The Exposure of Grace: Dimensionality in Late Heidegger

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Abstract
Heidegger's reflections on grace culminate in the years 1949–54 where grace names a figure for the ineluctable exposure of existence. Heidegger rethinks the relationship between what exists and the world in which it is found as one that is always open to grace. For Heidegger, this world is what he terms the "dimension" between earth and sky. The relationship is only possible where existence is no longer construed as a self-contained presence but instead is thought as something between presence and absence. In this essay, Heidegger's references to grace in five contexts are considered: the 1949 Bremen lectures, the 1951 essay "...Poetically Dwells Man...," the 1953 "Dialogue on Language," the 1951 lecture on "Language," and the 1954 speech at his nephew's ordination.

Keywords
Heidegger, grace, charis, exposure, Christianity

Grace names a constitutive feature of mortality.¹ The term features most prominently in Heidegger’s work during the late forties and early fifties, the period when he articulated his fullest conception of mortal existence as an earthly existence.² Existence takes place upon this earth and under the sky,

¹ What I am terming “grace” is something of a composite from three different terms that Heidegger tends to treat synonymously throughout the period in question. Grace as an unwarranted bestowal (die Gunst), as a sparing mercy (die Gnade), and as favor (die Huld), all these terms are taken up for the role they play in relating our mortal condition to its outside or “dimension,” as will be shown in what follows.
² The other locus for considerations of grace in Heidegger’s thought is during the period of the late teens and early twenties. A letter to Elisabeth Blochmann from 1919 speaks of “graced moments [begnadeten Augenblicken]” in life and of the “secret and grace-character of all life” (Martin Heidegger and Elisabeth Blochmann, Briefwechsel: 1918–1969, ed. Joachim W. Storck [Marbach am Neckar: Marbacher Schriften, 1989], 14). This letter is situated in the context of
and this middle ground is the domain of grace, if grace there be. To understand grace means understanding this middle ground, or between, as the “dimension” of mortal existence. Grace, in being bound to this dimension, dissolves the fixity or self-enclosure of that existence and, as it were, inclines the dimension of our existence to grace. That is to say, earthly existence is always uprooted, never secure, never certain, always incalculable, always inclined to a grace unwarranted. Upsetting our mortal abode is the economy of grace, a grace that lets us exist without warrant or ground. Grace figures predominantly, though covertly, in Heidegger’s work of the late forties and early fifties, as I hope to show. To do this, I will simply gloss the most impor-


3) A concern for grace is operative not only in the teens and early twenties but also in the mid-twenties, in Heidegger’s 1924 discussion of “The Problem of Sin in Luther,” in Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to ‘Being and Time’ and Beyond, ed. and trans. John Van Buren, 105–10, as well as in the late twenties, as evinced by another letter to Elisabeth Blochmann from 1929 where Heidegger writes that “in everything essential our heart must hold itself open for grace” (Heidegger and Blochmann, Briefwechsel, 32). It is also to be found in the mid- to late thirties in Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning), 1936–38, in a passage considered in note 6 below (GA 65: 277/195), and in Heidegger’s first Hölderlin lecture course of 1939, where he speaks of “joy in the great meaning of the Greek word χάρις—grace
tant formulations of grace in five of Heidegger’s lectures, essays, and speeches from 1949–54.

**Turning**

Heidegger’s first speaking engagement after the Second World War, his four-lecture cycle in Bremen (GA 79) from 1949 entitled *Insight Into That Which Is*, shows the pivotal role that grace plays in his thinking. In fact, it could not be more pivotal, showing itself as it does at the center of Heidegger’s darkest and most rigorous assessment of contemporary technology, “The Danger,” and again in the concluding pages of the last lecture in the cycle, “The Turn.” Grace is thus tied from the outset with the turning of the danger facing our world. Or should we say the danger facing being, the danger that is being, since this is the explicit concern of the lecture, the way that being itself must divide itself and pursue itself with the danger of transforming all that exists into the standing reserve of an endlessly circulating inventory of replaceable items. “There are indications” that this is taking place, Heidegger notes, “Only we do not attend to them” (GA 79: 56). These include our experience of death, of pain, and of poverty. It is in regard to the second of these, our pain, that grace first enters the discussion. It does so seemingly from out of the blue, in rather compact terms and cramped formulations, certainly rewarding further elucidation:

Immeasurable suffering creeps and rages over the earth. The flood of suffering rises ever higher. But the essence of pain conceals itself. Pain is the rift in which the basic outline [Grundriss] of the . . . world is sketched. From this basic rift [Grundriss], that magnitude that is too great for humans receives its greatness. In the rift of pain, what is highly granted [hoch Gewährte] guards its perseverance. The rift of pain rends the veiled procession of grace [der Gunst] into an unneeded arrival of favor [der Huld]. Everywhere we are assailed by innumerable and measureless suffering. But we are unpained, not appropriated [vereignet] to the essence of pain. (GA 79: 57)

Pain is a rift that reveals the world. Right away we see that there is nothing “internal” about such a pain, it is no inner sensation. Instead this pain would

[Anmut], magic and therein an unapproachable dignity” (GA 39: 25). A reference to grace from 1941 (GA 6.2: 388/EP 24) is discussed in the section “Ordination” below. Grace thus accompanies Heidegger’s reflections in every decade from the teens to the fifties, at the least.
be a tear that splits us open onto the world. A few years later Heidegger will write that it is this exposure of pain that makes our moods of joy and sadness possible in the first place (see GA 12: 222/OWL 153). This disposed exposure is what we run from with palliatives and appeasements, always endeavoring to preserve the integrity of the self, of the ego. Through the exposure of pain, however, we encounter that which lies beyond ourselves, the “magnitude that is too great for humans.” But in this exposure something else is at stake as well. In this exposition, the “highly granted” (hoch Gewährte) guards (wahrt) its perseverance and continuance (sein Währen). What is this that is “highly granted” to us while yet preserving itself? It is grace. Our exposure in pain tears into grace. It rends the veil from grace and makes the contact that reaches us as favor. Otherwise put, in the exposure of pain we are opened onto a beyond. That beyond would otherwise be veiled from us. The exposure of pain rends the veil that covers it simply by bringing ourselves into a relationship with it. It is no longer foreign to us. It no longer draws past us in its procession. It graces to be touched by us. Or rather, it is now an unneeded arrival of favor. Unneeded because at the moment that we would touch it, it has already touched us. Or when it would touch us, we have already touched it. The reciprocality is at the heart of the phenomenon in question. We touch it, it touches us, but we do not have it all. It does not give itself to us entirely. There could be no gift, if that were so. In giving itself to us, in other words, as arriving as an unneeded bestowal of favor, it preserves itself. Grace as what is most highly granted to us, grace as an outside for us to which we are exposed in pain, this preserves itself as outside, as beyond, by guarding itself from our total appropriation. It guards itself by giving itself, because in this giving there is always something that remains ungiven. We shall have cause to return to this logic of grace.

In the closing pages of the lecture cycle, grace returns. It occurs towards the end of a discussion of Hölderlin’s famed utterance, “But where the danger is, there grows / what saves as well” [Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst / Das Rettende auch] as something of a philosophical elaboration of this. The danger, once
again, is being’s own separation from and pursuit of itself with the threat of its own forgetting. Let us note the strangeness of this situation but also some of the most immediate consequences. First, the forgetting of being is nothing that would fall to humans or even to being from somewhere outside of being. Being entails its own forgetting. Second, this means that there is never any being, if the location be permitted, without this attendant forgetting, i.e., there is never any purely present being. Turning to the passage in question, the concern is once again with giving or, rather, in this instance, with refusal, though the two are not to be rigorously distinguished:

The self-refusal of the truth [Wahrheit] of beyng, pursuing itself with forgetfulness, shelters a yet unwarranted grace [die noch ungewährte Gunst]: that this self-pursuit turn itself, that in such a turn the forgetfulness turn itself about and becomes guardianship [Wahrnis] of the essence of beyng, instead of letting this essence lapse into disguise. In the essence of danger there essences and dwells a grace, namely the grace of the turn of the forgetfulness of beyng into the truth of beyng. In the essence of danger, where it is as the danger, there is the turn to guardianship, there is this guardianship itself, there is what is saving of beyng. (GA 79: 73)

Even in the midst of being’s own pursuit of itself with its own forgetting, there is grace. Or perhaps we should rather say, because of being’s self-pursuit there is grace.6 That the danger is being itself, this means both that being is utterly exposed to this danger, that there is nowhere it can hide from itself, and also that the danger can never annihilate being but only ever push its truth deeper into forgetting. Being can always drive itself deeper into

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6) In Heidegger’s Philosophy of Religion: From God to the Gods (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 168–69, Ben Vedder considers a passage from the Contributions entitled “Nature and Earth” (GA 65: 277/195) (translation modified; hereafter: tm) where Heidegger writes that, since the Greeks, “φύσις quickly became a being, and then even the counterpart to ‘grace,’ and, after this demoting, was fully exposed to the compulsion of calculating machination and economy.” Vedder then claims that “[t]his means that the modern understanding of grace, if it is understood as separate from nature and calculative thinking, is a result of the forgetfulness-of-being. The cleavage between knowledge and grace in this sense is a symptom of nihilism and even stimulates it….Grace, as a concept opposite to natural and philosophical knowledge, is made possible by the forgottenness of being.” What the passage from “The Turn” cited above gives us to think is that this separation of grace from nature may itself be necessary for the event of grace. In the language of the Bremen lectures, then, we could say that beyng sets after itself with the forgetfulness of its essence, and this forgetfulness shows itself in an oppositional conception of nature and grace. But insofar as that forgetfulness is itself part of beyng’s essencing, that very opposition of nature/grace is itself requisite for the grace that we are concerned with in the above.
forgetfulness, to be sure, and limitlessly so. But in this is likewise the glimmer of a grace yet ungranted. The impossibility of its complete forgetting is simultaneously the persistence of its memory. These are not two sides of some strange coin but, instead, a way of thinking the partial and never purely present existence of that which is. Forgetfulness is the “disguising” of this fact with a dissembling objectivity. This fragile way of showing oneself (of “essencing”) is nothing ever simply apart from the danger, but always itself endangered through and through. This essencing and persisting occurs in the midst of the danger. Recognizing this is an entrance [Einkehr] whereby the human is now addressed by what is. When the particular being is no longer construed as self-contained and purely present, it is able to reach ecstatically past itself and reach us, painfully touching us with its plight. In our exposure to the beings that reach out to us, we become the guardians of being, forgetfulness becomes guardianship, where to be a guardian is to be painfully attuned to the danger to being by being itself. Danger can only transpire in this fashion, and that is our grace. In the years that follow, these stark and seemingly abstract reflections are recontextualized in terms of human dwelling, language, the things of the world, and the homeland.

Friendliness

In Heidegger’s 1951 meditation on human dwelling that borrows its title, “…Poetically Dwells Man…,” from a verse of poetry by Hölderlin, Heidegger takes Hölderlin’s peculiar poem bearing that line, the poem “In lovely blue…,” as a guide for his reflections on grace. The verse that serves as Heidegger’s title comes at the end of a passage reflecting on the human condition as one of suffering and toil. It reads:

When life is plaintive toil, is it possible
for a person to look up and say: even in these conditions
I still want to exist?

[Darf, wenn lauter Mühe das Leben, ein Mensch
Aufschauen und sagen: so
Will ich auch seyn?] 7

Hölderlin’s answer is unequivocal: Yes [Ja]. The woes and toils of life are never so strong as to overcome our human spirit, we might say, and we pride ourselves on that. But let us note that to never be conquerable by pain means, at the same time, to never be conquered by pain, to be able to bear any pain or, rather, to have to do so, to be surrendered over to an endless pain that will never conquer us and never bring the desired relief of our demise. When toil cannot defeat us, we suffer the awful prospect of an endless toil. We should be beaten down, we should be annihilated, but we are not. Instead, we exist. We even want it.

In Heidegger’s reading, the toil of life occurs within a world completely beholden to utility. Toil itself, work, labor, is productive and useful, and for this reason remunerated in sometimes greater, sometimes lesser degrees. “Only in the realm of sheer toil,” Heidegger writes, “does man toil for ‘merits’ [um ‘Verdienst’]. There he obtains them for himself in abundance. But at the same time, in this realm, man is allowed to look up, out of it” (GA 7: 198/PLT 218). Only in such a realm of sheer toil (i.e., our world), does one work to earn. The world of sheer toil is the world of exchange and recompensation, where one thing is replaceable by another of equal value, where everything comes under the sway of value and thus finds itself an ersatz for another; it is the world where “no good deed goes unpunished,” as those only lightly poisoned by its fumes proclaim. This cycling of valuation and replacement (constituting what Heidegger terms at this time the “standing reserve” [Bestand]) compresses the differences and distinctions of things. In sheer toil, the field of vision is restricted, possibilities seem closed, and the world diminished. The world of toil closes in on itself, and we accommodate ourselves to a slow suffocation.

Yet even in the midst of sheer toil, however compensated, we are not trapped. We are able to “look up” (aufzuschauen). The simple gesture of looking up removes us from the closure of toil. Or rather, it does not remove us so much as allow us to see the impossibility of closure. In looking up we learn the lesson of limitation, that every boundary that encloses, at the same time is an interface that exposes. Nothing is ever so closed for us; there is always (only) relation; and this is a staple of Heidegger’s thinking, perhaps even his only thought. Looking up allows us to see our position as the occupancy of a middle ground, or a between, the dis-enclosed space that Heidegger terms the dimension: “The upward glance measures out [durchmift] the between of sky and earth. This between is apportioned [zugemessen] to the dwelling of man. We now name the measuring out so apportioned, i.e. extended towards us [zugereichte], by which the between of sky and earth is open, the dimension.
It does not emerge from the sky and earth being turned toward each other. This turning-toward rests much more for its part in the dimension” (GA 7: 198/PLT 218; tm). The between that is appropriate for our dwelling is allotted to us, meted out to us. We receive that dwelling, we place ourselves within its extent, when we look up. Looking up dislodges us from our routinized and stabilized identity, showing us another side to our limits. The reciprocal relation of the allotment and our looking up, the reciprocal measuring involved, composes the di-mension.

If this measuring were something performed with a tape measure, there would be neither dislodging nor exposure, only a claustrophobic determination and closure. Some fifteen years earlier, Heidegger had described scientific explanation in terms of its relation to an unknown, “Every science, even the so-called ‘descriptive’ ones, explains: What is unknown [das Unbekannte] in the region is led back, in various ways and ranges, to something known [ein Bekannten] and understandable” (GA 65: 146/101). The measuring of the dimension, as Heidegger now understands it, is something of the reverse. The measure that Hölderlin proposes is Godhood, prompting him to ask, “Is God unknown [unbekannt]? Is he manifest like the sky? This / I sooner believe.” While it is easy to read this as an exclusive option, either God is unknown or he is manifest, with Hölderlin opting for the latter, Heidegger reads the two questions together. He writes, “‘Is God unknown?’ Manifestly not. For if he were unknown, how could he, being unknown, ever be the measure? Yet—and this is what we must now listen to and keep in mind—for Hölderlin God, as the one who he is, is unknown and it is just as this Unknown One that he is the measure for the poet” (GA 7: 200–201/PLT 220). Contra scientific explanation, for poetic measuring, the unknown is the measure. But this unknown is never completely unknown. If that were so, we would not be speaking about it; Hölderlin would not have remarked on it. Instead, this is an unknown that nonetheless shows itself, a manifest unknown, a revelation of a concealment, as Heidegger discusses it: “The measure consists in the way in which the god who remains unknown, is revealed as such by the sky. God’s appearance through the sky consists in an unveiling that lets us see what conceals itself, but lets us see it not by seeking to wrest what is concealed out of its concealedness, but only by protecting the concealed in its self-concealment” (GA 7: 200/PLT 220–21; tm). This is the measure by which our mortal, earthly dimension is unfurled, a measure that allows what shows itself to show itself as concealed. What exists in this way is neither fully present nor fully absent; its concealment is that of a constitutive non-presence that serves to splay the thing onto the world. One does not bring the measure of a
known to what is unknown (and thus arrogate it as known). Rather one takes the measure (Maßnahme), receiving it from an unknown that reveals itself as unknown (this cannot be overemphasized), and with this measure apportions out the dimension. This measuring, seeing the concealment revealed in all things, letting that concealment remain concealed, allowing these things their entry onto world, makes up the true geo-metry, the figuring of our earthly abode. This measuring Heidegger calls poetizing.8

Returning to Hölderlin’s poem, the question of whether, in the midst of unending toil, it was still possible to wish to exist was answered directly: yes. The lines that follow qualify that response:

As long as friendliness, that pure thing, still endures in the heart
the human does not measure himself with Godhood haplessly.
Is God unknown? Is he manifest like the sky? This
I sooner believe. It is the measure of man.
Fully deserved, even poetically, dwells
the human on this earth.

[. . . So lange die Freundlichkeit noch
Am Herzen, die Reine, dauert, misst
Nicht unglücklich der Mensch sich
Mit der Gottheit. Ist unbekannt Gott?
Ist er offenbar wie der Himmel? Dieses
Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnet
Der Mensch auf diese Erde.]9

8) This poetic manner of dwelling in the world can be neglected, of course. In the text, Heidegger notes that the human is first human in this measuring out, adding that “[t]his is why he can indeed block, trim, and disfigure this measuring out [Durchmessen], but he can never evade it” (GA 7: 199/PLT 218; tm). A marginal note to the manuscript at the word “disfigure” reads “‘unpoetic’” (GA 7: 199 n. j.). In the discussion after a 1952 reading of this lecture, Heidegger explained that “[w]e think unpoetically, that is nothing negative, it is related to what is poetic” (GA 76: 390). The 1970 text “The Dwelling of Humans” develops the point at some length, considering the role of the “unpoetic” in Hölderlin’s poetry, among other issues. There Heidegger writes, “In the ‘unpoetic’ the ‘poetic’ does not vanish; far rather: the ‘finite’ is disregarded, the ‘peaceful’ destroyed, the ‘bound’ dissolved, the ‘restraining’ perverted into what is let loose. All these say: what gives the measure [das Maßgebende] is not admitted, the taking of the measure [die Maßnahme] is neglected. The region of inclination [Neigungsgegend] is buried” (GA 13: 218). The poetic persists in the midst of this.

One can enter the dimension as long as friendliness remains in the heart. As Heidegger notes, “friendliness” is Hölderlin’s “masterful translation of the Greek word χάρις,” or grace (GA 7: 207–8/PLT 236; tm). χάρις is typically understood as grace or favor, either displayed or felt. Heidegger himself translates it in this manner, as Huld. Hölderlin names the two sides of grace, its bestowal and its receipt, in one word that names a bond: friendliness. Heidegger cautions us that Hölderlin does not locate this friendliness “in” the heart, as I have rendered it above. Instead, this friendliness is found “at” the heart: “Hölderlin states in a turn of phrase he liked to use: ‘at the heart’ [‘am Herzen’], not: in the heart [im Herzen]; ‘at the heart,’ that is, arriving with the dwelling essence of the human, arriving at the heart as the claim of a measure such that this itself turns to that measure” (GA 7: 208/PLT 226–27; tm). The “arrival of grace [Ankunft der Huld]” (GA 7: 208/PLT 227; tm) only happens when we have entered the dimension and have left the closure of both utility and even our own interiority behind. We do not receive grace without inclining toward it. Grace is our receipt of the measure, our acceptance of unending toil without redemption, the abolition of other worlds but this one earth. Only in this way is our dwelling deserved and fully warranted, fully warranted by the promise to never be done paying it off or, rather, to never take it as remunerable. Thus it is a strange merit that we have earned, a warrant bound to an infinite task and an infinite demand, to a never ending, never arriving, ever unknown measure.

**Thriving, Blooming**

The 1953 “Dialogue on Language” returns to these very remarks on χάρις at the conclusion of “…Poetically Dwells Man…”. The Japanese interlocutor cites that essay directly and says that in χάρις there speaks an arriving, to wit, “the blowing arrival of the stillness of delight” (GA 12: 135/OWL 47; tm).11

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10) The reciprocal character of grace is attested in the shades of meaning in the Greek word. Liddell, Scott, and Jones specify the first two senses of grace as “in objective sense, outward grace or favour, beauty” and “in subjective sense, grace or favour felt, whether on the part of the doer or the receiver,” a reciprocality reiterated in the following two senses “in concrete sense, a favour done or returned” and as “gratification, delight” (A Greek-English Lexicon, 9th ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], s.v. χάρις).

The researcher in the dialogue agrees, but also emphasizes the character of χάρις as a bringing forth, as “that which brings here forth [her-vor-bringende],” noting, “Our German word poetize [dichten] says the same” (GA 12: 135/OWL 46; tm). We thus see again the reciprocality of grace. It names the confluence of what arrives with a bringing forth. Yet while χάρις can be said to bring forth, this does not make it a productive activity like work. All that χάρις brings forth is the reception of an arriving. The “work” of χάρις does not produce anything, assert itself into anything, but instead receives something. It receives “delight” (das Entzücken), a term clarified by the researcher, “Delight [Das Entzücken] you understand literally as withdrawing [Entziehen], pulling away—namely, into stillness” (GA 12: 133/OWL 44; tm). χάρις would consequently be the arrival of some kind of withdrawal.

With this we touch another structural element of Heidegger’s thought. All giving requires withdrawal. For the gift to reach the recipient, the donor must detach from the gift, abandon it. But for the gift to be a gift it must remain tied to the donor. The detachment cannot be complete. Were the recipient to possess the gift entirely as his/her own, it would no longer be a gift, but something simply taken for granted (though only in the colloquial sense, since it is precisely its gift character that is being overlooked). Instead the donor withdraws in the giving, but only in order to create the distance that the gift bridges. The recipient, too, acknowledging the gift, receiving it, creates this distance. The gift is the material testament to this relationship; more than this, it marks its creation. The gift is simply its condensation. The withdrawal of giving extends a relationship. χάρις, grace, is the name for this contact, for the persistence of contact in the midst of withdrawal.

In the dialogue with the Japanese interlocutor, Heidegger thinks this contact as a message (Botschaft) sent to us. As the inquirer explains, in somewhat cryptic terms, “grace [Huld] itself is poetic, is the authentically poetical, the welling up [das Quellen] of the message of the twofold’s disclosure” (GA 12: 135/OWL 46; tm). χάρις, grace, is the bringing here forth (identified as poetic) that receives the message of a disclosed “twofold” (Zwiefalt). Fortunately, the conversation partners explain this twofold in some detail, in terms of the thinking of Being in Heidegger’s Being and Time: “What mattered then, and still does, is to bring out the Being of beings—though no longer in the manner of metaphysics, but such that Being itself will shine out, Being

itself—that is to say: the presence of present beings, the twofold [Zwiefalt] of the two in virtue of their simple onefold [Einfalt]. This is what claims the human to its essence” (GA 12: 116/OWL 30; tm). The reference to “Being itself” should not mislead us into thinking that Heidegger now seeks some abstraction apart from the ontic. What is said here is that being itself is precisely a relationship between being and beings, the presencing of what presences. This is a relationship of neither two nor one, but of both, a one that moves beyond itself—the particular being that is nonetheless in being without itself being being—and a two that is likewise one—the particular being is so tied to what lies beyond it, so tied to being, that it is impossible without it. Neither two nor one, being is relation, what stretches between them. The twofold of the onefold is an attempt to name the way that each particular being is an interface upon being, how being connects beings without being reducible to any or even all of them, as the relation of separation and joining between them.12 This could not be disclosed to us, this way of being of beings, were it not for grace, were we not able to take delight in withdrawal.

Grace is said to be the “source” of these tidings. This role for grace is better understood through the interlocutors ruminations on the Japanese word koto. The Japanese partner has struggled to express an idea apart from Western metaphysical oppositions of the sensible and the supersensible. For the Japanese, we are told, these are better spoken of in terms of Iro and Ku, “Iro means more than color and the sensibly perceptible of any sort. Ku, the open, the emptiness of the sky, means more than the supersensible” (GA 12: 136/OWL 46; tm).13 The Japanese cannot specify what this “more” consists in, but it is essential to the thought at stake here. Iro and ku articulate the way of being of what exists as something shining, colored, out in the open, under the sky. The resonances with a Heideggerian thinking of earthly or finite appearing are unmistakable. And this is where koto comes in, because in the

12) For an alternate, provocative reading of Heidegger’s twofold, see Gumbrecht, “Martin Heidegger,” 91–93.

13) In Heidegger on East-West Dialogue: Anticipating the Event, Lin Ma explains that the form/emptiness relationship articulated here is indebted to the famous Buddhist formula “form [shiki] is emptiness [ku], emptiness is form,” with Heidegger possibly misreading the Buddhist term shiki for iro in his notes. She elaborates the distinction as follows, “Form is the most basic of the five aggregates [major Buddhist categories]. It encompasses both visual forms such as color and shape, as well as nonvisual ones such as sound, odor, and taste. Emptiness is the fundamental nature of reality. It signifies the absence of a self-causing and invariant self-nature or self-hood in anything or person… Emptiness is present from the very moment of the conception of form. It does not exist apart from the phenomena it qualifies, and is not to be sought as something separate” (182).
conversation, the Japanese interlocutor now has an intimation of “from where the interplay of each to the other occurs,” naming this “[k]oto, the event of the clearing message of the grace that brings here forth” (GA 12: 136/OWL 46–47; tm). Ku is not emptiness because it takes place from out of koto; iro is not form because it takes place from out of koto. In each case what occurs within the space of koto is a reciprocal, participatory seepage, as it were, of the thing past its boundaries (color is apposite here insofar as color shines and radiates beyond the limits of the colored thing) and of openness onto the thing. This could not occur in a void but only in an emptiness that is no longer empty (simply by virtue of this radiance) but, rather, can only occur in something like a sky, which names now a medium for the streaming radiance of the thing. Both the body and its fitting space are reciprocally in need of one another. They name the dimension of mortal existence. Koto names this, too, and in so doing it names the message of grace (the twofold disclosure).

Grace is again the interface of the limited with its beyond. Only in this sense is it a “source,” as the English translation would have it, of the twofold’s disclosure, not as a fixed point from which something begins and before which there is nothing. Rather, it is the source as spring (die Quelle), the activity of which Heidegger names as the action of grace, das Quellen, a welling up. A spring is not a beginning, but a transition, it is not water out of nothing, but the site where that water crosses a threshold of below to above and springs up between earth and sky. And it is this stretched relation that appeals to us and places its claim upon us. The interface by which the thing passes itself and enters the dimension allows it to reach us and address us; our position there as exposed renders us addressable (an address is always already assigned to us). Grace brings forth the touching appeal of the twofold. Trading on the reciprocality of it, we might also say grace receives being.

Koto is the medium for the message of grace. It shelters all “that needs the protection of the thriving and blooming” (GA 12: 136/OWL 47; tm), for only in this dimension can that take place upon the earth and under the sky. It protects by letting the things remain “more” than themselves, as the Japanese interlocutor struggled to articulate. Language is likewise found here, the central concern of the “Dialogue.” Kotoba is the name for language, the “blossom petals that stem from koto,” or rather “blossom petals that thrive out of the clearing message of the grace that brings here forth” (GA 12: 136/OWL 47, tm, 145/53; tm).14

14 In “Afterwords—Language”, in Heidegger and Asian Thought, Graham Parkes ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 213–16, Parkes points out in a discussion of kotoba that the sense of language operative here is one in which “to speak is tantamount to to do” with
When Tezuka Tomio met with Heidegger in Freiburg in 1954, they spoke of kotoba. Tezuka explained it as the way in which “things happen and become language.”\(^{15}\) He notes Heidegger’s response, “This explanation seemed to fit well with Heidegger’s ideas. Taking notes on a piece of paper that was to hand, he said: ‘Very interesting! In that case, Herr Tezuka, the Japanese word for “language,” kotoba, can mean Ding [thing].’”\(^{16}\) Words, too, shine and thrive upon the earth and under the sky, beyond themselves, as petals of the dimension, lips of the flower of the mouth.

**The Tree of Graces**

Grace ventilates the space of earthly existence. That grace lets grow and thrive is claimed likewise in a lecture given at about the same time as “…Poetically Dwells Man…,” the 1950–51 lecture “Language,” which takes as its guide a poem from Georg Trakl entitled “Winter Evening” featuring the verse:

Golden blooms the tree of graces
from the cool sap of the earth

\(\text{[Golden blüht der Baum der Gnaden}}\)
\(\text{Aus der Erde kühlem Saft]}\)\(^{17}\)

Here the tree of graces stakes out the space of the between, mediating the co-belonging of earth and sky: “The tree is rooted soundly in the earth. Thus it thrives in a blooming that opens itself to the blessing of the sky” (\(\text{GA 12: 21/PLT 198; tm}\)). The tree “thrives” like the petals of koto, the unfurling of the bud whereby what once was concealed now exposes itself to the outside and, as a blooming, does so in a radiant display. Blooming is this entrance into radiance and the offering of self. The tree offers itself to the blessing of the sky. Heidegger continues the thought in the language of “…Poetically Dwells

\(\text{koto}\) being the word for both “speech” and “matter,” such that “[l]anguage as koto would then be that ‘thing’ which calls for thinking, the matter at hand as one plies the craft of thought” (215).


\(^{16}\) Ibid.

Man...": the tree “measures out [durchmißt] the intoxication of blooming and the sobriety of the nurturing sap” (ibid). Within this between, the earth does not simply shoot forth the tree; the space is already prepared for it; it is fitted into this; there is nothing abrupt or forced in its emergence. What is earthly grows at a pace, with composure. By holding itself back in this way, with reserve, withdrawing, it exposes itself to the sky and to what the sky might bring, “The restrained growth of the earth and the dispensation of the sky belong to each other” (ibid; tm). The tree is a figure of extension through the between, a figure of grace.

“The poem names the tree of graces. Its sound [gediegenes] blooming harbors the fruit that falls to us unwarranted [unverdient zufallende Frucht]: the saving holy that is well disposed towards mortals [das rettend Heilige, das den Sterblichen hold ist]” (GA 12: 21/PLT 198–99; tm). Dwelling in this between we are subject to what befalls us. When everything is not calculated and known in advance, when there remains an unknown, there is likewise room for surprise and chance (der Zufall) to fall to us. The fruit that befalls us from the tree of graces is inclined to us, almost friendly to us, we might say. It is *hold*, a term closely related to *Huld* as grace. But what fruit is this?

Heidegger’s explication of Trakl’s poem turns upon an account of this between presented by the tree. To be in the between is to be in the middle, in the midst, to be among, in German: unter. But the middle is no melting away of distinctions, it is not a space of homogeneity and identity, as was the threat of the work world. On the contrary, the between is the space of singularity and distinction, where beings are cut apart from each other, but in so being cut are likewise opened to each other. This cutting (scheiden) of beings from the other beings they are among (unter) articulates the between as a realm of difference (Unterschied). The difference in question is the difference between things and world. “The middle of the two is intimacy [Innigkeit],” i.e., friendliness (GA 12: 22/PLT 199).

The intimacy of thing and world is of course reciprocal. For their part, the relation of things to world is termed a gesture, “The things gesture [gebärden] world” (GA 12: 21/PLT 199; tm). As things, these are not the stabilized and foundational joists of the world. World is not placed atop them like a house upon its foundation. The things gesticulate the world. In the “Dialogue on Language,” gesture is presented as subsisting “less in the visible movement of the hand, nor primarily in the stance of the body”; instead it is “the gathering of a bearing [eines Tragens]” (GA 12: 102/OWL 18). Things as gesturing world would thus gather together a bearing of world, but what does this mean? We think of gestures as meaningful movements, but Heidegger makes clear that
gestures are different from “ciphers, all of which are native to metaphysics” 
(GA 12: 111/26; tm). Ciphers would be univocal symbols of something else; 
not so gestures. The discussion of gesture culminates in the following 
exchange between the inquirer and the Japanese interlocutor drawing out 
what we might term the reciprocal nature of gesture as a bearing:

i: what truly bears, only bears itself toward us . . .
j: . . . though we bear only our share to its encounter.
i: While that which bears itself toward us has already borne our counterbearing into the 
gift it bears for us.
j: Thus you call bearing or gesture: the gathering which originally unites within itself what 
we bear to it and what it bears to us.
(GA 12: 102/OWL 18–19).

Gesture is thus an encounter where what is borne in the gesture is met by 
what authentically bears. Gestures do not issue out into a void but are met by 
a world already in place, bearing itself towards the one gesturing. Gesture is a 
way of responding to the bearing that comes to us. But we would miss the 
truth of gesture if we left it at this oppositional stage. Instead we are also part 
of the world that bears itself towards us; thus it has already accommodated us 
in what it bears to us. Nothing is borne to us that we cannot withstand; oth-
erwise we would be annihilated and thus no longer at issue. We can bear 
everything, and this is again our condemnation to the world of toil. Gesture 
is our agreement to this and our acceptance of the play. Only in this accep-
tance as gesture is there this gathering; only in this acceptance is there the 
bearing of ourselves and of world at all. To say that things gesture the world, 
then, is to say that they present themselves so as to be met by the world such 
that this world accommodates them to itself. It is to say that they throw 
themselves forth in such a manner that they are simultaneously addressable 
by world. Things expose themselves in their bearing and let themselves be 
met. The world is not so heavy as to need any other support than this.

The world’s relation to the things, for its part, Heidegger describes with 
the verb gön nen, a relative of die Gunst, grace, meaning to grant (heard now 
as to grace us with the “presence” of): “Things gesticulate world. World graces 
us with things” (GA 12: 21/PLT 199; tm). The granting of the world and the 
gesturing of things name a single relationship. Thing and world are knotted 
together such that each is bound to the other without being identical to it. 
This reciprocity is again the spacing of grace.

In Heidegger’s account of the verse of Trakl’s poem we are concerned with, 
these lines “expressly bid the world to come” (GA 12: 21/PLT 199). The fruit
that falls from the tree of grace are the things themselves. To be in the
between, between earth and sky, in mortal existence, is to be among the
things and in the world. The fruit that falls to us from this dimension-
spanning tree is “the saving holy that is well disposed towards mortals” (GA
12: 21/PLT 198–99; tm). With this conception of saving, we return to the
relationship between the danger and the salvatory in “The Turn.” The things
that come to us in this world are holy or hale (heil), which is to say that they
are accorded the distance of the holy and need not show themselves fully. They
remain with their constitutive concealment. But they are not completely lost
to us; this concealment is what allows for them to be well disposed to us in the
first place, to inhabit this between with us, and to display themselves to us.

But now we hear of “the fruit that falls to us unwarranted [unverdient]”
(GA 12: 21/PLT 198–99; tm), whereas in “…Poetically Dwells Man…” our
dwelling was found to be “fully warranted” (voll Verdiest). Is this not contra-
dictory? Yes, but only if one remains within the register of an antithetical,
even dichotomous, thinking, precisely the sort of thinking that would be
unable to come to terms with the between, for such a thinking would always
misrepresent the between as derived from the gap between two present
points. Warranted and unwarranted dwelling say the same. Dwelling is both;
it is poetic and unpoetic; as we have seen, dwelling is the taking up of resi-
dence in this between. To dwell is to warrant the unwarranted.

Ordination

In 1954 Heidegger gave a short speech at the ceremony for his nephew Hein-
rich’s ordination into the priesthood.18 The speech is divided into three parts:
an expression of joy, of thankfulness, and a wish. The wish includes a brief
discussion of grace. It begins, “You know from theology the statement: gratia
supponit naturam. Loosely translated this says, Grace [Die Gnade] blooms on
the ground of nature” (GA 16: 489). This theological statement is one that had
accompanied Heidegger from his early beginnings. The notes to a 1918–19
course on “The Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism” (scheduled,
but not held), include comment on the distinction between Protestant and
Catholic faith, where “[t]he ‘holding-to-be-true’ of Catholic faith is founded
entirely otherwise than the fiducia of the reformers” (GA 60: 310/236), the
former being far more theoretical, we might say, then the lived practical life of

18 I am grateful to Thomas Sheehan for calling my attention to this reference.
This leads Heidegger to charge that “[f]rom there also the concept of ‘grace’ differentiates itself, and with it, the entire ‘relationship’ of grace and freedom, nature and grace; and the meaning of the phrase ‘gratia supponit naturam’ [grace presupposes nature]” (GA 60: 310/236; tm).20

The phrase also occurs in a 1941 essay on “Metaphysics as a History of Being” in a discussion of the transformation of truth to certainty. In the history Heidegger sketches, the certainty of salvation and the certainty of representational rationalism go hand-in-hand. God is understood as the purely real (actus purus) and the first cause. Within the realm of causality set in place by this conception of God, the human “must above all bring about his reality by holding fast to the highest good, that is, by faith... Through faith, man is certain of the reality of the highest real being, and thus at the same time also of his own real continuance in eternal bliss” (GA 6.2: 387–88/EP 23). From this it follows that “the highest truth has the character of the certainty of salvation [der Heilsgewißheit]. The essential transformation of truth to the cer-


20) The English translation falsely renders the Latin phrase as “grace underlies nature.” The difference between the Scholastic Catholics and the Lutheran Reformers on the question of nature is succinctly conveyed by McGrath: “Luther’s soteriology of extreme corruption attacks the Scholastic principle, ‘grace does not destroy nature, but presupposes and perfects it’ (Gratia non tollit naturam sed eam supponit et perficit). Scholasticism assumes a substantially intact nature. We do not need to be essentially transformed but only elevated by grace. The Scholastics rationalized this by positing that our original intimacy with God was not essential to our nature, but a supernatural gift, something added on, a donum superadditum. The Fall has brought about the loss of God’s gift of presence, yet the loss of a supernatural gift is not a corruption of nature. What has been given can be lost without any violence to human nature. Therefore the Scholastics argue that the Fall has darkened our intellect and misdirected our will but left our nature intact. Constitutive of this nature is a relationship to God, a natural orientation of the intellect and will to God...Luther reverses this position in order to maximize the urgency of the Redemption: because Adam and Eve’s intimacy with God was a natural state of being, their loss of the divine presence represents a total corruption of nature” (McGrath, Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy, 156). See also the discussion in Hugo Ott, “Martin Heidegger’s Catholic Origins,” American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 69: 2 (1995): 137–56. 152–53. The “private circle” Ott mentions was the ordination ceremony discussed here.
tainty of representational thinking is determined by the essence of Being as *actus purus* [i.e., God]” (GA 6.2: 389/EP 24). Certainty is thus operative in both the supernatural and natural realms, and it is this that is expressed by *gratia supponit naturam*: “All natural human behavior and action must necessarily be completely based upon a certainty which man has brought about for himself if the supernatural is grounded in natural behavior in some way in accordance with the principle: *gratia supponit naturam*. The essence of truth of man’s natural behavior must be certainty” (GA 6.2: 388/EP 24; tm).

In the ordination speech, however, Heidegger interprets the “nature” voiced in the phrase in accordance with Hölderlin’s hymn “The Rhine,” where it is contrasted with need and nurture as a birth:

...For
As you began, so will you remain,
Need also effects so much,
Nurture, too, but the most able
Is namely birth,
And the ray of light, that
Meets the new born.

[...Denn
Wie du anfiengst, wirst du bleiben,
So viel auch wirkt die Noth
Und die Zucht, das meiste nemlich
Vermag die Geburt,
Und der Lichtstrahl, der
Dem Neugebornen begegnet.]21

Nature, then, is distinct from nurture and what is brought about by discipline. It is also distinct from what happens due to distress or necessity. Nature is neither cultivated nor in need. It is a new birth to what is bestowed upon us, to a surplus, to the ray of light. Beginning with this contact, nature also ensures that this beginning remains with us, however far from it we might seem to be. This is the nature that provides the “ground” for the blossoming of grace.

The nature in question is consequently a bestowal tied to one’s birth, and for Heidegger this means that it is a gift of the homeland. This homeland comes to stand for the dimension we have been describing between earth and

sky: “The earth of the homeland and the sky above it bring the most in natural gifts. From them there thrives that which is strong enough to grow towards the gift of grace [dem Geschenk der Gnade]” (GA 16: 489). We have already seen how existence in this dimension between earth and sky exposes one to the surprise of chance. It likewise exposes one to the surprise of the ray of light upon one’s birth. Only what is born in this, as exposed, and keeps this beginning with it, can grow up to face the gift of grace, the gift of the homeland. But all is far from tranquil here: “Indeed, precisely these sources for the natural growth of all sound [gediegenen] human beings are threatened today like never before. These sources also could not be protected from drying up by artificial measures. No organization is able to replace those natural forces of growth” (GA 16: 489). The earth and sky of the homeland face the challenge, on the one hand, of what today we would term globalization, where the specificity of this particular place is increasingly lost in the quest for new markets, and on the other, technological intervention, where life is made to grow in laboratories, and the weather, the time of day, the season no longer play a role for industry. No technologically created second nature will replace these singular relations; no assertive, aggressive human response will counter their loss. These forces of the homeland, the earth and sky, face the same threat that we discussed in regards to “The Turn,” beyng’s self-pursuit with forgetfulness. Here the forgetfulness is the forgetting of how one began: exposed.

But this is precisely what is bequeathed to us by the homeland. Grace blossoms on the ground of this endangered nature. What grace gives us is endangerment. Endless toil is grace. Unceasing danger is grace. Grace gives to us the appeal of these forces. Grace lets us be reached by them. Their gift is to show a need for us. They want us. Grace lets us be needed in the world. Its gift is to let us participate in the making of the world. The endangered nature that cannot be left behind, the fact that from the very beginning one is born anew though always already met by a ray of light—this nature ensures that there is a dimension in which we grow and in so growing can be met by grace, despite endless toil and despite the unceasing, ever increasing danger.

Heidegger’s reflections on grace close here with the charge that “[w]here in the meantime the sources still flow, we are able to protect their blessing and take their reign under our care [Obhut]” (GA 16: 489). These words should not be heard as imposing some burdensome duty upon us that we need to comply with, if we are to be considered “authentic” or if we are to save the human race, the planet, etc. Instead these words say that we can accord with the world’s need. Protecting and taking-under-care name ways in which we
accept the relationship that these dimensional forces offer. It is not a matter of making these forces wholly present or of preventing their annihilation. Either option is still thought too absolutely in terms of a logic of presence and absence. It is precisely this that must be broken with and that is broken with upon entry to the dimension between earth and sky. We are called to withstand the tension and grow towards grace. Heidegger’s wish for his nephew states all this beautifully. It is a wish for grace:

May the inheritance that has gathered for centuries in the earthly and heavenly powers of our homeland remain awake in you.

May this inheritance for its part and in its limits help you, in a world of industry and devastation, at all times to detect what is rooted in the soil and to experience what is of the source, and to catch sight of the ray of light in whose gleam the pure and the right shows itself.

May this light ever remain a warm and bright light along your path and illuminate each of your steps. (GA 16: 490)

Abbreviations of the Works of Martin Heidegger

I. Volumes in Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 102 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975–):


GA 76 Leitgedanken zur Entstehung der Metaphysik, der neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft und der modernen Technik. Edited by Claudius Strube. 2009.


II. Other English Translations


