature, call it history, which “are by no means so far apart and separate from each other [...], as the arrangement of disciplines in the [university] curriculum may make it seem” (GA 10:37). Whatever their source, both knowledge and salvation are gifts that are given, not prizes won by a striving, therefore *meritorious* human subject. It was no joke when Heidegger described himself as a “Christian theologian”,⁷⁵) nor does his later abandonment of theology as a profession prove that he ever escaped its clutches. A dog is not free just because he barks at his chain. By the same token, Goethe’s contempt for religious “enthusiasm”⁷⁶) and his wicked expressions of impatience with religious orthodoxy (such as one epigram that ranks icons of the crucifixion with tobacco smoke, bedbugs and garlic as the things he most detests)⁷⁷) should not deceive us as to his fundamentally Christian-Protestant acceptance of the fact of human contingency – contingency understood as non-necessary Being (only God

⁷⁵) Letter to Karl Löwith, 19 August 1921: “Ich arbeite konkret faktisch aus meinem ‘ich bin’ – aus meiner geistigen überhaupt faktischen Herkunft – Milieu – Lebenszusammenhängen, aus dem, was mir von da zugänglich ist als lebendige Erfahrung, worin ich lebe. Zu dieser meiner Faktizität gehört [...], daß ich ‘christlicher Theologe bin [his italics!].” The text of this letter is in: Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers, eds. DIETRICH PAPENFUSS and OTTO PÖGGELER, 3 vols., Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann 1990–1992, vol. 2, Im Gespräch der Zeit (1990), pp. 27–32.

⁷⁶) Goethe ridicules his erstwhile friend Johann Caspar Lavater in biting epigrams (e. g., FA 1,2: 220, Nr. 52), and in the ›Xenien‹ (›20. Der Prophet: “Schade daß die Natur [...], FA 1,1: 530). Goethe’s heterodoxy shows up in his earliest writings, e. g., the “Brief des Pastors zu *** an den Neuen Pastor zu ***”, FISCHER-LAMBERG (ed.), Der junge Goethe (cit. fn. 50), vol. 3, p. 108–116; and ›Werther‹, whose protagonist is quietly amused when an “enlightened” visitor scolds Lotte for encouraging superstition in children just a week after having one of his own children baptized (Letter of 6 Juli 1771, FA 1,8: 72f.).

⁷⁷) ›Venezianische Epigramme‹, no. 66, FA 1,1: 457.

cannot not exist) – and of our need to remain open, even to seemingly gratuitous revelations of truth. To acknowledge this is not to attribute any naïve belief to either Goethe or Heidegger, it is to recognize the prevalence of a common paradigm and elements of a common discourse in their writings – their shared advocacy of openness to the world. Both men knew that revelation and concealment, like Being and nothingness, are intimately intertwined. Both took pleasure in paradox and in the aporias of their intellectual inheritance, and both knew that culture is a “trübes” medium, which conceals as well as reveals: “Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben” (Faust, line 4727).

But why is there life at all? Why is Faust not annihilated in the end – not brought crashing down “zu Grunde” – as Mephistopheles thinks all things should be? Why does the curtain of Goethe's *Faust* not close on a scene of blood-curdling destruction, as in the 1587 chapbook and, with only a little less goriness, in Marlowe's ›Tragical History‹? The usual answer is that Goethe, following Lessing, children of the Enlightenment both, could not condemn Faust's desire to know and experience, even though his titanic striving lead to tragic consequences. This answer, however, takes for granted what Mephistopheles (disarmingly, in light of his frank and almost endearing frustration) disputes: the givenness and priority of Being and a world in which some *Übermensch* may prevail.

Heidegger takes up the question: “Warum ist überhaupt Seiendes und nicht vielmehr Nichts?”⁷⁸) Leibniz had posed this same question, and answered: “Nihil est sine ratione”, which Heidegger translates as “Nichts ist ohne Grund” (GA 10: 3) and interprets it as meaning: “Nichts ist ohne warum” (GA 10: 53) – before pondering truths generated by shifts of word stress (from “Nichts ist ohne Grund” to “Nichts ist ohne Grund” = “Jedes Seiende (als Seiendes) hat einen Grund” – GA 10: 60). Whatever is has its sufficient ground,⁷⁹) including the insatiable inquirer after this ground: *der Mensch*.

Heidegger finds food for thought in a line from ›Der Cherubinische Wandersmann‹ by Johannes Scheffler (Angelus Silesius), as did Hegel and Leibniz before him. Scheffler's line reads: “Die Ros' ist ohn' warum, sie blühet weil sie blühet”,⁸⁰) which Heidegger takes to mean not that the rose is ungrounded or lacking a sufficient reason, but only that, unlike *der menschliche Verstand*, a rose has no need to inquire about its ground (GA 10: 56f.). “Die anderen irdischen Lebewesen leben zwar durch Gründe und Ursachen, aber niemals *nach* Gründen” (63). It is human

⁷⁸) At the end of ›Was ist Metaphysik‹ and again in ›Einführung in die Metaphysik‹. – Both Goethe and Heidegger regard Being and Nothingness as implying each other – which is a paradox beyond the truths afforded by logical propositions.

⁷⁹) Sufficient not in the sense that it “gerade noch ausreicht, um etwas als ein Seiendes so zu halten, daß es nicht sogleich in Nichts zerfällt. Der zureichende Grund ist jener, der dem Seienden dasjenige zu- und darreicht, was es in den Stand setzt, sein volles Wesen, d. h. die perfectio zu erfüllen” (GA 10: 105).

⁸⁰) This continues: “Sie acht nicht ihrer selbst, fragt nicht, ob man sie siehet” (GA 10: 53–57; see JOHANNES SCHEFFLER (Angelus Silesius), *Sämtliche Poetische Werke*, ed. HANS LUDWIG HELD, 3 vols, Munich: Hanser 1949–1952, vol. 3, p. 39, No. 289.

beings who ask “why,” not roses. “Why me?” asks the cancer patient, causing hospitals to post comforting responses to this most frequently asked question. Among E. E. Cummings’s ›Fairy Tales‹ is “The Man who said ‘Why’.” In Phillip Roth’s ›Nemesis‹ the narrator Arnie has no time for Bucky’s Why and calls him “this maniac of the why.” Heidegger’s question is: “Warum ist überhaupt Seiendes und nicht vielmehr Nichts?” It’s in the nature of Dasein to ask why, although we might do better to emulate the rose’s care-lessness. Heidegger ponders verses by Goethe: “Wie? Wann? und wo? – Die Götter bleiben stumm! | Du, halte dich ans Weil und frage nicht Warum?” (GA 10: 185).⁸¹⁾ Heidegger seems to agree. “Gods do not answer letters.”⁸²⁾ And Being may or may not oblige *Dasein’s* demand for a rationale. Let it be.

⁸¹⁾ ALBRECHT SCHÖNE reads “Warum?” as “Wozu?” i. e., as an expression of militancy toward a teleological world view (FA 1,2: 1006f).

⁸²⁾ JOHN UPDIKE, writing on Oct. 22, 1960 about Ted Williams’s refusal to come out of the dugout and tip his hat to the cheering crowd after hitting a home run in his very last at-bat on September 28, 1960, as quoted in: Picked-Up Pieces: Moments from a half century of Updike, in: The New Yorker, Feb. 9 & 16, 2009, p. 67.