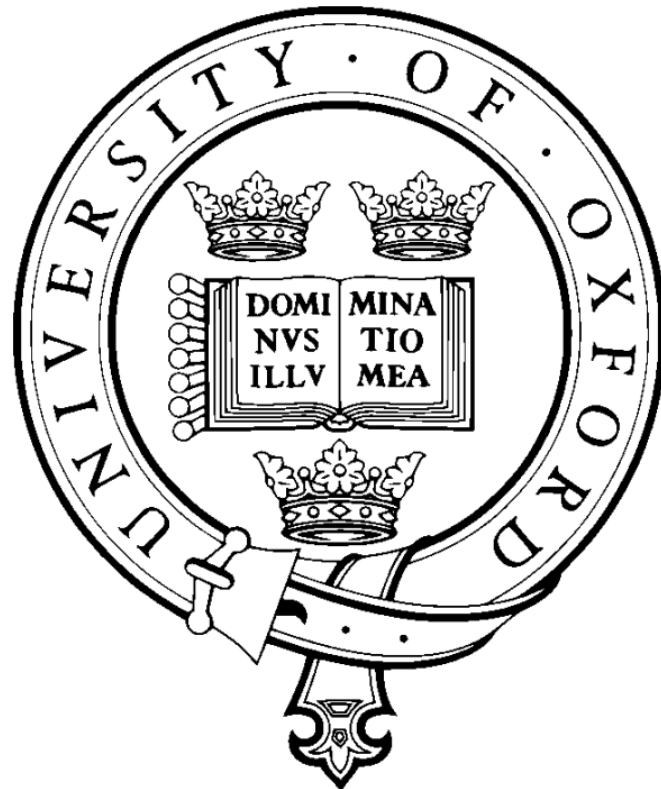


Art, Paradox, and the Sacred in Heidegger



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Dedicated with love to the life and memory of Josefine Ekeland

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Abstract

In this project I argue that there exists paradox in Heidegger which illuminates the nexus between art, the sacred, and world-disclosure. Heidegger has worked out a reasonably good picture of these three domains individually and emphasized their essential connectedness in his writings after *Being and Time*, but provided frustratingly little to explain or motivate the nature of this connection. Perhaps consequently, this area has also been largely under-served in the existing secondary scholarly literature. I aim to contribute a novel and constructive reading to both, and one which makes explicit what I take to be another significant (and equally underdeveloped) implicit theme in Heidegger's later work – paradox. I derive a starting definition of paradox independently from Heidegger's account of the sacred, that is, his general engagement with religious phenomena, and then from his account of the work of art, yielding the following result: in both domains, there is a necessary paradoxical quality, an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate. This analytic definition is expanded with reference to Kierkegaard to accommodate the ways we may relate to it as a horizon that requires personal risk, and then tested as an explanatory mechanism against points of intersection between art and the sacred. In the end, having derived a sense of paradox from the text and used it constructively back towards the text, a secondary theme gently emerges; one in which the world takes on a sacramental quality, and sacrifice appears as a means of responsiveness to Being.

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Chapter I: Introduction

“When a contradiction is impossible to resolve except by a lie, then we know that it is really a door.” –
 Simone Weil, *New York Notebook*

If the Heidegger of *Being and Time* paints a picture of our current situation marked by rather austere questioning and a fundamental phenomenological conservatism which defers the question of God until such a time when we make progress on the question of Being, the Heidegger of the 1930's and beyond paints with a much freer hand, speaking of gods and mortals and art and poetry as inter-related participants in the way that Being comes to shape entire communities and historical epochs. In this 'later' Heidegger, the work of art and the question of the sacred are more than merely incidental or instrumental features of his project. They are crucial to understanding the way a particular world, a space of intelligibility, is structured and disclosed to us as the human sort of being, Dasein, and the way we come to reciprocally take a stance on ourselves and things in general along with it. Further, these two domains structure not only our world as those living within technological metaphysics but historical worlds in general within the Western philosophical tradition. For these reasons, any steps we might take to get clear on art and the sacred would stand to offer a good deal towards grasping Heidegger's vision of the era.

Heidegger has left us a reasonably good breadcrumb trail to follow on these two things separately. Between “The Origin of the Work of Art”, the commentary on art in *Mindfulness* and the *Contributions to Philosophy*, and some of the floating discussion present in other works of the era, these texts have generated much secondary scholarship, and for good reason. The same can be said for his views on what I will refer to as “the sacred” as a broad designator of his engagement with the dimension of the religious, the divine, the godly, and so on. While more cryptic in some respects than his work on art, Heidegger engaged with existing religious practices and a Hölderlin-influenced meditation on the space in which we

might recognize the presence or absence of gods in the first place, and this has also inspired its share of commentary and speculation.¹

In addition to the discrete accounts of art and the sacred that Heidegger develops there are also points where the two interact. Quite a few, in fact, and with seemingly significant implications for his broader ontology. The two examples which follow will serve as paradigmatic cases both for the purposes of explicating the interaction for now, and as a thematic guide in the chapters which follow where they will receive much closer attention. First, we find the following in the *Contributions*:

“Steadfastness in Da-sein prepares the disintegration of the priority of beings and thus prepares the un-usualness and un-naturalness of another origin of ‘art’: the beginning of a hidden history of the reticence of an abyssal encounter between gods and humans.” (CtP 398)²

This is highly suggestive and clearly indicates some sort of privileged relationship between art and the sacred, but the specific mechanism by which these two things are supposed to encounter each other or even matter to each other beyond a general holism is less clear, even in the broader context of the passage and section. Secondly, we might take as paradigmatic the picture laid out in *Mindfulness* of the same era, in which the space for Being to enter history is demarcated by the *struggle*. One of the partners to the struggle is the strife between earth and world, as in, the tensions which are set into the work of art. The other is the countering between gods and human beings, where the two ‘decide’ on each other and enter into some particular arrangement where the space for either is cleared. The struggle dictates the terms for entities to show up as entities, for Dasein to have a determinate relationship to these entities, and for a particular texture of relationships to obtain temporally. (M 65, *inter alia*) The details of these relationships will be dealt with in more detail as the main argument unfolds, but suffice it to say for now, the conjunction of art and the sacred in later Heidegger has significant textual and phenomenological consequences. The curious part is, both in Heidegger himself, and in the existing literature, this specific juncture is under-

¹ Here and in the future, any reference to “art”, “the artwork”, “the work of art”, will always mean art taken in a Heideggerian sense, linked to strife and the grounding of truth as ἀλήθεια. References to art in the non-philosophical sense will be signalled or scare quoted as ‘art’.

² For quality-of-life reasons and ease of readability references to Heidegger’s texts will be made parenthetically in-text according to abbreviations given alongside the relevant full citations in the bibliography. If a translation has been modified beyond minor stylistic preferences, like “beying” over “be-ing” for the German “Seyn”, which will be bracketed, the relevant Gesamtausgabe text will be listed parenthetically alongside the source text in translation. All other texts will be cited in footnotes.

determined. We can make informed statements about the starting position relative to either, and we can see clearly that they come together in important ways which dictate ontological horizons, but the connective tissue and motivating arguments are comparatively lacking. This is precisely what I aim to address in this project.

In brief, what are we to make of Heidegger's accounts of art and religion? Why do they interact at such crucial points? How do we move from their individual descriptions and functions to the broader role which is designated for them? Do they have any common features which might explain their relationship? What does this tell us about the way the intelligible world is structured and disclosed to those of us who are foregrounded against this background and take up our possibilities on the basis of it? Heidegger claims, for example that if we look at the way that philosophy has played out in the past, and according to the received standards of the tradition, that these topics are disparate threads. This, however, is not the case.

The historicity of the history of philosophy, and correspondingly, albeit in a different way, the historicity of art and of religion are intrinsically and wholly divergent. Yet on the basis of this divergence they are nevertheless entirely connected with one another in a way which still remains entirely obscure to us. (FCM 175)

I would like to make this connection a little less obscure.

1. Main Claims

I will be arguing that there exists paradox in Heidegger which illuminates the nexus between art, the sacred, and world-disclosure.

As a consequence of this main claim, several additional claims follow. First, things in general are revealed to have a paradoxical quality. The world is structured by unintelligibility simultaneously and just as necessarily as it participates in intelligibility. Secondly, what makes art and the sacred privileged in their relationship is that they both stand uniquely among other phenomena insofar as they require a paradoxical quality to be the sorts of things that they are, instead of having this quality revealed retrospectively or hermeneutically. Thirdly, it is on the basis of this paradoxical quality that there is what I will refer to as an

ontological *permeability*, by which I mean, there are still points of access which can dislodge us from our usual ways of ordering our relationships to ourselves and other entities and can allow things to be otherwise.

The order of priority of the argument rests on independent derivations of this paradoxical quality from both Heidegger's account of art and that of the sacred across texts and most importantly, from the texts themselves, to avoid circularity. From here, the paradoxical quality will be employed to constructively explain the particular interaction of these domains. Since art and the sacred function at a vital hinge between Dasein, Being, and an intelligible world, it will naturally have broader consequences which will be considered after the main threads of the argument are introduced and grounded.

I define paradox, based on my reading of the texts, as an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate. Now, this is not an account of paradox *in general* which might apply to any possible text or situation, but a species of paradox specific to and derived from Heidegger. In the broadest sense this means that there are terms (like known and unknown, for instance) which are both constitutive for a particular entity or phenomenon, and at the same time, mutually exclusive. That is, according to normal metrics they *cannot* be co-instantiated without doing violence to either the terms or the entity, and yet, *must* be co-instantiated so that the entity can function as the thing that it is. Immediacy is not something inherent in the entity or phenomenon itself, but rather our relationship to it and the way we take it up. To mediate the contradiction is to pre-determine what the proper venue of analysis is according to existing methods, whether logical, metaphysical, theological, or whatever else the case may be. In all of these mediations, the key is that the object of our consideration is denied the right to assert itself *as* itself. Finally, actionability refers to the fact that we must, despite the apparent contradiction, still be able to *do something*. A formal or mathematical contradiction offers little in the way of uptake as such. Art and the sacred, however, make demands.

2. Text and Method

Before anything else, there is one obvious consideration which must be addressed: Heidegger neither employs nor particularly likes the term ‘paradox’. It does not appear in his work in any positive sense, and when it infrequently does, it is when Heidegger dismisses the notion as a sort of semantic or logical parlour trick unbecoming serious thinking.³ Much like his treatment of logical contradictions, which we will address in some detail later, his fears about invoking this terminology stem from a general distaste for any prior conception which might defer his thinking to a dialectic which would seek to resolve tensions in a higher unity, or a logic which would dismiss challenging claims out of hand as nonsense irrationalism. His concerns are understandable, and it is clear that he often prefers to *not* use a particularly laden term rather than have to wrest it from the preconceptions which might make it problematic, like his avoidance of anything like ‘consciousness’ in *Being and Time* rather than attempting to rehabilitate or integrate the term. This being said, there *is* something to pick up on in his work on art and the sacred which surely *seems* paradoxical despite his protestations about the term. In fact it appears that within the scholarly reception it is harder to *not* notice it.⁴ What puzzles me is that despite frequent recognition, there is only one recent example which attempts to take this element of his work seriously for its own sake, *Heidegger and the Contradiction of Being* by Filippo Casati, who will be my primary interlocutor in chapter III.

So, in relation to Heidegger, my project represents a step outside of his preferred terminology, but I believe this should be a tolerable step as long as we establish now – in a preliminary sense – that the paradoxical quality in his work on art and the sacred I will be arguing for is not the sort of thing that Heidegger was against. It is neither ultimately hemmed in by logic nor ‘explained’ as paradoxical in a way that would terminate further thought. In essence I believe that we can ransom this perfectly fine word back from Heidegger’s scepticism at a reasonable cost. In relation to the existing literature, I am drawing on the existing commentary while picking up in an explicit and novel way a theme which has somehow

³ See, for example: BT 220, 209, 263; PRL 85; OET 157

⁴ Examples will be provided throughout, but among many others, authors as diverse as Iain Thomson, Jean Greisch, Karen Gover, Richard Polt, and Julian Young have noticed something ‘paradoxical’ at play (without any implication that their readings are aligned with mine)

managed to stay out of the crosshairs until now, even in the case of Casati, who considers the paradoxical quality in Heidegger with respect to Being itself.

Regarding my relationship to the primary literature: Most of the connections I am interested in and most of the serious explanatory value I believe my project offers are localized to the post-*Being and Time* era texts. There is no necessary backwards reading of my conclusions into every text mentioned, as if I am suggesting that the gods of the fourfold are secretly operating in and fully compatible with the account of meaning in the *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*.

There are two main threads of continuity I will be arguing for and committed to in a structural way. Firstly, that we can read Heidegger on the work of art as being roughly continuous, for example, between *The Origin of the Work of Art* and *Mindfulness*. Secondly, that we can at least render his work on the sacred intelligible across texts even in the absence of equivalence. The beying-historical space for the gods is not strictly the same as the divinity active in a historical religious tradition, but they are at least *of a kind* by virtue of their shared paradoxical quality. To get to this point I will be invoking a variety of texts along the way, such as the discussion on sign and signification in *Being and Time*, but this is of instrumental value in teasing out a constructive way of thinking about paradoxical phenomena as a special class of sign, to give one future example from chapter III.

On this same issue: This project is at core a constructive one, but in the service of the text itself. I am going beyond what Heidegger himself offers and making what I hope are well-informed and textually justified inferences as to how we might proceed, how to best fill in areas where clarity is wanting so that we can get a better grasp on Heidegger's later project in a broader sense, since I take it to be the case that *whatever* might be going on with art and the sacred it connects with the beating heart of his concerns after *Being and Time*.

One final methodological consideration; the account I am offering here is firmly within metaphysics, even though it suggests a possible exit ramp in the end, because the relations that I am building on are inherently metaphysical. It is fair to say that Heidegger was deeply concerned about the fact that we have lost sight of the question of Being. It was almost inarguably his *primary* concern. We find ourselves as the inheritors of a 2500-year-old tradition which has revealed being pre-reflectively as a

function of the way entities as objects make themselves available to us as subjects which stand over and against this domain of what ‘exists’, what is present and can be justified by appealing to our ‘reason’. More pressingly, the most recent manifestation of this relationship is one which frames everything that *is* – including us – as means towards infinitely quantifiable ends. Everything is merely ‘standing reserve’ for our inexhaustible projects, from natural resources to paintings in museums to the power hidden in atoms waiting to be split and put to work. (QCT 225) Even though there are deeper phenomenological and ontological insights to be gained by attentively seeking the ‘origin’ and affiliation of art and the sacred, this origin can only bring us more lucidly to where we already are and hopefully dislodge us towards a new and non-metaphysical receptivity to Being, at which point, things could be quite different. Even the work of art itself in its grounding of truth is something for Heidegger which must be, in a sense, overcome and left behind with the end of metaphysics. (MN 92) So, my argument makes no fixed claims that these relationships, paradoxical or otherwise, will hold at all times and in all possible happenings of Being in history. Whatever it is that comes ‘after’ metaphysics will remain the sole business of the after which lies beyond any possible conceptual horizon for us, and especially beyond any argument I am able to muster. This, I believe, is an inevitability, but one worth being clear on from the outset.

3. The Work at a Glance

I will be making my argument along the following lines: In **Chapter II** the main claim is that we can derive a functional analytic definition of paradox by attending to the necessary conditions for the sacred to function *as* the sacred, that is, without metaphysical or theological presumptions and distortions. First, I will define my terms in the abstract, what I will mean by “contradiction”, “co-instantiated”, “immediate”, and “actionable”. Then, I will present the sacred in three distinct but ultimately interrelated stages, starting with the fourfold, then the being-historical gods, and finally Heidegger’s examination of the world of the early Church, showing that in all three cases, the quality which must be present is *paradoxical* – an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate. To be explicit, even though the definitions are presented first for the sake of clarity, the actual priority of the argument is that these terms are derived from the text. This chapter concludes with a defense of my reading that while Heidegger

does not argue *towards* any particular tradition which corresponds with existing religions, he firmly argues *from* religion.

Chapter III will expand on the starting definition of paradox by making two further claims: First, that paradoxical phenomena are a special class of *sign* which discloses the world as unintelligible simultaneous with intelligibility. Secondly, that we can orient ourselves to this space analogously with the way Kierkegaard conceptualizes our relationship to the paradox, and most importantly, with the understanding that this orientation is a risk or a wager – an idea we find just as clearly in Heidegger. Afterwards, I will respond in some detail to Filippo Casati and show why my account can survive implicit criticisms and concerns in his work on Heidegger and paradox, with specific reference to the problem of formal indication.

Chapter IV independently derives the analytic definition of paradox from Heidegger’s work on art, thereby showing that the shared paradoxical quality explains the privileged relationship between art and the sacred, in addition to having independent explanatory value for art. We will work through Heidegger’s “Origin of the Work of Art” in detail, address existing commentary from Karen Gover and Stephen Mulhall especially, and then I will venture an example of what this account can offer by providing an original reading of a painting by El Greco, “The Opening of the Fifth Seal”.

Chapter V will present an application of the relationships that the previous chapters argued for in practice. I will give a full picture of the privileged relationship between art and the sacred, the ontological permeability which this reveals, and what paradox means for them both. Difficult passages will be revisited and given a close reading, especially from the *Contributions* on the origin of art which reveals a link between gods and humans introduced in the opening problematic. Finally, we will be in a position to assess Heidegger’s “Über die Sixtina”, a piece which comments on the role of the Raphael’s “Sistine Madonna” as both artwork and a facilitating element of the sacred coming into the world sacramentally. This piece, in conversation with Jacques Derrida on art and religion, will reveal the paradoxical relationship as one which allows for both a sacramental and a sacrificial relationship to the intelligible world, to Being as it shapes history, and to ourselves. This, our ability to relate to and withstand the paradox, is linked directly to our “highest dignity”. (QCT 235)

Man will know the incalculable - that is, safeguard it in its truth - only in creative questioning and forming out from the power of genuine reflection. Reflection transports the man of the future into that 'in between' in which he belongs to being and yet, amidst beings, remains a stranger. (AWP 72)

With this spirit of reflection and the incalculable in mind - to the task at hand.

Chapter II: Paradox and the Sacred

“Hearasay in paradox lust.” – James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* II.2.29-30

For most of Heidegger’s voluminous output of texts and lectures, the question of divinity is never far. From his earliest lectures on the *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, to his meditations on the way that Being becomes historical at least partially through the decision that Gods and Mortals make on each other, to later Hölderlin-inspired work on the fourfold and the divinities which share in the holy unity of it, what I will refer to in general as the *sacred* is a preoccupation at the very least. Indeed, it seems that *Being and Time* is unique in being so rigidly dedicated to avoiding the question for want of better phenomenological vantage point. What I aim to accomplish in this chapter is to provide a working account of the sacred in Heidegger, then ask what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for the sacred to be the sort of thing that it is. I claim that these conditions derived from the text are *paradoxical*, and that this paradoxical quality can be constructively formalized into an analytic definition that we will develop further and put to use in chapters to come. On this reading, for the sacred to be paradoxical is to be *an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate*. This definition is derived from the text and as such will be explained in detail as we proceed through the text itself.

There are textual considerations that make this a somewhat complicated prospect. Even though there is a presence of the sacred throughout Heidegger’s work, there are moments where the language surrounding the sacred is unique to a particular style or emphasis that Heidegger happened to be employing at the time. Benjamin Crowe identifies at least three such eras and claims that while Heidegger cannot be neatly or even profitably *systematized* on the subject of the sacred, he is nevertheless consistent enough to make substantive statements about.⁵ I take this to be correct, and will start from this general position, since it avoids both the unenviable (and perhaps impossible) task of needing to unify the terminology that Heidegger uses, and the burden of constructing an independent phenomenology of

⁵ Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger on Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024) 2, *inter alia*

religion to interpret these various styles through. As John Panteleimon Manoussakis states, “In each and every definition of religion one discovers what one has already placed in it.”⁶

On the subject of terminology, it is not the purpose of this chapter to give a strict exegesis of the various terms that I fold under the term *sacred*, but this is not to say that the interlocking relationships are of no interest or significance. The divinities as messengers of the gods are distinct from the essence of divinity itself, and the holy as the prerequisite venue for the gods is distinct from what Heidegger is attempting to articulate with his *last god*, and this too is irreducible to any particular deity, and all of the former are tied to the idea of a *hint* of divinity that we might attune ourselves to in order to be receptive to the presence or absence of the god. What is of interest for the current project is picking up for its own sake a thread which seems to come up consistently in the existing literature that attempts to disentangle and clarify Heidegger’s language of the sacred. Andrew Mitchell, for example, articulates a claim about the divinities of the fourfold by noting the *paradoxical* nature of the relationships involved. “To have heard the message is to insist on a distance from it and, paradoxically enough, this space is that of non-belonging and non-receipt.”⁷

This is just one clear example of a larger trend which goes beyond the fact that other authors have used the word ‘paradox’, which would otherwise be a rather facile and useless form of correspondence. In much of the commentary on terminology, there is a point at which contradictory language is invoked, a point beyond which normal thought may not trespass. We might respond to this horizon with gratitude, deference, expectation, horror, any number of things and all with good reason, but the paradoxical tends to surface whether by name or by implication. For Laurence Paul Hemming, the challenge of articulating the God-question is not even limited to the language and concepts of one set of texts or another but may itself be the connecting ligature between that aspect of the project as a whole. “What if Heidegger’s God underwent no transformation [between texts], but simply for Heidegger to speak of God was a ceaseless struggle with something that eluded saying?”⁸ For this reason, while I will make every attempt to keep

⁶ John Panteleimon Manoussakis, “Sacred Addictions: On the Phenomenology of Religious Experience”, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* Vol. 33 No. 1, 2019 pp. 41-55

⁷ Andrew J. Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015) 184

⁸ Laurence Paul Hemming, “Heidegger’s God”, *The Thomist*, Vol. 62 No. 3, 1998, 376

clear on the internal terminology of a particular era of Heidegger's thought, my usage of the term *sacred* is largely motivated by the fact that however the terms are specifically related to each other according to personal taste and exegetical inspiration, the contradictory, the offensive, the *paradoxical* element seems crucial in a way that has not yet been explicated properly. To this end I will derive my definition of paradox from one particular era of texts and then make it consistent with the others where it cannot be systemic.

To begin I will present a brief clarification of terms, before assessing how the divinities function in Heidegger's fourfold, since this seems to be the tightest and most self-contained presentation of the sacred, and derive a definition of paradox as the necessary conditions for the sacred to function *as* the sacred. The second half of the chapter will apply this sense of paradox to both earlier and later works of Heidegger on the sacred, and argue for a satisfactory degree of consistency to render it useful in the larger project of treating paradox as an ontic condition for accessing the ontological horizons opened up by the sacred and the work of art.

1. Paradox in Abstract

Even though the definition of paradox as an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate will be derived from Heidegger's text, I believe it is beneficial to be functionally clear on what this means before beginning. The following section should be considered with this in mind, rather than as an indication of priority within the argument. We first have the idea of a *contradiction*. While this is a necessary but by no means sufficient condition for paradox, it is the first hint that the entity or concept in question is peculiar. I want to state here expressly and emphatically that both in this chapter and in the project as a whole, contradiction is an opening and not a final designation. The point is to grasp the contradictory way that art and the sacred come to stand as compared to the more mundane modes of uptake suited for something with the being of equipment, for instance, and then test this contradiction in conjunction with the other aspects of the definition to get us into the domain of the paradoxical quality at the heart of these phenomena. To this end, contradiction need not be univocal. It is an instrumental feature to initially orient us to the mode of being most essential to the area of inquiry. Once we establish

that contradictory terms are sufficient to repel standard modes of access, and yet, impose themselves on us and offer uptake regardless, the sort of relational thinking-towards the phenomena that we arrive at does not require constant referring back to the contradiction at the genesis of this thinking as if it were an end for its own sake. If it were, this would generate exactly the sort of sterile logical contradiction and excessively clever ‘paradox’ that Heidegger was so dismissive of. Contradiction is an invitation to further thinking which must first become odious to thinking.

With this said, I mean “contradiction” here as it appears in common circulation, a classification or statement which contains internal opposition, like the classic ‘married bachelor’, or mutually exclusive premises which seem to be united in a true conclusion. All paradoxes are based on contradictions but not all contradictions are paradoxical. For example, as Quine points out, there is the case of the fictional Frederic who is 21 years old after only five birthdays. A superficial contradiction, but one which is easily accounted for when we learn the (statistically unlikely) fact that Frederic was born on February 29th.⁹ Paradox as I intend it must be resistant to this style of simplification, beyond just contradiction. For instance, the classical logical contradiction might look something like “ $p \ \& \ \neg p$ ”, but depending on the content of p , could be clarified in a way where the contradiction no longer holds. In order to make this more robust, there must be a sense in which the terms are more than just grammatically or semantically linked in a statement. Put plainly, the contradictory terms must be such that they *cannot* be co-instantiated, and yet, *must* be so co-instantiated for the phenomena to be what it is.

On this note, we have *co-instantiation* next. I mean this in the sense of temporal, spatial, or conceptual simultaneity, or some combination thereof. Temporal simultaneity would be something like, “ x is y at t_1 and x is z at t_1 ”.¹⁰ Spatial simultaneity means that the statement or statements in question range over the same entity or space. Conceptual simultaneity is just to say that incompatible predicates both genuinely obtain of a thing not clearly in space or time, or not clearly an entity. An example of this would be the statement that “the essence of truth is un-truth” (OWA 119). Truth is not something we encounter as if it were an object in the world, and yet, the contradiction between “truth” and “untruth” is still

⁹ W.V. Quine, “Paradox”, *Scientific American*, Vol. 206, No. 4, April 1962, 84

¹⁰ Note that this is formally referring to a type of co-instantiation in general, and could just as well describe non-contradictory terms depending on y and z

presented here as being what I call “conceptually simultaneous” through the idea of an essence. A more commonplace example of co-instantiation might be the following: If I were to say, “My garden is well-lit” in the morning and then, “My garden is quite dark” at night, there would be no contradiction. If I say, “My garden is well-lit and quite dark, at the same time and in the same place”, I have made an odd statement, one that seems contradictory in virtue of the simultaneity being invoked.¹¹ This example also leads to an obvious follow-up question: Is this not just nonsense? A fair question, one we will revisit shortly.

Insisting on co-instantiation of contradictory predicates, at least formally, allows us to clarify terms such that they no longer accommodate the possibility that new information about the content (like the discrepancy between birthdays and age) could resolve the contradiction. In the case of the birthday, for example, let us say that for a person x , P is “having a certain age” and Q is “having a non-corresponding number of birthdays”. If we say that for x , it cannot be the case that $Q(x) \& P(x)$, the second part of the statement would not hold true, since there *is* a condition under which an individual might have an age that does not correspond with their birthdays. Therefore, what I am aiming at with *co-instantiation* so formulated is that the contradictory terms which obtain simultaneously are not just incidentally or superficially contradictory, and cannot be explained apart through better epistemic access, but that they must be co-instantiated as genuinely contradictory.¹²

Immediacy is the next qualifier of paradox. Alternately, we might say that paradox is *not properly mediable*, since there is nothing that necessarily bars us from mediating a contradiction; in fact, this is the very danger. Immediacy is a characteristic of paradox that manifests in our relation to it rather than as a feature of the paradox itself. To mediate something here is to presuppose the proper venue for dealing with the paradox, without granting it the space to appear *as paradox*. This venue might be formal logic, convention, or some other systemic reasoning with an eye towards resolution. For instance, encountering a paradox and forcing it to conform to the rigors of formal logic as the domain in which it will be either resolved or discarded is mediation. Mediation might also look like putting a concept to work, such as

¹¹ It may seem trivial that for a contradiction to obtain there is an implied simultaneity, but despite this, it is necessary

¹² Again, this is not yet sufficient on its own to get us into the domain of paradox, as pseudo-contradictions can also be co-instantiated in their own way, but it is a necessary feature of paradox nonetheless.

being faced with the problem of divinity and instantly pawning it off to psychology or anthropology for appraisal and justification. To draw again on Quine for at least the language of paradox (and with apologies to Quine for flexibility of form), I agree with him that a true paradox might function as what he refers to as “antinomies”, “...that bring on the crises in thought. An antinomy produces a self-contradiction by accepted ways of reasoning. It establishes that some tacit and trusted pattern of reasoning must be made explicit and henceforward be avoided or revised.”¹³ Even here, I must distinguish my reading in the sense that there is no revision intended as the outcome, it is the crisis of thought itself which it to be emphasized.

When considering what it means for something to be properly or improperly mediable, while this is not the sort of thing that I believe can be turned into a hard rubric (since to do so would be precisely to ignore the particular hermeneutic or radicalizing nature of paradox for the situation that one discovers paradox in, and would function as mediation by pre-determining what ‘counts’ or not), we can take contextual clues that might guide us. In Heidegger’s work where this definition of paradox ultimately derives from, we will see that we are warned against demanding that the sacred corresponds to any existing ways of thinking, be it theological, psychological, or otherwise. These are possibilities, to be sure, but if these possibilities are pursued, we are no longer dealing with the sacred *as* the sacred, as it reveals its own essence of its own accord. Therefore, we can rely on the text to indicate that while the sacred can be mediated, it is not *properly* mediable without doing an injustice to the phenomenon in question. We better appreciate the crisis generated by the antinomy to use Quine’s language again, if we grant the possibility that the contradiction might make demands that elevate it into a paradox. To allow and even encourage such a crisis is to take it without mediation, but note that even in this case, taking it *immediately* does not mean refusal to engage with it at all – quite the opposite. There must be some route of uptake offered, which brings us to the next point.

Finally, we come to *actionability*. This is what separates a sterile or nonsense contradiction, or an oxymoronic statement for the sake of rhetorical flair, from the potentially paradoxical contradiction, and like the previous feature, this is a necessary characteristic that lies in our relation to the paradox. Actionability is a qualifier which signifies our ability to relate to the phenomena *as* paradoxical in practice

¹³ Quine, “Paradox” 85

and in the thinking which may be productively directed towards it. This will be expanded upon significantly in Chapter III, but for now, preliminary sketches will suffice to get us oriented. Consider the example from earlier, of the well-lit dark garden. It is not obvious that there is anything to *do* with such a statement aside from recommending a dictionary (if not a doctor). Other contradictions might still invite response in how they disclose the world. Actionability is not unique to paradox, of course, as the basic grasp we have of the world for Heidegger is partially constituted by the sense that things are able to be taken up, but actionability is necessary for my formulation of paradox. An example of this that we will return to later is the life of the early Christian community, in which they were presented with something which could not be justified through recourse to any existing method, yet could still be taken up and lived. An example which we might consider for now, a bit closer to the lives that we currently live and with any luck will have experienced at least once, is the experience of love. Both love and the way we might actively take up paradox without mediating it can both be considered as a radical openness. A quote from Feyerabend comes to mind here, defending himself against a critic who accused him of a lack of epistemic humility and even creativity. His interlocutor says,

...I should ‘examine’ with ‘respect’ what I do not know. Examine? If I love a woman and want to share her life, for my benefit and perhaps also for hers, then I shall not ‘examine’ that life, whether respectfully or with disdain, I shall try to *participate* in it (provided she lets me) so that I can understand it from within. Participating in her life, I change into a new person with new ideas, feelings, ways of seeing the world.¹⁴

This seems to me to hit the mark nicely. In declining some imagined right to detached examination and instead focusing on the potential to meaningfully participate in what one loves, or what challenges one’s prior conceptions, we are at the precipice of a potentially radical transformation. Love – and paradox – can still be actionable in the absence of analysis. In the next chapter this sense of actionability will be developed with reference to Kierkegaard. A paradox must offer possibilities other than a shrug.

Before moving on to the texts, I also want to contextualize what I aim to do with paradox in relation to most existing approaches, and it is best to start with what I am *not* doing. In establishing contradiction and co-instantiation with reference to possible ways of formulating their bare first-order

¹⁴ Paul Feyerabend, “Farewell to Reason”, *Farewell to Reason* (London: Verso, 1987) 306

logical requirements, this is nothing more than a preliminary step to give us access to the main argument which will not ultimately rest on such formulations. Attempts have been made to deal with contradiction and paradox in this way, such as Graham Priest's treatment of supposed limiting paradoxes in *Beyond the Limits of Thought* through the medium of dialethic logic, that is, by arguing that there are true contradictions. I agree that there are true contradictions, but not in the sense that a paradoxical statement has 'truth value'. I am interested in paradox as a *directive* for thinking, a way of characterizing elements of Heidegger's account of the structure of things that might yield productive results consistent with the text and with experience, rather than an object of thought for its own sake. What this means will occupy much of the argument of chapter III. As such, even though instances of paradox can be rendered in the forms of oxymoronic linguistic statements or self-contradictory logical statements, the statements themselves are of only indexical value in showing places where existing thinking needs to become questionable in the face of paradox, where we might take up what we cannot make sense of. It might well be possible to generate interesting results from logical approaches, for instance, if we formulate paradoxical statements as modal statements and then, as suggested by Amie L. Thomasson (who pursues this line of thought with goals unrelated to anything paradoxical), treat modal semantics as being in the business of establishing and articulating normativity.¹⁵ In this way, the logical contradiction relative to an entity could dictate practical uptake and relation that moves beyond the contradiction itself. This may be possible (if highly unorthodox) but I remain both agnostic to and disinterested in such an approach. It seems better to me to take paradox without insisting that its value derives from or is best assessed through its relationship to alethic or semantic structure, or is a quirk of natural language, which would be missing the proverbial forest for the strange trees. We can use language and logical categories to the extent that they light up aspects of Heidegger's account to be followed beyond the structures which facilitated them. Paradox is important in indicating the larger paradox at the heart of what allows us to have an intelligible world and conditions the parameters of our thinking about paradox or anything else.

¹⁵ Amie L. Thomasson, "Norms and Necessity", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 51, No. 2, June 2013 pp. 143-160

We now have a general grasp on how I intend these terms, sufficient to allow us to ground the analytic definitions in the text from which they are derived.

2. The Paradoxical Sacred in the Fourfold

Heidegger's work in the late 1940's and early 1950's on the fourfold [das Geviert] gives a fairly condensed account of how the divinities are to function in opening up space for Dasein to take up its historical situation, and it is here we will derive our definition of paradox before working backwards to establish goodness of fit for treating his overall handling of the sacred as having a paradoxical quality. For this era of thought, the primary texts are "Poetically Man Dwells", "Building, Dwelling, Thinking", and "The Thing", and all concern the manner in which we might come to *dwell* not just proximately around entities which make themselves available to us, but in a sense that lets us be thoroughly at home in what has been appointed to us, what has been given to us, the fourfold. The fourfold functions analogously to the *World* of *Being and Time* - it is that on the basis of which a localized domain of intelligibility can obtain for Dasein, at a particular time and in a particular place and in a particular style. The parameters of this domain are a reciprocally disclosed quartet: the fourfold of the earth, the sky, the mortals, and the gods or divinities. (PMD 218-20/ BDT 147/ TT 175-6, *inter alia*)

Each of these four can be read in at least two different aspects and are neither reducible to poetic language for the mundane, nor are they to be reified into pseudo-Platonic 'forms' that subsist on their own before being instantiated into practice. They are demarcations of ontically accessible phenomena while also providing the ontological structure that specific phenomena require to come to light in the first place, if we consider the "mirror-play" of their unity. (TT 177) The earth, for example, is the earth; it is the ground beneath our feet and the stability that we require as we conduct ourselves in our day to day lives. "Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal." (BDT 147) The sky, likewise, is the very sky we see and live under, "...the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year's season and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the

weather...” (BDT 147) However, the sky provides an interesting site for a challenge, and an efficient key to making sense of the rest of the fourfold.

For Heidegger, following Hölderlin, the sky is not *just* the sky, if by this ‘*just*’ we mean an empty space measurable in standard units that may or may not contain various meteorological events before terminating in gradations of upper atmosphere. This is to say, how we *measure* the sky matters quite a lot. As the sorts of things that we are, we already have a pre-reflective and non-negotiable relationship with the sky as a basic dimension of our existence, even though we can distort and misunderstand it, much in the same way that a vaulted cathedral roof or a low basement ceiling are both possible on the basis of the basic dimension of “up” that we relate ourselves to in practice. The “up-ness” of existence is not meaningfully questionable no matter what we choose to do with it. So, “Man, as man, has always measured himself with and against something heavenly. Lucifer too, is descended from heaven.” (PMD 218) If we recognize this, then we can relate to it without seeking to reduce the distance through quantification and mastery. Measurement here is not a particular action or stance that we may take up at one time and not at another. It is how we understand ourselves relationally such that we can come to any understanding of ourselves in the first place. This can be done badly, distorting our relational essence, or well, when we dwell fully and securely in the world which has been allotted to us. “Man’s taking measure in the dimension dealt out to him brings dwelling into its ground plan.” (PMD 219)

The sky is truly near to us only in allowing its distance, by enduring its distance as the sort of being to whom is given space beneath the sky to measure itself against. We recognize this distance in a practical sense, dwelling instead of dominating, when we, “...receive the sky as sky... [leave] to the seasons their blessing and their inclemency; [we] do not turn night into day nor day into a harassed unrest.” (BDT 148) Things like cloud seeding or artificial lighting to refuse the natural rhythms of light and dark and the activities appropriate to these times would be examples of domination. The word “receive” is an important one. We do not take the sky, or measure it to our size, or demand comprehensibility of it. Another way of putting this might be to say that we receive the sky when we refuse to mediate it. We receive it *as* the sky when we allow it the “strange measure” to be near as distance. (PMD 221) This contradictory phrasing will allow us to transition to the next dimension of the fourfold – the divinities.

The divinities will require some special attention. In “The Thing”, Heidegger states, “The divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead. Out of the hidden sway of the divinities the god emerges as what he is, which removes him from any comparison with beings that are present.” (TT 176) Already we see that the divinities are not identical with any particular deity, they are rather the dimension which allows any god whatsoever to introduce itself *as a god*, as distinguished from any other entity within the world. The divinities are a ‘where’ or a ‘how’ as much as they are a ‘what’, to the extent that they are properly described as any of these things without qualification. Just as before there is an exhortation to take this dimension up without recourse to the usual metrics. “Mortals dwell in that they await the divinities as divinities. In hope they hold up to the divinities what is un hoped for. They wait for intimations of their coming and do not mistake the signs of their absence. They do not make their gods for themselves and do not worship idols.” (BDT 148) There is more to say on the subject of idolatry, but first, the basic relationships of the fourfold need completion.

If we as mortals use the nearness of the sky’s distance as a contradictory measure of our own allotment within a particular domain of significance, and avoid the temptation to quantify it away, we are able to ascertain a hint as to the proper means that we are also measured in relation to the gods.

What is the measure for human measuring? God? No. The sky? No. The manifestness of the sky? No. 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 a disclosing 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 guarding the concealed in its self-concealment. Thus the unknown god appears as the unknown by way of the sky’s manifestness. (PMD 223)

In the same way that the sky is nearer to us according to the distance we afford it, the gods of the fourfold require deference. It is not that we measure ourselves fundamentally against a particular deity, or the sky itself according to a pagan veneration of nature, but in order for a deity to obtain we need to leave room for it as something that is known as essentially unknown, unconcealed as concealed. This measuring out of a space that allows for an encounter (or withdrawal) between man and gods allows the two to come into what is appropriate as their own, setting the “mortals” of the fourfold into relief now.

What remains alien to the god, the sight of the sky – this is what is familiar to man. And what is that? Everything that shimmers and blooms in the sky and thus under the sky and thus on earth, everything that sounds and is fragrant, rises and comes – but also everything that goes and

stumbles, moans and falls silent, pales and darkens. Into this, which is intimate to man but alien to the god, the unknown imparts himself in order to remain guarded within it as the unknown. (PMD 223)

It is the lot of the mortal to sustain the dimension of the unknown as such, it is the lot of the god to manifest through this unknown, which we get hints of in the sky above us, specifically from our vantage point securely on the earth. Once again here the divinity is distinguished as such by its total transcendence of the types of things which we find useful or practical, and its presence only as the unfamiliar, which sends itself prior to any dealings we may want or need with it.

We to whom the unknown is imparted are the mortals, mortal because we can die. “To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies. The animal perishes... Death is the shrine of Nothing, that is, of that which in every respect is never something that merely exists, but which nevertheless presences, even as the mystery of Being itself.” (TT 176) For our purposes, this evokes a distinction familiar to the language of *Being and Time* (especially ¶49) between the termination of an entity taken biologically or physiologically, where this “perishing” is an event in time between one state of physical functioning and another, and distinguished still from the death of others that we might experience as their “demise”. (BT 291 *inter alia*.) The death that is proper to mortals, minimally, is taken as a constant possibility that is actual only through this possibility, since tautologically whatever it is we currently are will not ever experience death as a *thing* or *event*, the way we experience other things. Death presences, despite never existing as things exist. The gods presence through absence. Being *is*, but as something can never be as an entity is or like we are or even as pure absence. Mystery prevails in all cases. To be a mortal and to be capable of death is to be attuned to these mysteries. “Only man dies, and indeed continually, as long as he remains on earth, under the sky, before the divinities.” (BDT 149) This is the fourfold, the space opened up reciprocally by dimensions which act as the condition for the possibility of anything whatsoever being intelligible to us, and for us to have the sort of thing that we are disclosed along with it.

The divinities or the gods are one of these dimensions and function all the better in this capacity the more we remain sensitive to the contradictory mode of revealing themselves that separates them from other entities. In this way it is both prior to and absolutely beyond our projects and whims. Rather than attempting to reduce this encounter with the divine to something on our level, attempting to mediate it,

the proper stance is one that potentially exposes us to a radical shift in demands. By emphasizing the strangeness of the divinities for its own sake, this is saying both more and less than some alternative readings of this aspect of the fourfold. For example, Julian Young provides two ways that we might consider the divinities. First, the divinities are a sort of ethical mandate allowing for decisions handed down in factual history which we might take up, despite the gods which they hint at not communicating these mandates themselves directly. “Since, however, the laws are ‘unwritten,’ the gods, unlike Moses, cannot articulate the laws verbally. They communicate them by, rather, being embodiments, incarnations, paradigm exemplars of the laws. They communicate them not, or not primarily, by saying them but by being, rather, the beings who they are.”¹⁶ I find this reading to be too narrow, especially given the mention of Moses. While it is true that God did not directly ‘speak’ to the Israelites, it is less clear how the God of the Old Testament is an exemplar of some of the laws. For instance, while God might tautologically be incapable of idolatry, it is vague how God is supposed to instantiate the duty to provide sacrifice of atonement for expiation of sin *in his being as God*, or is able to be an example for people commanded to follow certain marital practices. There must be a difference between the law *as law*, that is, as a binding or existence condition for a specific people which gains its authority from its relation to a divinity, and the particular contents of the law. On Young’s reading, it seems that divinity is unduly bound as an ethical exemplar to the specifics as well as the general in ways that cause problems.

In the same piece, Young identifies the gods with the *heroes of Being and Time*, that is, as a possibility of taking up a cultural paradigm that has been handed down not just as something past but as something truly one’s own as a living possibility in each moment, as “heritage”.¹⁷ This is in Heidegger’s language, “The authentic repetition of a possibility of existence that has been – the possibility that Dasein may choose its hero...” (BT 437) It is true that this is a way in which the divinities might function. The world that individuals are thrown into can doubtlessly contain a heritage that they might take up in better or worse ways, in more or less decisive ways, and based on the fact that they did not actively choose what they have been given to choose in the first place. However, this seems to bottom out too early to get to

¹⁶ Julian Young, “What is Dwelling? The Homelessness of Modernity and the Worlding of the World” in *Heidegger, Authenticity and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000) 199

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 201

the core of what allows the divinities the possibility of structuring our lives. It is not simply *that* we get a particular style of existence which we might take up. We get that just as much from the other aspects of the fourfold, like the possibilities offered by a rainforest rather than a desert, or a climate with four seasons as opposed to a wet and dry binary through the year. The peculiarity of the divinities is that they structure such claims but cannot *be* such claims, exemplar or hero or otherwise. I believe that by defining the divinities based on the strangeness rather than the function, we can still account for the function while still leaving enough vertical distance, as it were, to avoid hemming in the very thing that will not be tailored according to our fit. We are now situated sufficiently to be clear about the way that these divinities are *paradoxical* in the way I laid out earlier.

2.1 Contradiction

It is hopefully uncontentious at this point that when Heidegger draws together phrases like presence and absence in BDT or the known unknown in PMD to describe the identifying features of a phenomena, this meets the bare standard of a contradiction pending further explanation. However, one might rightfully say that this general style of contradiction is something that appears in far more mundane circumstances than the dimensions of the fourfold, and I would like to disambiguate the nature of this divine contradiction as something especially peculiar. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger notes that one of the ways available equipment for our day-to-day dealings might slip into being merely occurrent is actually by not being physically occurrent at all. We find a missing tool for a project not as something purely absent, but, “...to miss something in this way amounts to coming across something [un-available].” (BT 103) Superficially, finding something as missing seems to suggest a contradiction, but in this case, it is a designation of how lack of an entity does not merely strike the entity from the overall network in which it usually obtains. What is crucially different here is the notion that the missing entity in question still has a place in the World that it usually makes sense in, and it is only on the basis of privation that we note the occasional shift to being merely un-available in practice. The entity must be given as intelligible before it can register as found-missing in other circumstances.

In Sartre as well there is the example of his missing friend Pierre, absent from the café they were supposed to meet in and the apartment he has stepped out from a little later. In both these cases Pierre’s

absence is a way in which he is made present, “Pierre absent haunts this café”, and yet, at the same time, this absence only makes sense on the basis of an expectation that he can (and presumably has) been present in his usual manner at other times before this.¹⁸ Sartre considers that he *can* imagine anyone at all being absent from the café, such as Wellington, but, “...these have a purely abstract meaning; they are pure applications of the principle of negation without real or efficacious foundation...”¹⁹ Once again, like in the missing equipment, the reason that there is a contradiction is a privation of a more standard way for something to make itself available, and one that gives us no right to conjure up whatever absence we so choose. The missing entity has to have place before it can be missing.

What is unique in the case of the divinities of the fourfold is that they are given to us through contradiction as a *prerequisite* to be what they are. Even if a grasp of the divinities is attainable, and indeed it must be on some level, their unique status as heralds of a larger horizon of the sacred is still revealed against a background of refusal. In existing religious tradition we can find examples of this in the Old Testament, like when God ‘appears’ by veiling himself in fire, smoke, or darkness.²⁰ In the Gospels, especially in Mark, Jesus causes confusion and defies recognition in his interactions despite being present. Benjamin Crowe comments that, “In Mark, Jesus is the unknown revealed *as such* in the known.”²¹ In both of these examples, as in the divinities of the fourfold, we see the same linguistic dichotomies between contradictory terms as a feature of divine presence. To remove the contradiction is to obscure or even destroy the condition for the possibility of the divinities as such, by, for example turning them into idols. Deciding that one or the other of the contradictory terms needs to be removed, or cannot obtain in the first place, in order for the divinities to ‘make sense’ does not allow the divinities the free space to presence as divinities. It brings them down to entities or concepts like any other. Therefore we can say that contradiction is a necessary feature of the divinities.

¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 1956) 10

¹⁹ Ibid. 10

²⁰ Deuteronomy 4:11-12, *inter alia*

²¹ Crowe, *Heidegger on Religion* 61

2.2 Co-instantiation

These contradictions are able to rise to the level of paradox because they are describing the way that something is to be understood at the same time, in the same way, and all at once. If we claim, for instance, that we don't know the divine now, but we might later once we devise the proper system, we have turned the contradiction into a temporary predicate and defaced the divine as divine. Compare again to the missing Pierre. Pierre can presence temporarily and derivatively as a sort of present absence, but there are two key distinctions. First, this is an ontic and most importantly *perspectival* way that Pierre might come to be. Pierre is present as absent not absolutely or as a requisite feature for Pierre to be Pierre, but from the perspective of one individual waiting for him in the café. For someone else while Sartre is waiting, Pierre is simply present as he usually is, as any human being would normally be in practice. For the divinities, they are present and can *never* be present as things are present, they are absent but *never* as a mere negation since the dimension they open up, the measure that situates us as mortals in whatever specific way this might manifest. Further still, it does not matter who or where one is; there is no perspective which might bridge this gap or smooth over this contradiction, at least not without committing some sort of metaphysical sin in the process.

In the case of the known/unknown, co-instantiation of the two terms prevents this from becoming an indexical term for a certain type of epistemic perspective that we are temporarily saddled with on the way to potentially greater understanding. When Donald Rumsfeld invoked his much-discussed and sometimes lampooned matrix of knowledge at a press conference in 2002, from known knowns, or facts we have on hand, to unknown unknowns, or facts we lack and do not even know we lack, this included the category of "known unknowns". "Known unknowns are gaps in our knowledge, but they are gaps that we know exist... If we ask the right questions we can potentially fill this gap in our knowledge, eventually making it a known known."²² This is decidedly not the way that we come to know the divinities. They are co-instantiated as contradictory by virtue of the fact that we know them and can only ever know them by letting them remain unknown, regardless of any knowledge about the world we do or do not have or could ever have. Describing them in this way is a more substantial claim than just a momentary lack of

²² Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011) xiii-xiv

intellectual resources that has been flagged for improvement. For this to become an actual problem, a crisis which might generate a new way of thinking (or a new way of dwelling in this case), the terms must be taken as equally binding in ways that they would usually be resistant to. This leads to the next point.

2.3 *Immediacy*

In order for us as mortals to receive the divinities, we need to receive them *immediately*, which I previously stated was a refusal to presume an existing context for interface. There are many ways in which this presumption might manifest, but an example will be helpful to draw a contrast, that of ‘religion’. As Crowe notes in “Heidegger’s Gods”, Heidegger was broadly critical of what he took to be the Roman experience of religion, which was systematized and transactional compared to the experience of the sacred for the Greeks.²³ Heidegger accuses them of interfacing with the sacred according to the rights and certainties typical to their overall metaphysical stance, the rationality that becomes a, “far-reaching and anticipatory security”, the security of “domination” and “the imperial”. (P 50) With some caution in attributing this position to the Romans themselves and not just Heidegger’s interpretation, Crowe summarizes: “‘Roman’ religion, then, might be understood as a kind of technology designed to produce valuable outcomes through ritualized commerce with the gods.”²⁴ The gods are mediated through the same metaphysical lens that dictates the position of any other extant thing. Whatever can be said for the dangers of importing one style of spiritual interaction into the domain of another can be said doubly for the introduction of theology, metaphysics, naturalism, sociology, psychology, or virtually any other -ism or -ology which we might devise as a way of forcing the encounter with the divine into a venue more palatable to us.²⁵ Heidegger makes it clear that the divine *qua* divine must be taken immediately, perhaps keeping in mind here the warning against idolatry, and the risk of distortion. Immediacy is then another necessary feature of the divinities that we can identify.

²³ Benjamin Crowe, “Heidegger’s Gods”, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* Vol. 15 No. 2, 2007 227-8

²⁴ *Ibid.* 227-8

²⁵ Heidegger gives a fairly detailed account of what he sees as the role of theology in 1929’s “Phenomenology and Theology”

2.4 Actionability

This is a prerequisite of the sacred that is strongly consistent across all of Heidegger's considerations of the subject. In keeping with the declared scope of this section, we will limit our justification for the principle of actionability to the later texts on the fourfold, but with the proviso that there is much more to say as we continue. There are at least two clear positive ways that actionability might be taken up: in particular practice that is sensitive to the dimensions of the fourfold, practice by those who *dwell*, and in active waiting for those who do not enjoy access to such an intuitive practice.

In "The Thing", Heidegger gives us an example of how a special class of entity – a *thing* – might hold space for the fourfold and keep the dimensions in place for a people to take up their historical situation. The thing in question is a simple earthenware jug used by a peasant village. In materialist terms, the jug is merely a mass of clay shaped by someone in order to hold liquid, but Heidegger rejects the primacy of this explanation in favour of one which shows that before such an entity can ever come to be, the dimensions of the fourfold must already inform the basic grasp of things in general such that any one entity can obtain. What gives the jug its character in this arrangement is to be capable of, "the poured gift of the pouring out", whether or not it happens to be empty or full at any particular time. (TT 170) Whether it holds water or wine, the fourfold is gathered in its use. Considering the spring of the earth which gives water, "In the water of the spring dwells the marriage of sky and earth. It stays in the wine given by the fruit of the vine, the fruit in which the earth's nourishment and the sky's sun are betrothed to one another. In the gift of the water, in the gift of wine, sky and earth dwell." (TT 170) Mortals and gods also find each other in this arrangement held open by the jug. Mortals can use the jug for their own terrestrial purposes, "It quenches their thirst. It refreshes their leisure. It enlivens their conviviality." (TT 170) Mortals can also offer *libations* as a gift to the gods.²⁶ This pouring is of a different sort. "The outpouring is the libation poured out for the immortal gods. The gift of the outpouring as libation is the authentic gift." Further:

²⁶ The gods especially in this selection do seem to broadly correspond to the sorts of deities which are usually addressed in religious practice, rather than a mere messenger or placeholder, if we consider "libations" in view of pagan offerings of antiquity or the Eucharistic wine in Christianity

In the gift of the outpouring that is drink, mortals stay in their own way. In the gift of the outpouring that is a libation, the divinities stay in their own way, they who receive back the gift of giving as the gift of donation. In the gift of the outpouring, mortals and divinities each dwell in their different ways... In the gift of the outpouring earth and sky, divinities and mortals dwell *together all at once*. (TT 171)

If the pouring out of libations and the refreshment of mortals is not to degenerate into, “the dispensing of liquor at the bar”, then the jug, the *thing*, still gathers and unities the dimensions of the fourfold into their proper essences. The gods are available for worship, they are interested parties in the unfolding and offering of the intelligible background against which any mortal activities might be foregrounded. Noteworthy here is the language of gift-giving rather than transaction, recalling the critique of the “spiritual technology” of the Romans earlier. In this picture the fruits of the vine and the rains of the sky are freely given, and then freely returned by those who dwell on the earth to receive them. If there is any intended ‘outcome’ to any of this, it is satisfied and multiplied in the very act of pouring libations from the jug and affirming the relative position of gods and men. The gods offer themselves as something that can and should be taken up, despite also factoring into the overall disclosure of things.

Now, supposing that the gods do not show up in this way, this does not imply that we are entitled to a sense of disinterest or ostensible ‘atheism’. In a letter responding to a student that has been published along with “The Thing”, Heidegger gives an interesting and perhaps challenging statement:

The default of God and the divinities is absence. But absence is not nothing; rather it is precisely the presence, which must first be appropriated, of the hidden fullness and wealth of what has been and what, thus gathered, is presencing, of the divine in the world of the Greeks, in prophetic Judaism, in the preaching of Jesus. This no-longer is in itself a not-yet of the veiled arrival of its inexhaustible nature. (TT 182)

The reference to extant religious traditions will be taken up shortly. For now, the significant aspect of this statement is that, much as we saw earlier in the ways the divinities come to reveal themselves in the fourfold, there is a *contradiction* in absence as presence, elevated through the *co-instantiation* of the two into something that challenges thinking to be receptive to the “hidden fullness” of those traditions which have been, and as such, are indicative of another potential “*veiled*” arrival, taken *immediately* instead of translated through existing categories of history of religious belief or absence of divinity as atheism. What we do in response to this “default of God”, what makes it *actionable*, is a kind of active waiting.

This is further emphasized in “Poetically Man Dwells”, when considering the way that the unknown god and also the very manner in which the god might manifest in the first place are irreducibly “mysterious”. (PMD 220) When man measures himself from the earth in counterpoint to the sky’s near distance, and receives a hint of the unknown god, Heidegger details the unusualness of this measure in a brief passage that might serve equally well as a defense of *immediacy* as a necessary feature of the sacred as it will for the current question of *actionability* as active waiting:

A strange measure for ordinary and in particular also for all merely scientific ideas, certainly not a palpable stick or rod but in truth much simpler to handle than they, provided our hands do not abruptly grasp but are guided by gestures befitting the measure here to be taken. This is done by a taking which at no time clutches at the standard but rather takes it in a concentrated perception, a gathered taking-in, that remains a listening. (PMD 221)

The “gestures befitting the measure here to be taken” are fundamentally receptive, in the way that to await something is different than merely idling without a reference to be directed towards, like Sartre awaiting his friend Pierre is qualitatively different than his capacity to imagine awaiting Wellington (adjusted *mutatis mutandis* for what is appropriate for the divinities). Even the apparent absence of divinities is a type of presence because the *dimension* of the divinities remains and has the ability to make demands on us. Recall finally what we encountered in the description of the mortals from “Building Dwelling Thinking”, here shortened to draw out what is most pertinent. “Mortals dwell in that they await the divinities as divinities... In the very depth of misfortune they wait for the weal that has been withdrawn.” (BDT 148) In all of these cases, the absence of divinities is every bit as actionable as the practical relationship we might expect from their strange presence, and we grasp them *as* divinities to precisely the extent we are able to hold this actionability as a necessary and constant possibility.

One further example will suffice to make this point, by way of Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology. “Ontotheology” is the way in which, as part of the general sweep of metaphysics, Being is interpreted on the basis of beings, and in order to provide an ultimate ground for beings, God is transcribed metaphysically as the highest or most essential being on which all other beings depend, thereby avoiding uncomfortable regress. God is God on the basis of the necessity of beings having a ground, and beings are beings on the basis of God as self-caused creator and sustainer of things. This sort of deity is what is usually referred to by the ‘god of the philosophers’. Jean-Luc Marion summarizes the situation in

the following way. “The advent of something like ‘God’ in philosophy therefore arises less from God himself than from metaphysics, as destinal figure of the thought of Being. God is determined starting from and to the profit of that which metaphysics is capable, that which it can admit and support.”²⁷ Heidegger has many issues with this conception of God, but one of the most salient for our current purposes is articulated a few years after the fourfold essays in 1957’s “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics.” In it, he declares pressingly:

This [*causa sui*] is the right name for the god of philosophy. Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god. The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God. (ID 72)

His critique notes that even if we have a concept of *causa sui*, the self-caused or un-caused cause that solves a nasty metaphysical regress, it is unclear what we are supposed to *do* with such a concept. Without the open-ended actionability that comes with accepting the paradoxical nature of the sacred, it is just that, a concept, an intellectual abstraction that can only be taken up within the context of some other domain. In his defense of a positive account of religion in Heidegger, Crowe also argues for some bare minimum of availability of the divine for what he calls “worshipworthiness”.²⁸ For Crowe, even if we lack a completely developed and lucid picture of the divine – as we almost certainly do lack – we must still ultimately recourse ourselves to a dim prior grasp of the situation if we are to even start the investigation; we can still draw from a “pre-intention” [Vormeinung] in the language of *Being and Time*, and what this pre-intention is will matter quite a bit.²⁹ Crowe reads the previous passage from “Identity and Difference” as a valuable look into Heidegger’s own prior grasp which might be instructive on how to read his statements on the gods. “The sense that one gets from this passage is that, for Heidegger, the divine is always something worthy of worship, indeed, something that commands worship. This is, of course, consonant with what most people would take to be a characteristic feature of religiously significant entities.”³⁰ So, whether we take the gods as being present or absent within the dimension first opened and sustained *by* the gods in the fourfold, they can be taken up in worship or waiting, in joy or in sorrow, but taken up nonetheless.

²⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) 34

²⁸ Crowe, “Heidegger’s Gods” 229

²⁹ Ibid. 229

³⁰ Ibid. 229

Indeed, as we will see in greater detail in the following section on the being-historical texts, we can take up the gods as actionable without presuming anything about their actual ‘content’, and I will later argue that what paradox gives us access to is an ontical way of meaningfully relating to an ontological horizon. In any of these cases, without being actionable in some way the sacred cannot come to us *as* the sacred, and we are able to identify actionability as another necessary condition for the sacred. We have been talking about the actionability of these gods largely in particular practice, which matters, but in the service of a formal definition the role of actionability is to separate out the sort of paradox that is capable of making demands on us, of generating a crisis sufficient to gesture towards the unintelligible, from a strictly logical contradiction or an oxymoronic grammatical description. Imagining a contradictory statement or a situation that cannot obtain is one thing, but a statement which reflects something that cannot obtain and yet actually *does* obtain and is in fact accessible to us and can be taken up is quite another. Describing the sacred of the fourfold as actionable is a crucial necessary condition insofar as it separates out a true paradox from nonsense or superficiality, but is not a sufficient condition on its own, as idolatry and ontotheology both are actionable in their respective and defective ways. Despite this, in combination with the other conditions for the sacred in this era of the text, we can articulate the sacred as paradoxical.

2.5 Summation of Terms

In the account of the divinities of the fourfold provided so far, we have been able to analyse what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for the divinities to function *as the divinities*. I have claimed that these are:

Contradiction: Being present through absence, absent in presence, and other formulations of their mode of being show that the divinities appeal to contradiction in a substantial sense and not merely in a privative or derivative sense.

Co-instantiation: The contradiction must be taken all at once, and not as a placeholder for some future resolution, or separated into one term at one time and one term at another.

Immediacy: The divinities approach us on their own terms, which we respond to badly if we demand that these terms submit to our pre-existing interpretive machinery. We receive the divinities to the extent that we refrain from mediating the question of the divinities.

Actionability: The transcendence of the divinities in relation to the more mundane entities and projects which we usually take up still offers and demands its own kind of relationship, irrespective of their presence or absence within a particular disclosure of a fourfold/world.

If we formalize these principles into a single statement of conditions, the result is the following: The condition for the divinities *qua* divinities is to be *an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate*.

This statement represents something paradoxical if we consider it in light of the initial definitions we established in abstract in section 1. A paradox requires a co-instantiated contradiction, which is made truly paradoxical by the fact that it can be rendered as an antinomy which produces a “crisis of thought”, and to separate it from a merely theoretical paradox which may be either subsumed under existing logic or dismissed as nonsensical, we must still be able to respond to the crisis in some way, it must be actionable. Therefore, we may say with some justification that the gods (and the divinities, transitively) are *paradoxical*.

We will see how this cashes out in practice in the following chapter, since this is a preliminary definition to help us get our footing as we work through the remaining texts on the sacred before considering the further consequences of the sacred as paradoxical and the role that the work of art has to play in this story. For the moment I want to emphasize only that to describe something as *paradoxical* in this way does not mean that it has become its own class of entity called a ‘paradox’ which then necessitates (or even implies) identity or equivalence with anything else that might also be referred to as paradoxical. In what follows, we will work through the other two styles and moments in Heidegger’s treatment of the sacred, to see if this definition derived from the fourfold on its own for the sake of textual concision remains viable. I believe that it does. Similar to Crowe’s claim that what renders Heidegger’s work on the sacred consistent where it cannot be systemic is the emphasis on “performance”, I claim that an alternate route of interpretation is to treat Heidegger’s sacred as consistent through its paradoxical quality.³¹

3. Beying and Countering

Despite the attention that *Being and Time* received after its publication, Heidegger was unhappy with the results. “People are waiting for the second volume of Being and Time; I am waiting for this waiting to

³¹ Crowe, *Heidegger on Religion 2, inter alia*. I do not see my own claim as competing with or suggesting a replacement for Crowe’s, as much as responding to a slightly different thread in Heidegger’s work to answer a different sort of question.

cease and for people to finally confront the first volume.” (BN III 135) By using the language and style of systemic metaphysics to try to salvage metaphysics, the end result was a work which still lent itself to various metaphysical, existential, or even anthropological mis-readings. In the 1930s Heidegger experimented with a new style of questioning in works like the *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* and *Mindfulness* - challenging and deeply ill-suited for systemization. Crowe describes it as, “...a series of speech acts that ‘project’ what Heidegger takes to be a radically new way of thinking.”³² The point of these speech acts is, among many other things, to prepare a “dislodging”, to radicalize and destabilize the situation we find ourselves in and the way we understand ourselves on the basis of it. (CtP 22) One of these radicalizing conditions is our relationship with the sacred. As before, we will be seeking minimally necessary conditions under which the sacred might function according to its particular manner, and show that these conditions are also paradoxical as previously defined: as an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate.

3.1 Gods

Given the nature of these works, I will first present the nature of the gods in the context of the question of how it is that Being, here sometimes denoted as *Beying* to capture its specific functioning as the active negative space for history, shapes the way that a domain of intelligibility makes itself available for historical Dasein in particular eras or epochs, which are at least partially constituted by the way that the gods and Dasein have space to make a decision on one another and in so doing come to be the sorts of things that they are. In the language of *Mindfulness*, this dimension of ontological disclosure is called the *countering*, and as before, this is made both ontically and ontologically possible on the basis of the paradoxical nature of the gods.

Beying is related to ‘being’ in translation as the archaic German ‘seyn’ is to ‘sein’ for “to be”. This spelling change represents Heidegger’s attempt during this period of writing at differentiating this more fundamental, more primordial sense of what being is from the metaphysical usage we have inherited and are tasked with making a problem again. As Mark Wrathall points out, the actual application of this term

³² Ibid. 26

in Heidegger's texts is inconsistent, but despite this, does gesture towards a coherent way of thinking towards the issue. "Beying is the background against which entities can be uncovered and attain a stable, enduring presence."³³ It works by means of absence rather than presence and dictates the local or regional styles of disclosure that come to bear across limited historical eras. "[Even] though beying is not an entity and makes no concrete appearance in the world, it is not an inert nothing... it is finite and rich because it is a particular texturing of the field, and thus allows very specific relationships to emerge as definitive of entities in the world."³⁴ Beying in its silent way also acts as the venue for human beings and the gods to interact, and to make decisions on each other such that historical being can take a shape. This interaction is where we will focus. We will consider what the gods are in this picture, how they are, and how they remain consistently paradoxical.

"Human being' and 'god' are mere husks of words without history, unless the truth of beying brings itself to speak in these words. Beying essentially occurs as the 'between' for god and the human being, but in such a manner that this interspace first grants to god and the human being a place for the possibility of their essential occurrence." (CtP 375) The reader will hopefully find this reminiscent of the fourfold, in which the *dimension* of the gods grants or refuses access to any particular deities, and in doing so, assigns a relative position to human beings. The idea that the gods are as much a 'where' or a 'how' as a 'what' is made explicitly clear in *Mindfulness*, especially when we think them with a cautious reticence about presuming what we are even thinking about. I will quote at length to establish major themes of this era:

In [beying-historical] thinking the name 'gods' merely names the empty site of the undeterminedness of godhood that arises out of man's lack of attunement - the man who just intimates the distress of the crossing into a more originarily grounded history and will be thrown unto the beginning of another grounding-attunement. The name "gods" does not rest on the certainty that there are "beings" and spirits that are extant somewhere and that work in many ways - beings and spirits whom thus far we have somehow always justified to ourselves in compliance with human-*being's* total definiteness.

But to name an empty site means here making room in thinking for a domain of question-worthiness - a thinking that at the same time must be already attuned by an attunement that sets man free from every calculative bonding to beings. (M 212-13)

³³ Mark A. Wrathall, "Beying", *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) 121

³⁴ Ibid. 122

We have good hints here to follow. First, this style of thinking is specific to being-historical thinking, that is, thinking towards *beying* and not the metaphysical standards we have been thrown into as a matter of course. To think in this way means, among other things, a willingness to make ourselves a genuine problem again, to make room for thinking that the gods are still “question-worthy”, that their relation to us may not be neatly settled according to existing theisms or atheisms. The gods as site of questioning which can shake us out of joint (if we can withstand it) and open us to new possibilities, new styles, new ways of allowing *beying* to texture the background, need to stand utterly opposed to any attempts to interrogate them as we interrogate more familiar entities. When gods and men make these decisions on each other, they do so in *countering*.

3.2 Countering and Paradox

We will now examine the necessary conditions for the gods to be decided upon, using the countering as a rough template, and once again establish that these conditions can be properly described as paradoxical using the same criteria as before.³⁵ As we established earlier, the *countering* [Entgegnung] of gods and men is one set of productive tensions that make up the ontologically disclosive *struggle*, in tandem with the *strife* between earth and world. The countering presumes neither the nature of the *relata* nor the particulars of the relation, as long as gods and men leave room for each other. It is through the relational countering that the *relata* can come to have any ‘nature’ at all. A rough example might be two parties shaking hands and agreeing to become business partners in a shared economic venture. Before this relational act that commits both parties to their respective roles, there are no ‘business partners’ at the table, nor is there a business. It is through their sustaining of the relationship that their identities relevant to the project come to be, and remain stable, along with the project itself. According to Heidegger, metaphysical thinking has created a situation in which gods can no longer be gods, there has been a “de-godding” which has removed the condition for the possibility of a meeting between Dasein and the sacred.

³⁵ Even though the language of the countering shows up more in *Mindfulness* [Besinnung] than in the *Contributions to Philosophy*, I believe the two can be read more or less continuously on this note, especially given the statement that, “Meditation [Besinnung] is a questioning that searches into meaning [Sinn], i.e., into the truth of *beying* (cf. *Being and Time*).” (CtP 36) The two texts think towards the same horizons in largely consistent language.

This does not mean that we have fallen into atheism, or we have been abandoned by an extant sacred. Rather, by our sense of self-entitlement to explain and to know, to seek reasons and to make beings justify themselves to our reason, we have created a space for divinity which no longer allows divinity, we have instead “divinized” causality itself as the final reason and set it up as an idol which has largely supplanted God – in other words, ontotheology. (M 205) In particular, the Christian God has been done violence in this manner, or better, has come to stand from such an ontotheological manoeuvre.

The de-godding is the inevitable counterpart of *explaining* the godhood of gods, that is, derivation of gods from a divinization... The Judeo-Christian God is not the divinization of just any particular cause of an effect, but is the divinization of “being-a-cause” as such, that is, of the ground of explanatory representation in general. In this most subtle divinization of ‘causality’, as such, lies the ground for the apparent *spiritual* superiority of the Christian God. In truth, however, this divinization is the glorification of the crudest explanation.³⁶ (M 205/GA 66, 240, translation modified)

In other words, by asking about God and really meaning causality along with it, we have left no room for God in the answer. Whatever result we get has “de-godded” God as such. What we need to do, then, is to find a way of exposing ourselves to the risk of a space for the sacred that does not correspond to our expectations, and does not demand or even presume epistemic access to the content of our spiritual interlocutor. One of the first steps of this venture is made possible on the basis of the *contradictory* way that the sacred makes itself available.

3.21 Abyssal Contradiction

In being sensitive to the way that stepping beyond metaphysics requires alienation, we see the language of nearness and distance, especially as this puts us into relief with the gods again. “[No] glorification of beings... can ever catch up with being and remove man into that ‘between’, in whose perseverance he remains infinitely far from his own essence and, equally, from the godhood of the gods so that out of this farness itself he experiences the nearness of the risk of being and its necessity.” (M 46/GA 66, 59, translation modified) Just as the gods of the fourfold are made near to us all the more we understand them as distanced like the sky, which we stand beneath as the between and the measure of, the extent to which we are able to receive the gods is dependent on our ability to withstand the distance until the issue

³⁶ “Verklärung” can also be more literally translated as a pleasantly sarcastic “transfiguration” instead of “glorification”

can be near out of this distance. Indeed, this is necessary for the gods of the countering. “For this is the foremost non-propositional ‘truth’ of beying-historical thinking; only in the grounding of the truth of beying does the countering of gods and man adapt itself and never again does a god come to man and a world arise for him out of the objectification of beings.” (M 213/GA 66, 250, translation modified) Taking care to read this “non-propositionally”, we can still see that with these two suggestions in mind, it is in the distance-as-nearness that facilitates the sacred *as* sacred that this countering may adapt itself, that is, may come into what is most proper to itself and according to itself, rather than from the objectification and deification of beings as present entities. This is a challenging request, to be sure, but the language of contradiction plays a crucial part in gesturing beyond metaphysics.

Further, we see the contradictory language of nearness and remoteness as it pertains to the countering related to the *Abgrund*, or the abyss. In brief, to describe something as an abyss or as abyssal is to recognize its ontological status that seems to *suggest* a grounding relationship, while refusing any further schematization of this relationship according to our usual metrics. It is the ground that refuses to ground rationally. When dealing with nearness and remoteness in the language of *Mindfulness*, we *could* think of their mutual relationship in calculative metaphysical terms, as if what they ‘really’ were could be exhausted in measuring distances in neutral three-dimensional space. We could also consider them as being grounded abyssally in the way that being first discloses things as a whole, gives them a “clearing” in which to appear, and fits them together intelligibly such that entities can be available to us as near or far prior to any measurement and in a way that refuses interrogation of the usual metaphysical variety. “Nearness is the [abyss] of remoteness, and remoteness is the [abyss] of nearness. Both are the same: the [abyss] of the clearing of [beying].” (M 92) What is crucial is that we allow the contradiction of their mutually abyssal relationship to stand as it is, *without mediation*. “[Any] attempt at a ‘dialectical’ conceptual reckoning would shatter what here is to be thought into a merely superficial back and forth of differentiating and relating, and would destroy any notion of the leap unto the essence of beying.” (M 92-3/GA66 116, translation modified) If the contradiction stands, and is treated again as a gesture that guides thinking towards what cannot currently be thought, “...nearness and remoteness *initiate trajectories of decision* towards the truth of [beying]: in [beying] they are *the sites without location of the countering of*

godhood of gods and the domain of man – a countering that throws that godhood and this domain back unto their sway which is held unto the [abyss].” (M 93) Specifically, this type of relationship is initiated, “...over against machination of beings that are abandoned by being...” (M93) When beings are abandoned by being, we take them (at least in our current epoch) as naked presence of things at hand and lose sight of the relational horizons that gives us the basis for thinking entities meaningfully. They become flattened out, grist for the mill of our projects. I take it as significant that from within this situation, the hint at something more primary is by following paths laid out by contradiction.

In this relationship we can see that sustained contradiction is a prerequisite for the countering, not just in practice or in an ontically relevant sense – which is not insignificant – but also as it pertains to the fundamental decisions which allow both the gods their godhood and man his domain.³⁷ The ungrounded-grounding of nearness and distance gives a trajectory towards the *sites without location* which then hold the gods and men into a decision which also grounds without conceptual clarity, and indeed *cannot* do this if the countering is to be a decision and not just another metaphysical calcification. On the most fundamental level, contradiction is a necessary feature of the way that the sacred functions.

3.22 Co-instantiation and Immediacy

Having established the bare necessity of contradiction, the previous warning against dialectical thinking should be a preliminary sign that the contradiction needs to also be taken both as co-instantiated and immediately in order to give space for the godhood of the gods. For instance, if we see a contradiction in the way the gods manifest to us or make themselves strange to us now, but hope that someday we might learn enough to close the distance, we have separated the contradiction in such a way that we have denied space for the gods, which is typical of the way that things in general have been given over to us in metaphysics . “God is never a being about which man knows something at times this way and at times another way; god is never a being whom man gets closer to in various distances.” (M 202) What is

³⁷ There are of course other instances of contradictory languages in the being-historical texts that are instrumental to the gods, but this final horizon of the countering allows us to establish contradictory terms in a way that encompasses everything dependent on this horizon as well

necessary to steer us away from the temptation to relate to God as a temporarily misunderstood and contradictory entity is co-instantiation.

To treat the contradiction the way we treat contradictory facts or states of affairs of entities is to miss the point badly. This submits contradiction to existing forms of metaphysics, logic, theology, and philosophy. For the philosophy that Heidegger thinks worthy of the name,

To make itself understandable is suicide for philosophy. The idolizers of 'facts' never realize that their idols shine only in a borrowed light. They are indeed not supposed to realize that, for it would immediately make them perplexed and, accordingly, useless. But idolizers and idols are used only when the gods are absconding and so are announcing *their* nearness. (CtP 344)

We still owe a duty of vigilance to thought, to the project of philosophy which attempts to think Being, but this means not trading genuine problems for sham solutions. He goes on to say that, "...the thinking of the historicity of being can be made question-worthy in four ways", and first on the list is, "On the basis of the gods." (CtP 345) We think the nearness of the absconding gods when we think them without aid, when we expose ourselves to the strangeness of this encounter which gives us our grounding as the things that we are, in a way that cannot *be* a ground that provides final or even proximate explanations. Grasping this is one of the interrelated ways that we can think of the way that being, in a similar manner, needs to be made radically questionable beyond our usual metrics in order to be thought at all. "As determined on the basis of the gods, the thinking of the historicity of being... stands outside every theology and is equally removed from any atheism, whether in the sense of a 'worldview' of a doctrine having some other character." (CtP 346) Again, we think this according to its demands when we think it without presuming any pre-existing venue for it, in immediacy.

Much as in the case of the known-unknown or present-absence in the previous section, the contradiction here taken as co-instantiated and immediately is unfriendly to wordplay or perspective. Appealing to something like taking nearness 'as' distance to diminish the contradiction already separates out the two terms and smuggles in a resolution through the 'as' by appealing to our ability to organize things according to our normal modes of intelligibility. For example, if a new acquaintance makes a joke at your expense, and someone who better knows this person tells you to 'take it as a compliment', that this is actually a form of harmless mocking affection typical of their roguish personality, the 'taking it as'

is an attempt to translate from one set of content (this person is insulting me) to another seemingly incompatible one (this person is giving me their approval). This is only successful insofar as one of the forms of content ultimately wins out. If you insist that you are still insulted despite ‘taking it as a compliment’, you have not actually taken it as such. In the case of experiencing nearness as distance, the ‘as’ cannot serve this function, because the terms cannot be translated into each other. They collapse into each other without giving up their individual demands. Likewise, this distance is not compatible with a perspectival reduction of contradiction, since the nature of the countering is partially responsible for conditioning any perspective we might take on the subject and is prior to any individual or even epochal relation. The being-historical gods are not ‘near’ for some people and ‘far’ for others, or ‘near’ now and ‘far’ then.

Crowe characterizes the main thrust of the sacred in being-historical thought by emphasizing that, “[Heidegger] points to a way to recover the genuine *strangeness* of God as present yet absent, as revealed yet hidden.”³⁸ If this is true, as I believe it to be and as the texts encountered so far seem to support, then I take it to be equally true that a prerequisite for this strangeness which is distinctive to God is to take the contradictory nature of God as both co-instantiated and immediate.

3.23 Making the Absconding Actionable

We have so far established that in order for the strange and distant gods of being-historical thought to happen, and to not become ontotheological idols, they must meet the same paradoxical criteria that the gods of the fourfold did, and if this consistency is to hold, we should also expect to find a necessary element of what I have been calling *actionability*, their availability for some sort of practical uptake. This will require a different route of access than the gods of the fourfold, since Heidegger seems insistent that the role the sacred plays in this particular project does not neatly map on to any existing religious tradition as currently understood or widely practiced. I will argue later that this does not absolutely preclude our ability to take up this thinking from within such traditions, but for now, we will proceed without taking this as given, so that the argument does not become anchored to one particular interpretation. Instead, I

³⁸ Crowe, *Heidegger on Religion* 23

will argue for actionability on the basis of the mutual need between gods and mortals in the countering, and the fact that we can still experience the gods in their withdrawal.

In a somewhat trivial sense, despite the fact that Heidegger offers almost nothing in the way of content for these gods, since they are often discussed as placeholders for a possible domain of thinking that is intended to radicalize and not stabilize us, this domain still makes demands on us just as we are constituted in our potential capacity to hold this domain open in the epoch of being we have inherited as historical Dasein. While the trajectory of Western thought according to Heidegger might be in dangerous territory, the story is not yet over and the prognosis is not yet fatal (or if it is fatal, perhaps fatal in the way of Lazarus). If there were truly no access to the gods as a way of getting to the question of being, as we saw there should be according to the *Contributions*, then the situation would be hopeless. The situation is not hopeless. Therefore, *modus tollens*, there is at least the possibility of the gods being actionable.

This possibility requires more work before we can be reasonably certain that it is a necessary feature of the gods, but we have found a point of entry. How is it that Dasein and the gods are related to each other such that Dasein can take a meaningful stance on the matter? One such way is that they *need* each other. In *Mindfulness*, we find one among many other instances of the relation that Heidegger envisions between mankind and the gods based on their mutual need for each to be what they are in the countering:

Gods do not need man, but they distressingly need beying, whose truth – insofar as man is appropriated by Da-sein – must be grounded in Da-sein. Beying is the distressing need of gods so that, availing themselves of beying's essencing and in the complete detachedness unto the lack of concern with each and every being, gods let come true, like the storm of a great flight, into their godhood, the announcing [anzusagen] of themselves as those who refuse themselves [Sichvesagenden] within the refusal [versagend] of beying. (M 218/GA66 255, translation modified)

Gods do not need man, that is, they do not require the imagination or the creative faculties of man as previously conceived to birth them into existence by virtue of man's priority in this arrangement. In fact, the key point is that there is no such priority. As in the fourfold, it is the relation between gods and men that allow each to be as they are. As such, the gods *do* need the sort of historical being that man, here taken as Da-sein with emphasis on the *Sein/being*, is able to sustain and ground since it is Da-sein that

can sustain entities *as* entities, as meaningful and purposeful within a particular era. In their detachedness from each and every being, every entity, this ensures that they are never to be taken as a thing among things or a deified cause of things. It ensures that they do not suffer de-godding which denies their conditions in the first place. If Da-sein can sustain this, the gods permit their own announcing, announced precisely in their *refusal* to become comprehensible within the refusal of being, the abyssal quality we encountered earlier. The countering relationship of mutual need that defines the gods and mortals in their appropriate manner is the sort of thing we can never claim, but can await, again in active receptivity that is supposed to make volatile the picture of Dasein we have perhaps become accustomed to within metaphysics. “To be needed by the gods and to be shattered by such an elevation – it is in the direction of this concealment that we must interrogate the essence of being *as such*.” (CtP 69)

There is no implication that this active waiting will be easy, common, or even reasonable. Being able to risk one’s very relationship with being, the background against which everything and anything is foregrounded, is a steep price of entry. In “Why Poets”, Heidegger envisions that one of the unique tasks and burdens of the poet-as-thinker is being able to make room for the absence of the gods, here speaking in conversation with Hölderlin’s work. “Poets are the mortals who gravely sing the wine-god and sense the track of the fugitive gods; they stay on the gods’ track, and so they blaze a path for their mortal relations, a path toward the turning point.” (WP 202) Towards the end, we see further, “Because they experience unwholeness as such, poets of the kind who risk more are underway on the track of the holy... The unwhole as the unwhole, traces for us what is whole. What is whole beckons and calls to the holy. The holy binds the divine. The divine brings God closer.” (WP 240) Despite the absence of the gods, the poets can align themselves in practical relation to it such that they can turn this absence into an apophatic circumscription of the space where the gods can be called for, in the light of the holy, that is, in the light that allows the gods to presence as gods and not idols, and not as a purely negative absence.

In *Mindfulness*, to the extent that we can think non-metaphysically about the gods, we are given another hint how the gods might announce themselves. This happens not *primarily* through prophets and “bombastic ‘theophanies’”, but, “...by unobtrusively and decidedly making room for the sites of the decision in favour of a struggle that strives for obtaining gods’ glance in the beholding of those who inquire

poetically and thinkingly. The quiet dissemination of these sites of decision goes beneath, elevates and encircles the human-being hitherto.” (M 215) The elevation which shatters, the elevation which struggles by making room, is a way in which we can still take action on the absence of the gods, and inquire towards them in a way that allows a decision in the countering.

We can summarize the preceding exploration. The being-historical gods are harder to qualify in some ways than the gods of the fourfold since they are framed here as a necessary horizon that needs to be taken up as radically questionable before we can meaningfully decide on the sort of relationship which will structure us and the gods accordingly. Despite this they must be *actionable* to distinguish their space from that of a brute atheistic absence or an ontotheological idolatry, and the mutual need that being-historical Dasein and the gods share make this not just a possibility of being taken up, but a necessary feature of this conception of the gods. The absent gods whose absence cannot be actively traced by the poets, the absconding gods who cannot be actively awaited in their present absence simply *cannot* be the gods that join us in setting up space for being to shape a particular scene. With this, we can say that along with being immediately co-instantiated as contradictory, the gods must also be actionable. The being-historical gods are thus consistent with the gods of the fourfold on the basis of being paradoxical.

4. Phenomenology of Religious Life

The *Phenomenology of Religious Life* lectures are Heidegger’s broad attempt at accounting for what religious phenomena mean in practice for the person who enacts them, the enactment of them being critical to differentiate the method of a true *phenomenology* of religion from a theoretical *philosophy* of religion or a theology. Among other inquiries, he covers Pauline epistles in some detail, comments on Augustine and Meister Eckhart, and engages with Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Dilthey. Unfortunately, not all topics are equally well developed and the notes on medieval mysticism, for instance, are little more than fragmentary sketches of an intended path for lecturing that never fully materialized. For this reason I will focus most of the exegetical attention of this section on what the Pauline letters can tell us about the conditions for a genuine enactment of belief for the early Christians, arguing that here as well we find the

same consistent paradoxical function as elsewhere, albeit with different emphasis given the fact that this concerns factual belief based on historical revelation, and not the sacred as the grounds for historical epochs or as an antidote against metaphysics.

Heidegger identifies at least two main themes that impose themselves upon both Paul as the herald of the new revelation for particular communities of believers like the Thessalonians and Colossians, and the communities themselves insofar as they are able to take up this belief in practice: the relationship between the old law and the new reality of Christian *παρουσία*, “the appearing again of the already appeared Messiah”, and as a result of this, the turn towards an immanent eschatological thinking. (PRL 71) There are a few sites of contradiction in this picture, and contradictions that are significant for facilitating the sorts of relationships which are constitutive of transformative belief.

4.1 Message and Medium

First and foremost, Paul as Heidegger reads him is under a terrible burden. He is beset by anxiety as regards both his life and his mission, and for good reason. Both the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of his message are strange. Heidegger notes that in the letter to the Galatians 5:11, “[the offense of the cross]: That is the real fundamental part of Christianity, against which there is only faith or non-faith.” (PRL 50) What is this offense? On one level, the very idea that God could suffer and die a human death seems to strain and break the bounds of any modality, whether God *would*, *should*, or even *could* do such a thing. Even Peter struggled to comprehend this while in the physical presence of Jesus.

And [Jesus] began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the ancients and by the high priests, and the scribes, and be killed: and after three days rise again. And he spoke the word openly. And Peter taking him, began to rebuke him. Who turning about and seeing his disciples, threatened Peter, saying: Go behind me, Satan, because thou savourest not the things that are of God, but that are of men.³⁹

One can imagine the amount of offense that this message must have inspired for Peter to “rebuke” Jesus. Beyond even this, the resurrection also “offends” – if it is strange that God would die, how strange as well that a human being would rise from the dead. Finally, there is the issue of the Law. Heidegger says in

³⁹ Mark 8:31-33, related also in Matthew 16:21-23

reference to Galatians 2:19 in his notes, “Very important! Concentrated form of the entire Pauline dogmatic... [Through the law I died to the law] merely ethical. Since Christ is identical with the law, the law died with him (as does Paul, too).⁴⁰ (PRL 49) The fact that Jesus represents an absolute break between the old law and the new revelation, a physical death for Jesus and an existential death for Paul, since his whole mode of existence prior to his conversion was enacted in his zealotry, is an issue since it robs Paul of the very tools he would usually employ to effectively disseminate the revelation he has become a party to and its urgent consequences. With this, we will transition from the contradictions present in the content of the Christian message to the contradictions in how it is to be taken up by Paul in his preaching.

“Paul finds himself in a struggle. He is pressured to assert the Christian life experience against the surrounding world. To this end he uses the insufficient means of rabbinical teaching available to him. From this his explication of Christian life experience has its peculiar structure.” (PRL 50) In brief, the very means which Paul has at his disposal are at irreconcilable odds with the message he is to deliver, since, “[We] are not dealing with a logical mode of argumentation.” Further, “The fulfilment of the law is impossible; each fails in it, only faith justifies.” (PRL 51) His usual modes of communication cannot communicate what is crucial, and yet he is called to. The law (to the extent that it still matters as something beyond the “merely ethical” and prescribed ritual observances) delivers believers into an impossible situation, which can only be taken up successfully through faith. This faith is not something that we can motivate as if we were choosing between pre-determined choices in experience. For Paul, and with him the communities he preached to, when the message is received and understood in the non-propositional sense appropriate to it, it is received, “in great despair”.⁴¹ Along with this despair, there is a joy from the Holy Spirit, “a joy which is a gift, thus not motivated from out of one’s own experience”. (PRL 66) Heidegger strengthens this phrasing on the same page, adding that it is not merely a gift irreducible to experiential or practical concerns, but, “one which comes from the Holy Spirit and is *incomprehensible* to life.” (PRL 66, emphasis added) Here we can already see that both the bare ‘facts’ of the message are both incomprehensible and downright offensive to usual modes of thinking, they demand the impossible,

⁴⁰ The figure of Jesus, for Kierkegaard, is the paradox embodied on every level, as I will develop further in the following chapter, but for now will focus on Heidegger’s reading of Paul

⁴¹ 1 Thessalonians 1:6

they are *contradictory* and in a non-trivial sense since the contradictions must be taken up in practice (here, a life defined by faith) as both *co-instantiated* and *immediate*, not translatable into any existing concerns, modes of life, or historical inheritances.

4.2 Immanent Eschaton

We can deepen this claim by examining the second main thrust of Heidegger's assessment, the role that apocalypse plays in the life of the early Christians. Paul anticipated that when Christ returned as promised, the *παρουσία*, it would be in final judgment and final redemption for the faithful who were able to persevere. Crucially for Heidegger this was not a waiting that was directed towards some day or another that had not yet arrived but would eventually, but a total reframing of their relationship with temporality. "Paul is not concerned at all about answering the question of the When of the Parousia. The When is determined through the How of the self-comportment, which is determined through the enactment of factual life experience in each of its moments." (PRL 75) The Christian life is one of vigilance, hope, and expectation, that intrudes upon and structures any possible factual moment in everyday life. We might think of an example here elsewhere in Heidegger, in the distinction between fear and anxiety in *Being and Time*. We can be afraid of something we encounter, something that has not harmed us yet but *might* at some time in the near or far future, like realizing on a hike that the large rustling of some brush is not just the wind and is actually a bear. This fear is oriented towards one possibility that will arrive as any others will, even if indeterminately for the moment. Contrast this with the experience of *anxiety*. Anxiety is not 'about' anything.

That in the face of which one has anxiety is characterized by the fact that what threatens is *nowhere*... 'Nowhere', however, does not signify nothing; this is where any region lies, and there too lies any disclosedness of the world for essentially spatial Being-in. Therefore that which threatens cannot bring itself close from a definite direction within what is close by; it is already 'there', and yet nowhere; it is so close that it is oppressive and stifles one's breath, and yet it is nowhere. (BT 231)

In a similar way the pressing need and the threat of the *παρουσία* is from *nowhere*, or perhaps more accurately, *no-when*. It is something that is already there once the believer has accepted and understood the revelation, but never as one assents to facts or arguments. It produces a tension of fear and holy joy that cannot even be said to provide any typical kinds of day-to-day peace. Quite the opposite.

There is no security for Christian life; the constant insecurity is also characteristic for what is fundamentally significant in factual life. The uncertainty is not coincidental; rather it is necessary. This necessity is not a logical one, nor is it of natural necessity. In order to see this clearly, one must reflect on one's own life and its enactment. Those 'who speak of peace and security' ([1 Thessalonians] 5:3) spend themselves on what life brings them, occupy themselves with whatever tasks of life. They are caught up in what life offers; they are in the dark, with respect to knowledge of themselves. The believers, on the contrary, are sons of the light and of the day. (PRL 73-4)

The *παρουσία* and the eschaton are better described as horizons for any possible temporally local event than temporal events themselves, since we can only *await* them insofar as they have not yet arrived. They categorically exclude the possibility of experiencing them while still awaiting them in vigilance – present as absent, a certain uncertainty irreducible to worldly concerns. In other words, containing a contradiction as the basis for the particularly *Christian* uptake of the immanent apocalypse. Benjamin Crowe reviews this action as follows:

The apocalyptic situation is one in which every intelligible stance on the world meets with and is overtaken by something that permanently exceeds it. In the apocalyptic Situation, one has been exposed to a perspective that encompasses every human perspective and goes beyond it. Life has a new direction that it would never have discovered on its own.⁴²

It is time to make our final assessments of Heidegger's early work on Saint Paul and how it exhibits the same trend of consistent paradox.

4.3 Summation

As we previously showed, Paul's message and medium are paradoxical according to the working formal definition, and necessarily so if Paul's vocation and the new revelation are to be taken up by the community of believers. The sacred is the sacred because it is paradoxical. If we look at a specific yet highly significant aspect of the revelation, that of the second coming of Christ in the *παρουσία*, we see the same basic formal components. *Contradictory*, because present-as-absent, a certain uncertainty, and one which claims that temporality can be radically restructured according to principles alien to our own. As Crowe puts it, "What the early Christians added [to apocalyptic texts] was a further deepening of this sense of urgency by proclaiming that the great eschatological consummation is in fact underway in the

⁴² Crowe, *Heidegger on Religion* 15

very midst of mundane history.”⁴³ Even this idea, that the end of days is taking place day by day, is an affront to the way we usually treat these ideas respectively. If these contradictions were not so, if they did not demand to be taken as *co-instantiated* and *immediately*, they would cease to have the authority and the radical otherness that are capable of demanding the impossible from both Paul and the faithful. If there is one trend in this particular era of Heidegger’s thought on the sacred that is clear, it is, I believe, the fact that all of this *must* be taken up in practice, if it is not actionable, it is not faith, it is nothing. It is reduced to empty dogma or impotent theorizing. For the sacred to show up as the sacred in Heidegger’s treatment of Paul’s testimony and apocalyptic thinking, it must show up at least partially on the basis of co-instantiated actionable contradictions, taken immediately. It is *paradoxical*, and in such a way that we can now say with some justification that the major eras of Heidegger’s work on the sacred are both individually paradoxical and mutually consistent on the basis of this connecting thread, despite lacking any apparent systemic unity.

5. The Sacred and Religion

Throughout this chapter and in chapters to follow I am working from the broad position that Heidegger’s account of what I call the sacred has something to do with what we might call religion, that is, the forms of faith that we already encounter in the world as we inhabit it – especially (but not exclusively) the Abrahamic tradition. While the point of the argument is to establish the role of paradox in the sacred, and not a ground-up account of a phenomenology of religion, the link between the sacred and religion is not without some scholarly controversy, and I would be remiss if I did not address potential concerns and justify my understanding of this relationship. This section will attempt just that. My claim is that whether or not Heidegger is directing his work *to* any particular religious expression, he is working *from* a foundation that incorporates these traditions, and specifically in a way that is non-reducible to secularized readings of the sacred.

⁴³ Ibid. 17

5.1 From Religion

Heidegger speaks on the question of religion from a variety of standpoints, not all of which are compatible under the same form of reference. We have the world of the Greeks, not one of ‘religion’ properly for Heidegger, but a world in which, “...the god is, as god, the one who looks and who looks as the one emerging into presence.” (P 104) By contrast, there is the “spiritual technology” of ‘Roman’ religion. Finally, there are the ways that the Christian tradition has been interpreted and historically developed, whether originally, mystically, or ontotheologically. For the purposes of the current section, any reference to “religion” without qualification will focus on the historical uptake of the Abrahamic tradition. The reason for this, and the reason that Heidegger claims that the Greek gods “are no more”, lies in our starting point. (H 109)

One of the basic principles that Heidegger’s phenomenological project appeals to is that we cannot choose or escape our starting position, and failure to contend with this fact will produce errors that range from the useless to the dangerous. *Being and Time* begins with the analytic of Dasein for this exact reason. We are attempting ontology from the vantage point which we already occupy, and even more so, from a phenomenological position which we are always already *thrown* into. (BT 34/174) Likewise, when Heidegger considers metaphysics, it is all the more pressing because metaphysics is not some theoretical space we might consider abstractly or one day find ourselves in; it is the way of revealing that we already find ourselves understood in and as. In both of these cases the only possible way out is through. We can play only the hand we have been dealt. I believe this translates into Heidegger’s fundamental stance on religion as well.

There is a clear example of this in a rare bit of autobiographical writing published along with *Mindfulness*, “My Pathway Hitherto”.

And who would not want to recognize that a confrontation with Christianity reticently accompanied my entire path hitherto, a confrontation that was not and is not a ‘problem’ that one ‘takes up’ to address but a preservation of, and *at the same time* a painful separation from, one’s ownmost provenance: the parental home, homeland, and youth. Only the one who was so rooted in such an actually lived Catholic world may be able to have an inkling of the necessities that like subterranean quakes have been at work in the pathway of my inquiry hitherto. Moreover, the Marburg period offered a profound experience of a Protestant Christianity – all of which as what had to be overcome from the ground up but not destroyed. (M 356)

Shortly after this, Heidegger continues and specifies that this confrontation has nothing to do with specific dogma but is directed towards the question of whether the gods are fleeing from us, and the “one inquiry into the truth of being which alone decides on the ‘time’ and the ‘place’ that is historically preserved for us within the history of the occident and its gods.” (M 356) From this already we can see two main points. Firstly, as a result of his particular religious inheritance, Heidegger the man received a background against which the thought of Heidegger the philosopher was inevitably foregrounded. This background was not to be tossed aside or ignored for either. It might be preserved in its painfulness, or “overcome...but not destroyed”, but as background, it structured everything that was to follow; the only remaining question is whether this would be done in a more or less lucid way. Secondly, the path we have been assigned to for the genesis of our thinking and the direction we are thinking *towards* is “within the history of the occident and its gods”. These gods are obviously meant in a different sense than the specifically Christian God that Heidegger previously referenced, but the same principle underlies both. We start, *and we can only ever start*, from where we are, either individually or as thinkers of a particular local historical epoch. I find it implausible, to put it in the mildest possible terms, that Heidegger was not following this principle when he was working on a way to approach the sacred. The sacred is related on some level to the religious because that is where we are already are and are thinking from, and not just in the sense of arguing ‘against’ the religious, since that would subsume the entire project under a logic which has already been defined in opposition to the thing to be overcome. I believe, as we will see shortly, that this includes any possible attempt at ‘secularization’. We must think through and not against if we are to think at all.

Now, this gives us basis to think that at least Heidegger the human being was engaged with religion, but we can briefly make the case stronger that Heidegger’s thought on the sacred more broadly considered continued to engage nontrivially with extant forms of religion. Even in the era of the fourfold, we have already seen that Heidegger sees value in appropriating, “...the hidden fullness and wealth of what has been and what, thus gathered, is presencing, of the divine in the world of the Greeks, in prophetic Judaism, in the preaching of Jesus.” (TT 182) Treating these things as “what has been” means engaging with their essence and not merely their form. This might, for instance, happen in the form of a radical hermeneutic re-interpretation of their essence in light of what has been revealed by the phenomenological operation,

a move that starts from where we are, looks back to how prior revelation was experienced, and which might shake us out of our preconceptions of the religious such that the content itself might be re-examined. In seeking a non-metaphysical divinity, beyond existing forms of theism, atheism, religion, pagan antiquarianism, Christian revivalism, whatever the case may be, we still have good hints to follow in “what has been”. Mark Wrathall puts it succinctly while considering our particular situation between a horizon of metaphysical godlessness and a new orientation to divinity which has perhaps not yet made itself available. “...the hope of finding this sort of divinity is something we cannot bring about ourselves. All we can do is try to keep alive the practices that will attune us in such a way that we can experience the divine in the world. The only means we have available to this end are the religious practices we have inherited.”⁴⁴ So, in this way, despite the fact that we think to a horizon that precludes us from assuming the content of a new disclosure of the sacred, it is still important that we think *from* the essence of what has been given to us already and which constitutes our available hint at the sacred. For this to be the case the sacred must have some continuity with our received religious tradition, no matter how sketchy or corrupted by astringent ontotheology.

5.2 *From the Sacred to the Sign*

While there is still undoubtedly much to say we are at least beginning to move in the right direction. We have derived a basic sense of paradox as being an operative quality within Heidegger’s account of the sacred and linked it with the give and take of the gods of the fourfold, the being-historical horizons, and the anxious world of the early Church. In a sense this is only a first step. This allows us to derive a basic definition by which we might recognize it, but it is still unclear as to what this paradoxical quality is more specifically, or what we are supposed to do with it. In the next chapter these two points will receive their answers with reference to sign, signification, and paradox as a limit.

⁴⁴ Mark Wrathall, “Between the Earth and the Sky: Heidegger on Life After the Death of God” in *Religion After Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 85

Chapter III: Signification and the Extremities of Risk

“Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die... This paradox is the whole principle of courage; even of quite earthly or quite brutal courage. A man cut off by the sea may save his life if he will risk it on the precipice.” – G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

We have so far been preparing the way for a more sustained and substantial discussion on paradox in Heidegger, following hints found in his later work. After examining the sacred in some detail, the result was a cautious analytic description of how to identify paradox in Heidegger. It was described thus: an actionable contradiction, in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate. The derived analytic description was preliminary, developed just sufficiently to justify the continuation of the current inquiry, and admittedly had a sharp limit – it said nothing about what paradox *is*, in a more robust sense. Only how it looks and behaves in the text. We are presently in a better position to develop this point further and add ontological content to the form, resulting in a tripartite definition:

1. Descriptive: Paradox is an actionable contradiction, in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate
2. Ontological: Paradox is encountered as a *sign*
3. Functional: Paradox is related to as a limit and horizon, based on a Kierkegaardian approach

This argument will be the most constructive yet, and will require both importing analogous concepts from other thinkers and venturing some original claims on how crucial yet incredibly inhospitable facets of Heidegger’s later work hang together. I hope to show that if we can endure the cost of some exterior conceptual scaffolding, we will be able to paint an otherwise cohesive and thematically accurate picture where previously we have been left in relative obscurity.

I will begin with the main thrust of the argument for paradox as sign, drawing from Being and Time ¶17-18 in tandem with “What Calls For Thinking”, and proposing an equally fundamental disclosure of the overall *unintelligibility* of the world along with the holistic intelligibility that marks the

worldhood of the World. Next I will assess a few different ways that Kierkegaard employs the idea of paradox in his own work, and clarify which specifically inspires the present chapter, ultimately concluding that Kierkegaard is an appropriate and helpful source of illumination if we understand paradox as a limit condition to be related to, the site of an existential wager that demands non-standard forms of understanding. Afterwards, we will address the strongest alternative account to date, found in *Heidegger's Contradiction of Being* by Filippo Casati, and why the current chapter not only survives the implicit critique within it, but offers a parallel way of accounting for the paradoxical elements in Heidegger without reducing them to utter nonsense or an unsatisfactory shrug in the face of the unthinkable.

1. A Sign Assigned

In this section we will present Heidegger's relatively under-explored account of sign and signification in *Being and Time*, before establishing textual grounds for expanding this account beyond the context of equipment that it seems to be situated in. I will then propose paradox as a special class of sign, specifically, a sign which discloses the overall unintelligibility of the world, insofar as we experience it in the world.

1.1 Sign and Structural Intelligibility

In *Being and Time* the paragraphs relevant to signs fall under the section heading "Analysis of Environmentality and Worldhood in General". (BT 95) The core of the discussion takes place in ¶17-18, and builds on the presentation of the way entities show up for us as either *occurrent*, merely present as bare "things", or *available* in ways that make sense for the projects we find ourselves always already engaged in as part of the world which Dasein exists in and as. The total network of the sorts of entities which are available to us has the structure of *equipment*, which is prior to any one instance of equipment. For example, it makes no sense to talk about a pen being "equipment" for work outside of the larger context of desks, notebooks, texts, and other paraphernalia associated with the world of written work, in addition to reasons that Dasein would have to find this a project worth pursuing in the first place, which reciprocally illuminates entities as either appropriate or inappropriate for the chosen project. The individual entity can only make sense within the whole of the structure of things which are available. In a general sense, "The structure of the Being of what is [available] as equipment is determined by references

or assignments.” (BT 105) We can catch a glimpse of this larger structure when we are forced to see not just the normal flow of our projects but the purposes we have for using a particular entity or acting in a certain way, the “towards-this” of a project. (BT 105) An easy way to imagine this is to picture the pen one uses to write suddenly and inexplicably ceasing to provide ink, or cracking in some disastrous way and flooding your work with an excess of ink. The assignment of the pen to the project has been disturbed and frustrated, and now we see not just the item which was previously barely noticeable in our hand under normal use, but also, the fact that we had a reason for using a pen in the first place which is now interrupted. No pen, no writing, no work. The work becomes conspicuous right along with the entity in this moment of interruption. In addition to the role this concept has to play in Heidegger’s signs, I would like especially to preliminarily signal this here as a first step at noting the link between encountering something odd or amiss in our usual projects and a route to more general structural disclosure of one kind or another. (BT 98)

In ¶17, *Reference and Signs*, the determination of equipment by reference is given both depth and breadth. The point of this section is clear; it aims at finding a route from entities within the world to the world-structure itself, or the “worldhood of the world”. “[The] further we proceed in understanding the Being of entities within-the-world, the broader and firmer becomes the phenomenal basis on which the world-phenomenon may be laid bare.” (BT 107) The *point of departure* is the available entity, but the goal lies elsewhere, which is important for both Heidegger’s argument and my own. It is helpful to first get clear on what Heidegger means by a sign and a reference because, perhaps unsurprisingly, it is rather idiosyncratic compared to the usual treatment of the subject. Indeed, in one of the few pieces of secondary literature on this aspect of *Being and Time*, Jonathan Hope argues that Heidegger represents a possible path for semiotics which falls into neither the schools nor spheres of influence of Pierce and Saussure, thereby distinguishing it from most other major trends in the field since.⁴⁵

For Heidegger, we should first distinguish between *relation*, *reference*, and *indication*, and we will do so preliminarily. Every available entity with the mode of being of equipment is structured by

⁴⁵ Jonathan Hope, “The Sign in Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit”, *Semiotica* 202 (2014): 259-272

reference, as we already saw in the example of the pen. Equipment necessarily refers beyond the entity itself, to the serviceability which allows the entity in question to be available *for* something, to other entities which share in the web of reference which make up the equipmental whole, and to Dasein's ability to meaningfully participate in projects of any kind. References generally function without calling attention to themselves as such. A sign refers in a unique way; it *indicates*. Indication participates in the referential totality in the usual manner, but it does it in a way that makes a certain region of interconnected references conspicuous, by showing our concerns and situatedness. "Every 'indication' is a reference, but not every referring is an indicating." (BT 108) Regarding relation, it may seem that both referring and indicating are relations of some kind, and this is indeed true if we treat referring and indicating as broadly and formally as possible, but Heidegger also notes that this sort of formalizing is *trivially* true. Once we allow some universal concept of "relation" to enter the picture, the sign-structure expands in scope and "...provides an ontological clue for 'characterizing' any entity whatsoever." (BT 108) A clue applicable to everything is practically useless if the goal is to get clear on how entities are structured through the worldhood of the world, as if someone asked you to describe a friend and you replied, "They breathe." "If we are to investigate such phenomena as references, signs, or even significations, nothing is to be gained by characterizing them as relations." (BT 108)

In practice, we encounter signs in a variety of ways, from the most terrestrial and mundane, such as the directional indicator of a car or a knot tied in a handkerchief to remind the owner of anything whatsoever that may be worth remembering, to the sorts of technical signs and stand-ins useful for some of the more abstracted scientific and linguistic projects. (BT 108-9, 111). To grasp the essence of what connects all these instantiations of signs which we are accustomed to employing, Heidegger establishes a strategy linking the ontic character of sign to the ontological. "...signs, in the first instance, are themselves items of equipment whose specific character as equipment consists in *showing* or *indicating*." (BT 108-9) Note both that signs are items of equipment in *the first instance* and not ultimately or exhaustively, and the potentially substantial ramifications of the formal sign-structure, which we will develop as the section progresses. Heidegger provides a clear and very useful example of what it is for something to have the character of *indicating* in practice: a car signalling a turn. (BT 109) Consider a car in front of us on the

street about to make a left turn. The driver will (hopefully) use some mechanism to indicate this action, a blinking light on the corresponding side of the turn in our time or the deployment of an arrow in Heidegger's. What we see is the light, without a doubt, but the light in its available role as turn signal does not exist in a vacuum. Our ability to competently respond to it by either yielding, taking caution, waiting, whatever the case may be, relies on a whole network of intelligibility. We need to know how to navigate a world in which cars obey agreed-upon rules of the road, in which it matters based on the sort of thing that we are if we get hit by a car or not, and innumerable other subtleties which form the background for the single sign of the car's indicator light. That is to say, the single sign actually does not work as a one-to-one signifier between one visual stimulus (the light) and a pre-ordained meaning (the turn), but discloses a local and eminently relevant situation in the referential totality of the world which it exists in. This, however, is only half the story, since Heidegger emphasizes that what is ontologically significant about the sign is *not* the fact that it has a certain kind of "serviceability" within a world. The same could be said of the way a hammer (or any other equipment) functions, and a hammer is not a sign in any obvious sense. (BT 109)

When a sign addresses itself to Dasein, it addresses something which is always already engaged, it requires Dasein to take circumspective note of the environment it finds itself in; to grasp the sign as something occurrent which requires contemplation to unlock is to misunderstand the sign entirely. We understand a car's indicator by responding bodily and spatially, not with detached analysis.

A sign is not a Thing which stands to another Thing in the relationship of indicating; it is rather *an item of equipment which explicitly raises a totality of equipment into our circumspection so that together with it the worldly character of the ready-to-hand announces itself...* Signs always indicate primarily 'wherein' one lives, where one's concern dwells, what sort of involvement there is with something. (BT 110-11)

We are getting closer to the heart of the matter here. A sign is something available, but in a "peculiar and even distinctive way". (BT 109) Its mode of being is always already more than just its relation to its practical uptake, it refers beyond itself to the necessary conditions for its own ability to function as it does. This can be clarified further if we take up the question of sign and reference from another angle, how signs are *taken* as a sign instead of how entities specifically artficed as signs function. We do not start with some

sort of raw entity, merely present, awaiting assignment. Heidegger provides the example of a farmer taking the south wind as a sign of rain. The wind is not granted the predicate of “sign of rain” in addition to some other qualities which define it. This way of understanding the “meaning” of the wind roughly corresponds with H.P. Grice’s “natural meaning”, if we want to clarify the issue even further. In “Meaning”, Grice distinguishes between natural and non-natural meaning, and the former should meet certain qualifications. To use Grice’s own example, if we say, “Those spots mean measles”, we are entitled to certain claims but not others.⁴⁶ We may not say on the basis of this statement that the spots themselves have content which aims, as if intentionally, to communicate this or that about measles by means of the spots. We also may not claim any link between what the spots mean in this case and a conclusion someone else might draw from the meaning of the spots. Further still, we may not turn the “meaning” of the spots into some specific claim that might be isolated, “...thus "Those spots meant measles" cannot be reformulated as "Those spots meant 'measles' " or as "Those spots meant 'he has measles.'"⁴⁷ We may, however, reformulate the statement with the phrase “the fact that”, such as, the fact that he had spots or the fact that the wind was blowing in this particular way means measles or rain as the case may be.

Similarly, Heidegger’s signs that we take to mean something do not have traditional “content”. In establishing the link between south wind and impending rain, the farmer has already generally grasped the situation of the world disclosed through the practice of farming, and the wind as a component within this. The south wind certainly does not intend to tell the farmer anything about the coming rain, nor is it logically justified (or even necessary) to claim that the south wind means ‘it will rain soon’, even if the south wind means it will rain soon. It is the *fact that* the wind is blowing in this way that allows the farmer to take it as a sign of rain. The establishment of the sign *reveals* the mode of being of the wind as something meaningful from the first. (BT 111-12) Again, this is still just an increasingly nuanced hint as to the true ontological genesis of reference, but we have another gesture at the fact that a sign reveals something about the overall intelligibility of the world – even when it seems like we have a hand in establishing the sign.

⁴⁶ H.P. Grice, “Meaning”, *The Philosophical Review* 66:3, 1957 pp. 377-388

⁴⁷ Ibid. 377

Heidegger summarizes the relationship between sign and reference developed in ¶17 in three (relatively) straightforward steps, culminating in the following definition: “*A sign is something ontically available which functions both as this definite equipment and as something indicative of the ontological structure of availability, of referential totalities, and of worldhood.*” (BT 114, translation slightly modified, italics original) At this point it may seem that my efforts have been in vain since the sign structure presented so far seems like it only pertains to equipment, and the type of paradox and the instantiations of paradox in the world I have been exploring so far do not map neatly on to the equipmental structure, if at all. However, I believe closer reading and further reading can alleviate these fears. Throughout ¶17 the language Heidegger uses to describe the relationship between sign, reference, and available entities is careful. We find a kind of reference specifically reserved for equipment *qua* equipment, “serviceability-for”, a “distinctive way” that the sign is related to the “kind of Being which belongs to whatever equipmental totality may be available in the environment”, and sign as an “equipmental character” of something ready to hand. (BT 109, 113) The ontological relationship between sign and available entities does not appear to be biconditional, that is, a sign can function via the referential structure *as* an entity with the mode of being of availability, without needing to be wholly and necessarily identified with this particular functioning-as. That is, a sign can have the *character* of *x* or be related to *x* in a privileged way without needing to necessarily *be x* in a strong sense.

To be clear, as we already established, Heidegger has good reasons to explore the relationship between the indication that signs accomplish and the referential totality that makes up the structure of the intelligible world and the entities we might encounter within it. That is, after all, the purpose of this section of *Being and Time*. He leaves us with the following to close out ¶17: “Reference is not an ontical characteristic of something available, when it is rather that by which availability itself is constituted.” (BT 114) I believe that this, combined with Heidegger’s earlier clarification that equipment is merely a point of departure for the phenomenological investigation, should open up the possibility that sign and reference can play a larger role in Heidegger’s project than a brief stepping stone between available entities and the referential whole which structurally illuminates them. Before we consider this possibility more deeply, and present later text in which signs are in fact presented as non-equipment, we should formalize

the most important parts of ¶17 insofar as they pertain to the question of paradox as sign. We will call this formalization S(1) for future use.

S(1): A sign is a phenomenon in the world which reveals the overall structural intelligibility of the world.

1.2 Signs Beyond Equipment and Signifying the Unintelligible

In a 1991 paper, Taylor Carman also considers the possibility that Heidegger's treatment of sign might have deeper roots than its brief treatment in *Being and Time* would suggest.⁴⁸ Responding broadly to the same ambiguities in the text I remarked on concerning the relationship between signs and equipment, and how seriously to take the claim that signs might mean something beyond this, Carman argues that there is continuity between Heidegger's signs in *Being and Time* and his later work on language and the artwork. Given the admitted ambiguity, the best we can expect is that this claim might be plausible rather than unassailable, but if at least plausible, it does add that much more justification to my own constructive work which relies on a similar formal applicability of *Being and Time* era signs to later Heidegger and beyond. Carman begins by covering much of the same territory we have already crossed, noting that there is indeed something peculiar happening with signs. Even though they are an "embedded component of the equipmental whole", they also stand out in such a way that they reveal the world and "make possible our orientation in the situation among those other tools to begin with".⁴⁹ In addition to being "conspicuous", signs for Heidegger also seem oddly broad in their scope. For Carman, this tension is a result of Heidegger anticipating the functioning of the *artwork*, which as we know is also something within the world which has a special function in disclosing the world itself and acting as a phenomenological lens to grasp the structure of the world. The *Being and Time* sign is then a "curious hybrid" which finds its more serious treatment and voice only later in "The Origin of the Work of Art".⁵⁰ The proposed link can be most succinctly summarized in the following passage; "...both early and late in his career, Heidegger recognizes special kinds of artifacts that serve a special function above and beyond

⁴⁸ Taylor Carman, "The Conspicuousness of Signs in Being and Time", *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology*, 22:3 (1991): 158-169

⁴⁹ Ibid. 161, 162

⁵⁰ Ibid. 167

the normal serviceability of mere equipment.”⁵¹ I believe that Carman’s interpretation raises a valuable point, whether or not we have to subscribe to the specific notion that sign is some sort of latent formulation of the artwork.

So, is it time to update S(1), clarifying “a phenomenon in the world” into “a special kind of artifact”? We could, and it would probably help bring us closer to the goal, but if we can follow Carman’s lead and explore the possibility of some continuity between “early” and “late” accounts of sign in Heidegger, I believe that we can do even better than this. The artwork might function as a more developed sign in a formal sense, but there is an instance of sign in later Heidegger which is called explicitly as such in “What Calls for Thinking”.

Heidegger claims that what is most essentially worth thinking about, what both calls for thinking and calls us *for* thinking is the fact that we have not yet begun to think, despite the clear and substantial amount of intellectual capital which has been devoted to philosophy. We find things interesting, naturally, and this interest is seen as both praise and license for further attention. When we spend our time and attention in this way, “[What is] interesting is the sort of thing that can freely be regarded as indifferent the next moment, and be displaced by something else, which then concerns us just as little as what went before.” (WCT 262) This state of affairs is reminiscent of Kierkegaard’s assessment of an ultimately despairing desire to be absolutely self-sufficient and self-defining. In the case of such a conception of the self,

The self is its own master, absolutely (as one says) its own master; and exactly this is the despair, but also what it regards as its pleasure and joy. But it is easy on closer examination to see that this absolute ruler is a king without a country, that really he rules over nothing; his position, his kingdom, his sovereignty, are subject to the dialectic that rebellion is legitimate at any moment. Ultimately it is arbitrarily based upon the self.⁵²

Both philosophical “thinking” for Heidegger and one’s existential commitments for Kierkegaard run the risk of becoming solipsistic and flighty, missing the core issues for both. We will say much more on the

⁵¹ Ibid. 168. It is worth noting that Carman uses Heidegger’s work on language as a way of further grounding this comparison, but in a way that is neither immediately nor obviously helpful or harmful to the current project

⁵² Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd. 2004) 100

link between Kierkegaard's concerns and Heidegger's later, but for now, we can see that thinking does not always mean thinking in the right way, or towards the right target, just as we can have developed ideas about the self without developing much of anything.

That which actually demands thought *withdraws* from us. The following quote is preparatory for the introduction of sign in WCT, but beyond this, also touches helpfully upon ideas which have been explored up to this point and will be explored further in chapters to come; namely, that there is something we can orient ourselves to which is unknowable in any conventional sense yet for precisely this reason uniquely vital for us. It is the ontologically unknowable that is distinct from any ontic knowledge, the gnawing awareness of uncertainty that drew Socrates to and through his various interlocutors. (WCT 270) Heidegger considers how we can come to know, or do anything with, something which withdraws from us, refuses itself from the first:

[Withdrawing] is not nothing. Withdrawal is an event. In fact, what withdraws may even concern and claim man more essentially than anything present that strikes and touches him. Being struck by actuality is what we like to regard as constitutive of the actuality of the actual. However, in being struck by what is actual, man may be debarred precisely from what concerns and touches him - touches him in the surely mysterious way of escaping him by its withdrawal. The event of withdrawal could be what is most present throughout the present, and so infinitely exceed the actuality of everything actual. (WCT 265)

We see here echoes and emphases of themes which should be at this point somewhat familiar. As in the case of the sacred, what makes the withdrawal unique among all which is not-nothing, is that it presences through absence, refuses itself yet asserts itself as something which calls to us and establishes epistemic limits and existential challenges. It refuses to be submitted to metaphysics, the metaphysics of presence, the enframing of technology. To understand it correctly is to follow its flight away from us. As in the case of art, there is something present in what is present which will always exceed our attempts at grasping it, infinitely so, which makes the entity (or event) in question a unique opportunity as long as it is allowed to function according to its particular mode of being.

In the wake of the withdrawal, we are drawn along with it, as if in a draft:

Man here is not first of all man, and then also occasionally someone who points. No. Drawn into what withdraws, drawn toward it and thus pointing into the withdrawal, man first is man. His essential being lies in being such a pointer. Something which in itself, by its essential being, is pointing, *we call a sign*. As he draws toward what withdraws, *man is a sign*. But since this sign points toward what draws *away*, it points not so much at *what* draws away as into the withdrawal. The sign remains without interpretation. (WCT 265, some emphasis added regarding sign)

The previous definition of sign from *Being and Time* has not changed so much as it has been given depth and scope.³³ Just as before, we do not encounter the sign as if it were a pre-existing abstract and occurrent entity within the world, to which the predicate “sign” is attached. The sign is discovered as something already capable of disclosive activity based on the matrix of intelligibility it is encountered within, man already *is* a sign as the one who is pointing, who is called to think what is not yet thought, whether or not this thinking is undertaken in any particular case. Further, we see that a sign need not be a “what”, that is, an entity with the mode of being of equipment, not even as a point of departure. A sign can also be a *who*, or, to phrase it slightly differently, Dasein itself can be essentially structured so as to orient itself towards something which is only properly grasped as present in granting and recognizing its withdrawal. The scope of what a sign can be with this deeper definition seems to agree with Heidegger’s earlier, slightly tentative steps (as Carman noticed). How this might specifically be the case is best understood by reading a little further on in WCT.

If the sign in *Being and Time* is a way of getting the overall structure of the world in view, from the “inside”, as it were, we get a hint here of what it is to have intelligibility structured from “without” – that is, from a domain or an event which is fundamentally *unintelligible*, and in doing so, requires the most basic determinations of our own self-conception to be made volatile along with it. “That which directs us to think gives us directives in such a way that we first become capable of thinking, and thus *are* as thinkers, only by virtue of its directive.” (WCT 272) Heidegger is explicit that when we encounter this question, it is not as we would encounter a fact within the world that stands before us awaiting further

³³ There is of course room for disagreement here, but for the purposes of my constructive argument, disagreement presents no significant trouble. Either Heidegger confirms here that signs are not necessarily equipment, and goes along with the line of thought we have been following so far using Carman as a brief guide, or Heidegger has deviated from that sort of claim, while retaining the important formal qualities of a sign which pertain to the disclosure of the limits of intelligibility. In either case, we can still continue discussing signs as something which can eventually disclose the unintelligibility on the other side of this general intelligibility.

clarification. “We ourselves are in the text and texture of the question. The question ‘What calls on us to think?’ has already drawn us into the issue in question. We ourselves are, in the strict sense of the word, put into question by the question.” (WCT 273) The question which calls us and withdraws from us is disclosive not in a local ontic sense, does not shape one entity or another, but is ontologically *global*. It has a hermeneutic quality which addresses us as we are, and then opens us up as a site of possible unintelligibility once we understand the question and consider what it is precisely that we are. We run the risk of getting too far afield if we continue down this path, but we can formalize a few key points from this text as we did sign in *Being and Time*.

In addition to S(1), which states that a sign is a phenomenon in the world which reveals the overall structural intelligibility of the world, we can add S(2) and S(3) based on the previous reading of WCT:

S(2): a sign can function without explicit orientation to the intelligible

And further

S(3): a sign can be disclosive of something unintelligible

Now that we are working with a more complete picture of Heidegger’s sign, we can revisit the question of whether to modify S(1) in light of where we have been since. S(1) still represents an accurate statement, but if we are to be rigorous, actually represents two separate claims which do not necessarily need to be linked anymore, and can be combined with S(3) to yield the specific class of sign which we have been attempting to justify so far. We can modify S(1) as follows:

S(1A): A sign is a phenomenon in the world

S(1B): A sign *can* reveal the overall structural intelligibility of the world

Both of these statements are backed by the text of *Being and Time*, and now that they are separable on the basis of what we have seen in “What Calls for Thinking”, we can use S(1A) as a strictly necessary base which can be modified by any of the other statements we have formalized.⁵⁴ We start with S(1A), as written.

⁵⁴ I do not claim that these are the only statements that can be formalized based on the text, just that they are the ones most relevant to the current question of paradox as a sign, but I do maintain that in any case, a sign being

If we consider S(1B) alongside S(2) and S(3), we can retain the structural disclosure of S(1B) without needing to commit to the disclosure of structural *intelligibility*. Recall, for the sake of keeping sure footing as we proceed, the fact that when Heidegger considers man as a sign, and one which is called by something unknowable, Heidegger explicitly opens the door for global consequences of this calling. With this, we have reason to allow retaining the structural disclosure of S(1B) without the necessary link to structural intelligibility. We are now ready to finish the job we started earlier in this section. I take it to be plausibly defended at this point that paradox is something encountered, at least most immediately, in the world, whether as a result of the paradoxical quality of art or in the sacred. If it were not encounterable in the world it would not be actionable, and since both of these require actionability to function, there must be something accessible in the world. As a result, we can use the less restrictive version of a sign suggested in Heidegger to say that paradox, encountered in the world, can function as a sign.

To reiterate once more the case developed so far, I am arguing that on the basis of certain phenomena encountered in the world, namely the sacred and the work of art, we can describe them as paradoxical because of the way they must function if they are to function as these particular things at all. These preconditions for function were abstracted into a formal definition of paradox, encountered as an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate. To improve the robustness of this formal definition I claimed that paradox was a sign. Based on the way that sign is presented in *Being and Time* we established that signs are phenomena encountered in the world that can be disclosive of the structure of the world. *What Calls for Thinking* provided justification for treating paradox as something both non-equipmental and something which can indicate the non-intelligible aspects of that which structures phenomena as a whole, following the formalizations (S)1-3 earlier. Paradox is encountered in the world and true to the function of a sign, discloses non-propositionally the overall situation that Dasein finds itself responsible for and the demands that come with it. Paradox represents the demands of the unintelligible yet actionable. Therefore, paradox represents a class of sign which has a unique disclosive function:

something encounterable in the world is the bare minimum bar of entry for any correct statement made on the subject, a necessary condition (but likely not a sufficient condition for any more substantial claim on signs).

*Paradox is a sign which discloses the structural unintelligibility of the world.*³⁵

Paradox as sign offers one very attractive additional benefit – it allows us to deepen the existing definition of paradox without having to give anything up or having to insist dogmatically that if paradox is a sign it cannot be some other sort of thing as well. When we encounter a sign, it does not cease to function as usual in the world, with its own mode of understanding that is appropriate to it. For example, we can correctly understand the car’s directional indicator as a sign, but this does not absolve us of the responsibility to take care we are not struck by the car. It never ceases to indicate direction while also providing a hint to the worldhood of the world. The farmer reveals something about the wind, and the world, by discovering the wind as a sign of a certain type of weather, but the wind does not thereby lose its other context-appropriate attributes and associations. Even in the cases of the class of sign I am proposing, which are admittedly odd as we would encounter them in practice, the art never ceases to be art. The sacred never ceases to be sacred. Our understanding them *as* being a sign does not reduce them to *just* being a sign. This, I think, is something worth taking seriously. As Heidegger stated in WCT, “The sign remains without interpretation.” (WCT 265) To interpret, to transmute from one form into another for the sake of clarity, this is what we avoid when we refuse to cash out paradox into a more univocal form, logical or otherwise, and instead leave it to guide a style of thinking and a direction of inquiry towards a limit. Our sign also remains without interpretation in the strict sense, letting paradox set the tone of what we respond to. Now that we have built two levels of our definition of paradox, it is time to answer the

³⁵ Here and elsewhere, on the subject of ‘unintelligibility’, I would like to preliminarily disambiguate between two separate but related explanatory possibilities: ineffability and inexhaustibility, that is, being *absolutely* unknowable as opposed to being comparatively unknowable on the basis of the impossibility of any final explanatory grounding and the constant offer of novel possibilities. Since it is the nature of the sign, the sacred, and the work of art that they make themselves accessible for Dasein as extant particulars and not just as theoretical constructs, this precludes them being *purely* ineffable, else this would amount to an unintelligibility so thorough as to deny uptake. We will qualify this further in the context of the work of art and the unintelligibility of the ‘earth’, but for now, even the less extreme inexhaustibility produces a practical ineffability, since being directed towards such a horizon or phenomenon announces itself as something which challenges our usual ways of knowing (and as we have seen, the knower along with it). Consider Kierkegaard’s aesthete on the mysteries of Mozart from *Either/Or* as an example of such an inexhaustibility which cashes out in practice into a qualified ineffability: “As regards Mozart’s music, my soul knows no fear, my confidence no bounds. In part this is because what I have understood so far is very little and there will always be enough left over hiding in the shadows of presentiment; partly because I am convinced that if Mozart ever became wholly comprehensible to me, he would for the first time become wholly incomprehensible to me.” See: *Either/Or* p.72

question of what we do with a sign like this, and how we are to relate to it, providing the third and final piece of the idea of paradox we have been tracing so far.

2. Kierkegaard's Paradox and Risks at the Limit

This section is to clarify the background structure that informs my application of paradox in Heidegger, its goodness of fit, and its potential usefulness for the larger questions at stake in this project. This will entail a consideration of the engagement that Heidegger himself had with Kierkegaard to set borders around the discussion, a look at the various ways that Kierkegaard uses the idea of paradox in his work, and finally, isolating the particular angle that I am appealing to for my methodology. If the previous section aimed to develop the status of the “contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate” aspect of the analytic definition of paradox we derived, treating it as a sign, this section ultimately aims to positively develop the “actionable” aspect of the contradiction – actionable by taking paradox as a limit condition for our usual kinds of understanding and an invitation for an existential relation instead.

A brief word on the role that Kierkegaard is playing first. I am not arguing necessarily *for* Kierkegaard, but *from* Kierkegaard, as a general style of approach. What this means is that I think Kierkegaard will offer a valuable ‘scaffolding’ to help us manoeuvre through some of the less structurally complete parts of the Heideggerian edifice, in a way that is appropriate to the nature of both, and without becoming a permanent part of the edifice. What this does *not* mean is that I am committing to a perfect agreement between Kierkegaard and Heidegger, or that I am trying to smuggle in Kierkegaardian conclusions to Heideggerian problems.

To be sure, Heidegger did both read and appreciate Kierkegaard, as we can see in a few examples. Throughout Heidegger’s *Phenomenology of Religious Life* lectures, he quotes Kierkegaard approvingly, especially *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety* in conversation with Augustine in the section entitled “Phenomenological Interpretation of *Confessions*; Book X”.⁵⁶ Perhaps

⁵⁶ See: PRL 128, 141, et. al

the most glowing (if qualified) and most discussed citation of Kierkegaard is in a note in *Being and Time*, when Heidegger remarks, “S. Kierkegaard is probably the one who has seen the *existentiell* phenomenon of the moment of vision with the most penetration; but this does not signify that he has been correspondingly successful in Interpreting it existentially.” (BT 497, note iii to H. 338) While this sort of backhanded compliment is fairly typical in Heidegger’s commentaries on others, and he seems convinced that Kierkegaard ultimately failed to deal properly with existential temporality, the engagement remains.³⁷ Beyond this, rather than push for any specific textual relationship between the two authors, I will defer to Heidegger, who states with no small amount of exasperation in his *Black Notebooks*, “Enough already here with the reckoning up of ‘influences’ and of the dependencies on Husserl, Dilthey, Kierkegaard, and whoever. Here the task was—if anything—to put into effect a confrontation with antiquity and with the retrieved problem of being. Instead of which, manifest prattle keeps piling up from week to week.”³⁸

2.1 Kierkegaard’s Paradox

Now that we have drawn boundaries around the style of engagement with Kierkegaard, what does Kierkegaard himself have to say about paradox? Quite a lot. Kierkegaard uses paradox in at least three different senses, all of which are theoretically separable yet ultimately interconnected. In one sense, and put extremely simply, faith itself is paradoxical, in that it asks us to believe what we cannot justify, else it would not be belief, and demands that the eternal correspond somehow with the historical. The highest single instantiation of this is the second sense of Paradox, Jesus as *absolute paradox*, that which repels all attempts to mediate or reduce to concepts of rational understanding. The sheer fact *that* Jesus existed as the “God-man” is enough to provide a lifetime of issues (at bare minimum) for the believer, without needing to qualify the statement about Jesus being (God) born in poverty, or (God) born to suffer, or having one quality or another relative to human terms.³⁹ Now, none of these things are historically irrelevant for the status of Jesus Christ as the one who is qualified to *teach* the paradox, since the only

³⁷ See especially BPP 288 and CTP §105

³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Ponderings II-VI*, Black Notebooks 1931-1938 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2016) 24, §87

³⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013) 182-3

terms up to the task are the ones dictated by the paradox itself as compared to the authority required to teach the natural sciences or historiography, but they are not required for the sake of the paradox *qua* paradox.⁶⁰ When the absolute paradox presents itself to be grappled with in history and as something to be taken up by any present individual without the slightest preference for historical placement, and demands that anyone attempting faith relate themselves to the point of risking themselves *to* this paradox, we can see the third sense of paradox taking form. I will refer to this third sense as an *existential limit*, as a single way of uniting a few variations of this phrasing and theme that Kierkegaard uses.

One of the clearest presentations of paradox as limit is in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, a postscript several times longer than the text itself which it is commenting on, the *Philosophical Crumbs*. In the *Crumbs*, Kierkegaard (as Johannes Climacus) opens a section on the “absolute paradox” with the following reflection:

One should not think ill... of paradoxes, because the paradox is the passion of thought, and a thinker without a paradox is like a lover without passion: a poor model. But the highest power of every passion is always to will its own annihilation. Thus it is also the highest passion of the understanding to desire an obstacle, despite the fact that the obstacle in one way or another may be its downfall. This is the highest paradox of thought, to want to discover something it cannot think.⁶¹

This introduction of paradox in this way already gives us two insights which will be helpful to bear in mind. First, the fact that paradox is something which poses a real risk to the individual who would approach it seriously, and that paradox is not itself a terminating point, but merely an “obstacle” beyond which thought is not permitted to go. The understanding reaches a “limit” where it encounters the unknown, and yet still strives to know it, which produces a series of tricks and traps as the understanding attempts to cope with its own inadequacy. Does the understanding treat it as a known-unknown, a shrug, a cosmic joke, a cosmic horror, a frustration of its own efforts? All of these things are still the understanding attempting to define the nature of the limit from within its own conceptual powers, and therefore confusing its own limits with *the* limit. “What is this unknown then? It is the limit that is

⁶⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 107-9

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 111

constantly reached, and to this extent when the determinations of movement are exchanged for those of rest, the different, the absolutely different. But it is the absolutely different for which one has no distinguishing mark.”⁶² This, in conjunction with the three varieties of paradox we already encountered earlier, allows us to draw from the discussions of paradox in the *Postscript*.

Daniel Watts explicates this notion of limit in helpful ways. One significant issue when discussing what happens when our ability to speak meaningfully about something seems to collapse – like in the face of paradox – is the risk of either quietism or nonsense, especially if we take paradox to be something best captured in the form of a strictly *logical* paradox, like ‘p and ¬p’. Watts stresses that firstly, considering the possibility of dealing with Kierkegaard’s paradox requires that the individual relating to the paradox must do so as the particular individual they are, and not in abstract logical space. He notes that in the *Postscript*, “...logical systems cannot ultimately be severed from the non-discursive performances of particular human thinkers.”⁶³ Rather than reducing logical systems to the whims or capacities of individual psychology the implication is instead that we must not presume uncritically that the proper space for assaying paradox must in every case be a logical one. For Watts, Kierkegaard distinguishes between two different ways we might individually *represent* limits to thought and relate to them accordingly. The first way is the *aesthetic-intellectual* and corresponds to wide variety of activities in practice, the way we might represent “...a poem, a treatise, a table of data and a system of symbolic logic.”⁶⁴ What unites these sorts of representations is a “disinterested” approach which does not require you to consider the implications for your own existence, such as considering death as an event-to-come that will objectively eventually happen, without thinking about what *your* death will mean beyond the usual death-paraphernalia of graves, elegies, absence, and the like. Aesthetic-intellectual responses to the question of death will tend to defer to representations which are “outside” the self and capable of sustained contemplation in this manner, even if the subject matter of the representation is still death.⁶⁵ A Heideggerian analogue for this

⁶² Ibid. 117

⁶³ Daniel Watts, “Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought” 90

⁶⁴ Ibid. 94

⁶⁵ Ibid. 92-3

sort of relation to death might be the reliance on “idle talk” in the face of death in the absence of authenticity in one’s Being-towards-death. (BT 299-300)

When we represent something in such a way that we put ourselves into the picture along with the representation, we do so in an *ethico-religious* way. The representation is delimited against aesthetic-intellectual representation, and then, “ethico-religious thinking must involve, *inter alia*, thinking of or about your own individual existence *in concreto*, as one for whom the issue of what you are—or, rather, who you are becoming—is inescapable.”⁶⁶ So, Watts suggests we can approach paradox, or death, or whatever else the case may be that seems to refuse logical coherence, without therefore rendering it merely *incoherent*, by treating it as a limit, and so delimited, relate to it existentially. We will continue with Kierkegaard’s own work on what this limit looks like and what, to the extent that there is a “what”, is on the other side of it for those subjects who would approach it.

The understanding hits the limits of its powers, and is faced with two choices: offense, or faith. For Kierkegaard, decisions like this, what one relates oneself to in productive tension, are the basis of a pseudo-dialectical structure which accounts for different modes of existence for the individual subject. In brief, defining yourself on the basis of relations to external goods and pleasures, on the “interesting”, describes the sphere of the *aesthetic*. Realizing a capacity for inner moral reflection and possibility, and defining this possibility against a universal law describes the domain of the *ethical*.⁶⁷ In both cases, there is a boundary which acts as a hard line past which the individual cannot progress without choosing to adapt their dialectical stance, in a way that can never receive adequate prior justification.⁶⁸ With the realization that the highest expression of the ethical is *not* universal ethical normativity, but instead, the universal requirement for everyone to stand as an individual before God without any final recourse to existing and codifiable ethical norms, one exits the domain of the ethical and stands before the boundary of the *religious*.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid. 95

⁶⁷ Both of these not to be confused with the *aesthetic-intellectual* and *ethico-religious* previously mentioned

⁶⁸ For a detailed sketch of the aesthetic and ethical spheres in practice, see Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life’s Way*

⁶⁹ The exemplar of this relationship and this route to the genuinely religious is of course the figure of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*. The implication is not that everyone will be called to acts as extreme as Abraham’s willingness

The religious is nothing like a collection of propositions or dogmas that one may assent to intellectually. As Mark Wrathall says in “Coming to an Understanding with the Paradox”, “As long as my approach to Christianity is preoccupied with keeping straight the noetic structure of my beliefs, or with making Christian doctrines intelligible and plausible, I will miss the point.”⁷⁰ It requires a much more radical shift on behalf of the believer when faced with the paradox. “Christianity is not a doctrine but is an existence-contradiction and is existence-communication.”⁷¹ Christianity is existence-contradiction because it rests on a paradox that can only be grasped from the side of the paradox, and existence-communication because it requires a total shift of dialectical commitments and consequently, one’s whole relational horizon, in order to obtain as a whole. Individual points of doctrine like the Incarnation or the Resurrection are only possible from within the horizon opened up by the entire mode of *existence* which has been transmitted. When faced with the ultimate challenge to the understanding, the only possible response is either total conversion or some variety of bet-hedging and categorical confusion between the comprehensible boundaries to measure the self against (ethical or aesthetic, for instance) and the final boundary which removes such boundaries.

If the understanding responds to the paradox with anything other than assent to the paradox to the point of literal self-destruction, that is, subjective dialectical abandonment to something no longer comprehensible or justifiable, this may manifest as what Kierkegaard calls “offense” and despair. Alternately, one can accept the basic premise of this relation, without thereby being able to *live it*. This lingering on the threshold is one manifestation of “Religious A”.⁷² If the meeting between the understanding and the paradox is a happy one, recalling the passion of thought which wills its own annihilation before something it cannot think, then this passion gives rise to faith, that is, infinite relation of one’s self to the paradox, “Religious B” or the “Paradox-Religious.” Once again, paradox here is not a

to sacrifice Isaac, but that there is no safety in appeal to public ethics when our highest calling is full surrender to God.

⁷⁰Mark Wrathall, “Coming to an Understanding with the Paradox” in *The Kierkegaardian Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2019) 244

⁷¹Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 318

⁷²Ibid. 470-494, *inter alia*

singular point or proposition that can be determined, assessed, and cordoned off from task of living. It is grasped only in relating oneself to it, actively and without recourse to any existing modes of speculation.

This is the paradox-religious sphere, the sphere of faith. It can all be believed – against the understanding. If anyone imagines that he understands it, he may be sure that he misunderstands it. Someone who understands it directly (as understanding that it cannot be understood) will confuse Christianity with one or another pagan analogy... Or he will confuse Christianity with something which has indeed entered into the heart of man, i.e., into the heart of humanity, confuse it with the idea of human nature and forget the qualitative difference that accentuates the absolutely different point of departure: what comes from God, and what comes from man.⁷³

Here, and elsewhere in the *Postscript*, we see how radical the paradox actually is, the boundary that demands we abandon even concepts of human nature. Not just intellectual, but also *anthropological* mediation is unsuitable for the task at hand. All such concepts of self or world and modes of understanding in their usual encounters are viable only insofar as they are related to God in the paradox. There is one further proviso: paradox as limit does not for one moment relieve the existing individual of their obligation to continue existing, in the world and with the world. The boundary does not demarcate a here and there; it relates the existing individual to a *here* that is far stranger, infinitely stranger, than the one that preceded it.

To be a Christian involves a double danger. First, all the intense internal suffering involved in becoming a Christian, this losing the understanding and being *crucified on the paradox*. This is the issue Concluding Postscript presents as ideally as possible. Then the danger of the Christian's having to live in the world of worldliness and there express that he is a Christian.⁷⁴

This crucifixion on the paradox is not an easy option for life; it accentuates the most challenging aspects thereof. This is what is at stake in crossing the limit, and indeed, it is framed as something with stakes, something to be risked. Before we continue to this final point which I believe justifies a goodness of fit between Kierkegaardian paradox and what I am reading as Heideggerian paradox, we should clarify what we have managed to present so far. We clarified that the intended agreement was primarily methodological and not substantive, and briefly presented the ways Kierkegaard uses paradox, converging

⁷³ Ibid. 487

⁷⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 481, supplement, drawn from Kierkegaard's *Papers IX A* 414. Italics added for emphasis.

and complementing each other in the paradoxical-religious, or Religious B. We saw that the paradoxical-religious is the sphere of existence which demands the most challenging dialectical relationship, placing the faithful in an im-mediate relation to God within the world, despite all contradiction and sacrifice. It is a *limit* to understanding that can never be crossed of one's own power but needs to be given the freedom to set its own terms and make its own claims. A happy, but by no means presumed, result of this is that we see agreement between the initial analytic definition of paradox that I derived from the way that the sacred functions in Heidegger: an actionable contradiction, in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate. This rather thin preliminary definition, in combination with a Kierkegaardian method, becomes much richer and more useful for the work to come. Actionable, in that one can still relate to the terms *as an existing subject*, actionable in the face of a clear contradiction, one repulsive to the understanding, repulsive because the contradictory terms must be taken as co-instantiated (whether God/man, eternal/historical, or singular/universal, etc.). What we have essentially added to this as the result of the methodological background is seeing how such an analytic paradox can function as a limit, a boundary, a horizon. What happens at this limit for Kierkegaard, and I believe for Heidegger, is a risk.

2.2 What it Is to Risk

From the previous discussion it should be clear that what is being risked, the only currency we have to stake that has any spending power, is one's own existence, since if there was any guarantee or even any weighing of odds, it would cease to be a risk worthy of the paradox, but would subjugate the entire question under precisely the terms that the paradox poses such a violent affront to, resulting in tragedy, comedy, offense - anything but faith. The risk must be a risk, full stop. We find a good formulation of this idea, which also hearkens to the idea of the paradox as a limit, again in the *Postscript*:

The point is this, that it is only through the risky venture that the individual becomes infinite; it is not the same individual, and the venture is not one among many others, one more predicate to attach to one and the same individual; no, through the risky venture he himself becomes another. Before venturing he can only understand it as madness (and this is far preferable to being a thoughtless babbler who sits there imagining he understands it as wisdom - and yet refrains from doing it, whereby he directly declares himself to be mad, while anyone who regards it as madness can at least claim prudence in leaving it alone), and when he has taken the risk he is no longer the same one. In this way, suitable room is made for the *discrimen* of the transition, an intervening

chasmic abyss as a setting that answers to the passion of the infinite, a gulf that the understanding cannot cross over either to or fro.⁷⁵

This is to say that the person who is considering relating themselves to the paradox cannot treat it as something which can be weighed according to the way that things in general, and their self-conception along with it, have been previously disclosed and navigated. To engage in the process is to make everything thoroughly and fundamentally volatile. It would be distinctly advantageous for the current methodological proposal if we found similar treatment of risk in Heidegger as it pertains especially to the religious paradox bleeding into a general ontological paradox at the limits of reason, and we find exactly that.

We will start by briefly drawing upon John Caputo's *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* for the basic outline of the juncture. The story is something like this: In both the lines by Angelus Silesius ("The rose is without why...") that Heidegger uses in conversation with Leibniz in *The Principle of Reason*, and the language Heidegger adopts at crucial points in his later work (for example, *Gelassenheit*), Heidegger is in conversation with the medieval mystical tradition, especially Meister Eckhart. (PR 41, Et al.) The case Caputo makes is explicitly for a mystical *element* rather than a genuine *mysticism* in Heidegger since there are crucial points of difference between the two. One of the most striking is when the time arrives for the aforementioned *Gelassenheit*, a willing releasement of Dasein towards something else, against the powerful demands made by metaphysics and technology to keep everything in its rightful place.

What is it that Dasein releases itself towards? Nothing that can be justified beforehand or even counted on to be *worth it* in any spiritual sense. Here, Heidegger breaks with both Eckhart and Kierkegaard, who see the admittedly challenging and perhaps even frightening love of God as that in the face of which the usual conception of the self is annihilated. The path will be difficult, but God is waiting for us. On the contrary, "[There is] nothing in Heidegger's '*Ereignis*' to love and much to fear. The releasement of which Heidegger speaks has taken on a more ominous aspect than Eckhart's, for it has been detached from its religious matrix. It is no longer releasement to a loving God, but releasement to a

⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 355, as one example of this kind of language among many others

truth which is equiprimordially un-truth.”⁷⁶ We will have more to say on this later in chapter V, but the key for the moment is that both Kierkegaard and Heidegger agree that the undertaking which happens at the limits, where God is paradox and truth is un-truth, is a limit to both normal understanding and the self which would understand, and requires something to be ventured.

We see a further example of the way we might risk ourselves in the face of paradox as limit once again in Heidegger’s *“What Calls for Thinking”*. As we have previously seen, Heidegger considers what it is to think, to learn, to remember, and finally, to be called to and for thinking in a more essential sense than the reasoning which has been justifiably reserved for our scientific endeavours. Along the way, he considers what it means that we have, in a broad western-metaphysical sense, posited *mythos* and *logos* against each other, or worse yet, decided that logical thinking somehow emerged victorious against the mythic. To this he responds, “[Nothing] religious is ever destroyed by logic; it is destroyed only by the god’s withdrawal.” (WCT 266) The withdrawal in question, whether of a god or of the source of thinking itself, is not a mere negation or absence but a way in which the absent is made present, if we are properly attuned, and we can still orient ourselves towards the absence. We can treat it as a problem that is worth thinking through, albeit in a different sense than usual. “We are pointing then at something that has not, not yet, been transposed into the language that we speak. It remains uncomprehended.” (WCT 271) The upshot of this, is that when we release ourselves into this pursuit of the withdrawn and cease to assume that our “logical” thinking is the final arbiter of what can or cannot appear for us as a worthy object of thought (or an object at all), we are necessarily stepping into the unknown, in spite of our commonsense intuitions about the way that natural language functions. The common interpretations of language around the worthiness of objects of thought and what it is to be *called* are part and parcel of the true task of thought, recalling here Kierkegaard’s paradoxical passion of thought which seeks to think something it cannot think. “This floundering in a commonness that we have placed under the protection of so-called natural common sense is not accidental, nor are we free to deprecate it. This floundering in commonness is part of the high and dangerous game and gamble in which, by the essence of language, *we are the stakes.*” (WCT 275, emphasis added)

⁷⁶Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* 249

We have hopefully at this point established to a reasonable – though not exhaustive – degree of clarity the ways in which Kierkegaard’s paradox functions, how it has points of complement with both Heidegger’s own work and my initial analytic definition of paradox derived from the work, and how it maps onto a sense of limit and risk or wager found in both. This suggests a goodness of fit for Kierkegaard’s paradox as a methodological background or scaffolding in some of the trickier Heideggerian territory. In closing this discussion of Kierkegaard as method, my final intentions can be summarized as follows: if we have indeed established a correspondence between the two authors in the parts of the text that we have access to, I see no reason not to consider the possibility that the correspondence may be valuable in suggesting a method for dealing with the parts of the text that are less clear or less developed. If paradox is taken as a sign, then the “unknown” which it gestures towards is not a discrete entity itself, or a space of purely logical contradiction, but a horizon and limit to Dasein which problematizes Dasein along with the disclosure of the world. As a final step, the strongest alternative to the account of paradox in Heidegger that I have been attempting to develop is in Filippo Casati’s *Heidegger and the Contradiction of Being*, and if I can show that my account can survive the implicit critiques found in Casati, any conclusions we draw later will be built on a more reliable foundation.

3. To Indicate Contradiction, Formally and Otherwise

The purpose of this section is relatively simple. Casati represents one of the most recent sustained attempts at identifying and articulating paradox in Heidegger for its own sake and is one of the few to take on such a project in general. If his efforts are successful and his critiques of positions like my own are solid, then the current endeavour is not only poorly timed but poorly justified. If, however, we can take the opportunity to engage with his work in a way that clears space for another approach to paradox, and show that his arguments are *not* fatal, then we will have the assurance we need to continue productively and even clarify a few important points along the way. The primary point of disagreement and therefore defense will be the notion of whether or not we can say anything about paradoxes, specifically, whether or not they can be shown via formal indication without generating an intolerable vagueness. I disagree with Casati that formal indication as a species of what he calls a *showing solution* is either vague, or a

solution in the way he uses the term. Before this we must show to what extent our respective formulations of paradox are able to meet in conversation in the first place.

Casati claims that there is an intractable ontological paradox in Heidegger's account of Being, but rather than this being an issue to be solved, "Heidegger's paradoxes reveal something *true* about Being itself. Being is, therefore, *truly* inconsistent."⁷⁷ To render this claim both philosophically palatable and logically non-trivial, Casati ultimately attempts to demonstrate a type of logical dialetheism in Heidegger's work. The operative claim of dialetheism, contrary to traditional forms of logic which enshrine the Principle of Non-Contradiction, is that "some contradictions are true *in the actual world*."⁷⁸ The contradiction here and the source of the paradox in question for Casati is that if we consider what allows an entity to be an entity in Heidegger, and take equally seriously the *ontological difference* – Heidegger's revelation that the being of entities is not identical to the being of Being, or put even more succinctly, that Being is not and cannot be itself an entity – we arrive at a paradox; it seems like Being is an entity, since we seem to be able to meaningfully refer to it, rendering it an entity, while Being is also categorically excluded from being an entity. The upshot of this is that, after translations to logical form and significant heavy lifting, "Beying has no reason/no ground and, at the same time, Beying is the reason/the ground of itself".⁷⁹

Is this the same paradox that I have been attempting to articulate? Yes and no. We both agree that when it comes to the way Heidegger discusses Being, and the way that Being seems to function in relation to certain domains of possible experience, there is a sense of intractable contradiction that rises to the level of paradox. We both also agree that this is not an accidental feature or something to be explained away. From my perspective this is where the agreements generally stop. Whereas Casati attempts to derive the crux of the ontological paradox from the relationship between Being and entities, I pick up on the way that paradox is a necessary way that we are able to phenomenologically account for the functioning of the artwork and the possibility of the sacred. However, from Casati's perspective, the scope of my own project seems to fall firmly within his own starting premises and therefore within his

⁷⁷ Casati, *Heidegger and the Contradiction of Being* 4

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 93

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 164

formulation of the ontological paradox. This might seem strange, since from a certain standpoint my formulation of paradox so far never really attempts to capture Being itself, since this paradox as sign and limit is linked to the sorts of horizons and decisions that allow for experience in the first place, and only touches upon Being itself implicitly. This, for Casati, is enough.

The thought goes like this: Following something that Denis McManus pointed out, Heidegger in the opening of *Being and Time* is concerned with a general sense of Being which can accommodate the ontological pluralism of different *modes* of Being (whether equipment, Dasein, etc), and calls this general sense, “a possible horizon for any understanding of Being”. (BT 1) This possible horizon should ideally not have either Being or a mode of Being, to avoid an infinite regress of horizons, one making sense of another without end. However, as McManus notes and Casati quotes, “For it to be the case that there is such a thing as ‘what the horizon in question is’, it would seem to need to be the case that this ‘horizon’ possesses a mode of Being.”⁸⁰ To capture this, Casati appeals to his starting premise (4), which states “x is an entity if and only if x has a reason”.⁸¹ From here, however we might choose to interpret “the horizon for any understanding of Being”, the horizon has either an ontological or epistemic reason (since it is the reason by virtue of which we are able to understand different modes of being), which would make it an entity according to the biconditional, and yet, this reason would itself be Being, since Heidegger identifies the horizon with the general meaning of Being, and therefore cannot be an entity, leaving us with the ontological paradox all over again.

So, concerning my own framing of paradox, while it does not explicitly gesture towards Being as such, I believe that since the horizon of paradox does ultimately both implicitly gesture at Being and provide reasons for entities or phenomena to have the particular mode of Being that they do, it could reasonably fall under the purview of Casati’s premise (4) and therefore the ontological paradox he is concerned with even though our conceptions and derivations of paradox do not otherwise neatly line up. If we grant that our paradox corresponds, as I believe it is beneficial to do for the sake of stress-testing what we have developed so far, why does Casati think we should reject accounts like my own and prefer

⁸⁰ Denis McManus, "Ontological Pluralism and the Being and Time Project." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51, no. 4 (10, 2013): 651-673.

⁸¹ Casati, *Heidegger and the Contradiction of Being* 72

ones like his? As mentioned before, the biggest issue is whether or not we can show or formally indicate anything about paradox.

Casati begins by identifying two general styles of approach to paradoxical elements in Heidegger, and claims that both what he calls the *showing solution* and the *eliminativist approach*, “are not successful because both of them face exegetical and philosophical issues”.⁸² The eliminativist approach, cited in Casati with reference again to McManus, argues that (especially the early) Heidegger explores the problem of Being in a later-Wittgensteinian mood of resignation, showing the paradox as an absurd conclusion that reveals the ultimate hopelessness of the project in the first place. If we understand the project correctly, so the story goes, it has a therapeutic property, curing us of our problematic tendencies to excessively and incorrectly interrogate Being as such, as if this were even a question that could be meaningfully asked. Heidegger fails deliberately so we can be free of having to fail in the same way.⁸³ Neither myself nor Casati endorse this reading, which leaves the *showing solution*.

If the eliminativist position roughly corresponds with the later Wittgenstein, Casati draws a similar analogy between the showing solution and the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. If we can't *say* anything about Being, due to inherent limitations of language, can we perhaps *show* something about Being by employing non-standard modes of reference or communication? Casati identifies various strategies in the existing literature that correspond to the general showing solution, including formal indications, poetic language, quietism, “linguistic shenanigans and stylistic trickeries”, and outright linguistic failure.⁸⁴ It would be fair to classify my own invocation of paradox as operating within the showing solution, specifically formal indication, despite not entirely corresponding with the sorts of linguistic concerns that Casati associates with this style of solution.⁸⁵

Formal indications are defined here as communications or conveyances which, firstly, “...force us to abandon any abstract, theoretical, and conventional way of communicating”, and secondly, “... *show*

⁸² Ibid. 3

⁸³ Ibid 83

⁸⁴ Casati, *Heidegger and the Contradiction of Being*, 77

⁸⁵ While I will only be addressing formal indication here, this does not mean that other varieties of the showing solution are doomed. I believe that we have good and rather interesting reasons to defend disclosive silence, for instance, from Casati's critiques as well, a project better taken up elsewhere.

something by having an *existential* impact upon us.”⁸⁶ Since my view of paradox claims both that paradox cannot be properly captured by appealing to any kind of *a priori* theoretical apparatus, and functions instead by disclosing something of existential value, that is, the fundamental unintelligibility of things in general which we are challenged to respond to, paradox-as-sign can be considered a formal indication with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Casati gives two examples of what a formal indicator might look like in practice. First, citing Dahlstrom, we might consider a musical score. One *could* theoretically assess it, examining its internal relationships between tones and technical attributes but the more organic response to a musical score might be simply to pick it up and play it, to realize that the music is depicted not for analysis but as a kind of existential offer.⁸⁷ Another example is irony, using natural vagaries of language to gesture at something not obviously propositionally contained in the language itself. To grasp irony, we must abandon strict grammatical theorizing and realize the draw to the implied showing of something else, in a way that other forms of communication would be ill-suited for.⁸⁸

So, we have formal indication presented as one strategy among others of gesturing towards the paradoxical action of Being. “...through an unorthodox way of either using language or restraining from it, all of [the strategies] attempt to disclose something about what cannot be said.”⁸⁹ Casati offers critiques of philosophical problems with this, perhaps most importantly the issue of vagueness, and the related issue of something like a philosophical cowardice or irresolute equivocation wherein one wants to simultaneously assert that paradoxical aspects of Being (or Being itself so construed) cannot be spoken about while also attempting to do just that through means orthodox or otherwise. First, “...the fact that [the showing solution] appears to be vague.”⁹⁰ While little is said on how vagueness specifically applies to formal indication, with silence bearing the brunt of most of it, the main complaint seems to be methodological. It is not that the object of formal indication is vague, as it does seem *prima facie* to be indicating something that we can identify, so much as the exact workings of this are either poorly or merely speculatively articulated. Citing McManus, Lafont, and Blattner, Casati charges that the view of formal

⁸⁶ Ibid. 77

⁸⁷ Daniel Dahlstrom, “Heidegger’s Method: Philosophical Concepts as Formal Indications”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 47, no. 4 (June, 1994): 775-795

⁸⁸ Casati, *Heidegger and the Contradiction of Being* 77-8

⁸⁹ Ibid. 81

⁹⁰ Ibid. 84

indication is never fully developed even by Heidegger, and that it may in fact just amount to an articulation of the problem rather than an actual solution.⁹¹ Why might this be an issue? At best, the problem is being glossed over or reframed in a way that never addresses the paradox in question fully, merely stating that there *is* such a paradox using a slightly more developed sensitivity to the vocabulary which presents the problem. At worst, formal indication is a partially-formed approach abandoned by Heidegger for a reason. The operative principle in this vagueness objection might be otherwise articulated as, “any solution worth the name should do what it purports to do with some degree of methodological transparency.” We will return to this shortly, assess what exactly it is that formal indication purports to do, and see for ourselves how transparent such a method is or is not. Before this, a word on whether Heidegger “fully develops” the idea of formal indication, and whether the “speculation” we are left with is still viable.

It is true as Casati quotes that Cristina Lafont says, in her “Replies” following a symposium and regarding a debate over Heidegger’s potential realism or idealism, that Heidegger’s treatment of formal indication leaves room for speculation. However, it is worth quoting further to get a better sense of the context.

“Heidegger’s view of philosophical concepts as ‘formal indicators’ (formale Anzeige) has indeed raised much attention among Heidegger commentators in recent years, in part due to the fact that Heidegger never fully developed this view in his lectures of this period. This, in turn, has opened the door to a great deal of speculation about how ‘formal indication’ should be understood... However, in my opinion the short and scattered expositions that Heidegger did offer about how to understand ‘formal indication’ are more than sufficient to answer the question raised by Dreyfus in this context.”⁹²

With a slightly fuller picture, the remarks are more an acknowledgment than an indictment, and for Lafont, the specific charge of vagueness simply never arrives. Formal indications are able to sustain treatment satisfactory for certain philosophical tasks (in this case, able to clearly distinguish between types of reference suitable for different modes of access to entities). I do not believe that Casati’s appeal to Lafont wins him an unproblematic ally. Further on, regarding the *Being and Time* discussion of being-towards-death which relies on formal indications, she says,

⁹¹ Ibid. 85

⁹² Cristina Lafont, “Replies”, *Inquiry* 45, no. 2 (2002), 231

...in this context Heidegger not only explains the distinction between ordinary and scientific assertions (which are always about entities in the world) and philosophical assertions (which are never about such entities at all), he also makes explicit the specific sense in which philosophical concepts are formal indicators. This explanation is very helpful in order to determine whether Heidegger's 'formal indication' can be interpreted as a forerunner of Kripke's 'rigid designation'.⁹³

Issues of Kripke obviously aside, we see again that Lafont considers Heidegger's account of formal indication perfectly viable without being irreparably dirtied by the original sin of vagueness due to the aforementioned "speculation". In both examples given from "Replies", Lafont's assessment of formal indication hinges on its functionality as a way to approach specific problems, either for Heidegger or in applied questions of Heidegger scholarship. This brings us exactly to the issue we identified earlier when considering the implicit principle of the charge of vagueness, whether or not formal indication does what it purports to do with reasonable clarity. Now we will turn to Heidegger's admittedly diffuse treatment of formal indication to ascertain what it is formal indication purports to do.

The main claim here is this: To call formal indication a "solution", showing or otherwise, is something of a misnomer, since formal indication in Heidegger's presentation is primarily a way of *starting* a phenomenological inquiry, not terminating it. If this is the case, then the charge of methodological vagueness as previously articulated falls flat. To argue this, I will be drawing primarily from Heidegger's 1921-22 *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* (hereafter "PIA"), while acknowledging that formal indication also has a role to play in both *Being and Time* and the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* lectures.

The PIA lectures have nearly nothing to say about Aristotle, but quite a lot to say on the matter of how to frame and access philosophical problems without making grave errors which would scuttle the investigation from the start. Heidegger notices straightaway the problem of discussing Being, or even philosophy itself, when the nature of the problem is precisely such that we have lost touch with the genuine sense of either. The first step is recognizing that different objects (taken here in the broadest possible sense, not the restricted sense of "entity") have different modes of access and of genuine possession. (PIA 15) When we speak about something like *life* or *philosophy* as opposed to something like cats or

⁹³ Ibid. 232-233

experimental data, we should be careful not to confuse the mode of reference to one with the other, and yet, crucially, we have a pre-theoretical grasp of both sorts of objects. “What is important at first is only this: the idea of determination, the logic of the grasp of the object, and the conceptuality of the object in the respective definitory determination must be drawn out of the mode *in which the object is originally accessible.*” (PIA 17, italics original)

This roughly corresponds with the ideas of having an “average understanding” or “prior grasp” in the language of *Being and Time*. When discussing Being, we see that, “Inquiry, as a kind of seeking, must be guided beforehand by what is sought. So the meaning of Being must be available to us in some way... We do not *know* what ‘Being’ means... *But this vague average understanding of Being is still a fact.*” (BT 25) Even when discussing more common entities, of the available and occurrent variety, and the way they depend upon the world-structure prior to being intelligible as entities, we see that, “in every case interpretation is grounded in *something we see in advance* – in a *fore-sight.*” A bit later down the same page, “Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation is founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us.” (BT 191-2) So far, so good. We start from a basic and eminently accessible, if ontologically imprecise, grasp of phenomena before settling on the right way to access them depending on our intentions. Now, when the phenomenon in question is the basis for phenomena being accessible in the first place, we have a problem, as we have previously seen. Formal indication flags the reference to such things as a self-aware work in progress, something based on the “how” of initial access without thereby presuming to know the exact character of the “what” under investigation.

This can happen in a few different ways, either regarding entities, the general sense of Being, or regarding Dasein itself as the newly reflective participant in the process of asking properly penetrating philosophical questions, but in all cases, the consistent theme is that formal indication is a *starting point*. It is a useful indexical that makes no claims to final authority, despite being justified in its first steps insofar as it does pick up on genuine aspects of our pre-theoretical experience. A final example will illustrate this further. In PIA, Heidegger claims that formal indications have a referential function, and a prohibitive function. They refer, in the sense that, “they receive their concrete, factual, categorical determinateness

from the respective direction of experience and of interpretation.” (PIA 105) In so doing, they also prohibit this initial grasp from crystalizing into an unhelpful reification. “...they factically ‘say’ nothing with regard to the concrete movedness of factual life but instead, merely give direction to the regard...”. (PIA 105) This should ring similar to the distinction that Daniel Watts made earlier in our distinction between gesturing towards the ethico-religious representation in Kierkegaard’s *Postscript* and the fact that the content of this gesturing is also firmly a prohibition *against* aesthetic-intellectual representation, together with what this means for paradox as a limit which is at least partially defined against our usual forms of understanding.

Further, “the formal indication prevents every drifting off into autonomous, blind, dogmatic attempts to fix the categorical sense... and which would then purport to determine an objectivity in itself, apart from a thorough discussion of its ontological sense.” (PIA 105) As we can see, the method itself is relatively straightforward. We start from a basic grasp of things, recognize it *as* a basic grasp, and then use it as a hermeneutic guide for *a thorough discussion of its ontological sense*.

This last part is crucial and bears emphasis. Formal indication purports to give us reasons for starting, pending the real work. This is as far as it is a “solution” to anything. What it gestures at might be vague in the sense that it gestures at something still strictly undetermined, but recall, Casati’s problem was not with that aspect of it. The issue was with the *how* – does it do what it claims to do? From our current position, I believe it does, and in a way that is not obviously fatally vague. Vagueness only becomes a serious issue in this context if we treat formal indication as something which participates in the *solution* of the “showing solution” more strictly and essentially than the *showing*. To claim that this showing, based as it is in similar principles that ground some of the phenomenological underpinnings of the analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time* and other writings of the era, is fatally vague in method despite being a preliminary step with no claims to being a solution, is to strangle the scope of possible worthwhile references to Heidegger’s own work. Casati’s critique cannot be rigorously applied without undercutting the possibility of his own project as it currently stands and necessitating a far more critical work instead. Further, the previously advanced reading also addresses the issue of irresoluteness or philosophical cowardice, since it turns out that we can speak towards or around that which cannot be properly

crystallised in language without claiming that we have captured anything in so doing beyond the need to direct our inquiry. I believe we are decently situated now to say that formal indication as a variety of the showing solution is at least more durable than previously suggested against the charges of vagueness.

This is a good thing, since along the way we also managed to tacitly work out some more detail as to how paradox works, if we continue to grant Casati's framework for the moment where I am committed to a variety of formal indication. When we relate to the sacred or the work of art in a way which is attendant to its necessary paradoxical qualities, the contradictions that flag us and represent our prior grasp of the phenomena function in a closely analogous way to the formal indication - it directs thought without presuming the content of the thought and especially without any necessary presumption that the starting grasp will remain unchanged throughout. This is similar also to the way in which Dasein risks itself by orienting itself towards the paradoxical qualities, since, according to the sign structure, the world itself and Dasein along with it is hermeneutically revealed as being less stable in its starting intelligibility.

What has been covered in this chapter provided expansion and clarification to the definition of paradox as an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate, by showing that we encounter the paradoxical quality in the world as a special class of sign which reveals an unintelligibility which simultaneously structures the intelligible world, and by showing how Dasein can venture a relationship to paradoxical phenomena along the lines of a Kierkegaardian approach where Dasein itself is risked at the limits and horizons disclosed as paradoxical. The next major step required, now that we have derived our analytic definition from Heidegger's account of the sacred and expanded it constructively, is of course to tackle the other major prong of the project's argument: the paradoxical quality of the work of art.

Chapter IV: Art's Paradox

“Well, the way of paradoxes is the way of truth. To test reality we must see it on the tight rope. When the verities become acrobats, we can judge them.” - Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

After an examination of Heidegger's account of the sacred it has been proposed that there is a paradoxical element that can be identified as operative in allowing the sacred to function as such, and further, that this paradox can also be taken as a sign which directs us towards a horizon of unintelligibility that is simultaneous with the conditions for intelligibility we are familiar with in both everyday practice and phenomenological analysis. This tension between given intelligibility and unintelligibility will serve as the transition point into the second main theme of the current work, the role of art, since one of the main functions of art for Heidegger is to ontically instantiate precisely this sort of tension between what is given and what is refused in the *strife* between the world and the earth, the strife which is the non-propositional truth that shapes particular histories and peoples. This chapter will present a reading of art to yield two interrelated claims: First, that art has a necessary paradoxical quality, and second, that this paradoxical quality is what allows us to access the space also gestured to by the sacred. Paradox makes art and the sacred formally intelligible and accessible to each other, ultimately allowing a full articulation of a link that is only loosely explained in the existing text. Paradox is the common language that facilitates their privileged relationship.

The path towards this argument will be slightly different than what we encountered in the sacred. An account of the sacred, Heideggerian or otherwise, will often and usually uncontroversially have to appeal to notions of paradoxical language, if not at least non-standard modes of encounter, to get off the ground. There is something *prima facie* strange that needs to be accounted for. This is not the case with the artwork. The temple in OWA, for instance, is not some Lovecraftian entity that boggles our conceptual faculties by its very existence. Rather, the functioning work of art is deceptive because it is, also *prima facie*, a part of the world. It is in some sense an entity like any other. What needs demonstrating is that despite having a standard initial mode of access, the way the artwork functions still participates

necessarily in the formal qualities of paradox (an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate) that we derived earlier, and in the way it discloses horizons for possible intelligibility. For this reason as well, I will invoke a different voice of contradiction in this chapter as a starting point since I believe the burden of proof is higher in this case. Therefore rather than developing the contradictions out from contradictory language in the case of the sacred and building the paradoxical quality by grounding it in the other characteristics, I will start by appealing to a classical $a \& \neg a$ as the gate and indication which can help us think towards the paradoxical quality.

I will first present a reading of “The Origin of the Work of Art” and other roughly contemporaneous texts involving art and then derive paradox from the text itself much as in chapter two, here resting initially on the contradictory intelligible-unintelligible aspect of art via the *earth*. While I will necessarily have to offer some specific interpretation of the shoes, the fountain, and the temple in OWA, my larger point is that virtually any reasonable interpretation will have to invoke terms that gesture towards the paradoxical space I propose in order to preserve the relationship between art and truth. This implicit strangeness, here made explicit, is what sets up a mode of access to art that allows it to disclose and sustain an intelligible world and not collapse into just another entity among entities. Finally, as a practical example of what I am proposing and a bridge to the final chapter where art and the sacred come together with respect to the paradox, I will offer a reading of El Greco’s “Opening of the Fifth Seal (The Vision of St John) “.

1. The Origin

Heidegger’s “Origin of the Work of Art”, first published in 1951 and based on lectures written and delivered in the 1930s, is arguably the most sustained treatment of the subject in his philosophical output and one of the most heavily commented upon. We will examine the essay section by section in order to build a foundation that we can then put in conversation in the with discussions of art in the *Contributions to Philosophy, Mindfulness*, the fourfold writings, and others, using the element of paradox as a guide to bring out the most relevant aspects.

Heidegger sets out to capture the definition, function, and ontological role of the work of art. He begins from the obvious fact that before taking up any particular philosophical or critical stance we have some basic pre-reflective grasp that directs us towards a definition of artwork. After all, we have rooms in museums full of it, our living spaces feel as if they are enriched by it, we are surrounded by music in public space and personal enjoyment. Artworks are “things” that we encounter, what could be more obvious?⁹⁴

A painting – for example Van Gogh’s portrayal of a pair of peasant shoes – travels from one exhibition to another. Works are shipped like coal from the Ruhr or logs from the Black Forest. During the war Hölderlin’s hymns were packed in the soldier’s knapsack along with cleaning equipment. Beethoven’s quartets lie in the publisher’s storeroom like potatoes in a cellar. (OWA 3)

It seems, intuitively, that there is a ‘thingly’ quality to art, even if the work of art itself is neither reducible to nor fully identical with the thingly quality, for example, the clay used to make pottery, or the stone that is to be chiselled and worked into a statue. The fact also remains that unless we want to walk a path of corrosive reductionism, the work of art is also intuitively *more* than its thingly quality. A ceramic might be composed of clay, but it is not *just* clay. A sculpture is something beyond the stone that provides its raw material. Heidegger frames the work initially, but not ultimately, by examining the thingly quality – a bit of didactic subterfuge. “We wish to hit upon the immediate and complete reality of the artwork, for only then will we discover the real art within it. So what we must do, first of all, is to bring the thingliness of the work into view.” (OWA 3) What is it for a thing to be a thing?

There are three answers from the philosophical tradition to the issue of the relationship between the thingly quality of the work and the artificed quality of the work, none of which Heidegger is satisfied with. First, there is the substance/accident distinction. We might consider that when we talk about a thing, we are able to ascertain it *as* thing based on certain qualities it possesses. A piece of wood from a sycamore tree, for instance, might have the qualities of “hard, mottled bark, a warm sandy-coloured wood”, and so on. The qualities are not identical with the thing but do accompany it. On this possible account the thing is that which the various properties gather around, the *substance* to the *accidents* of classical thought,

⁹⁴ The “thing” aspect of art in “Origin of the Work of Art” is not the technical use of the term from “The Thing”, and is here a rough demarcation of the way that individual works of art seem to have presence in that way that other entities do

which is mirrored in the way that our language functions propositionally by use of subjects and predicates which adhere to them. This, however, will not do. Noting this reciprocity of form between the apparent “thingness” of the thing and the language that alternately describes it or conditions it either lands us in a hopeless spiral of which ‘comes first’ in priority, or asserts one as the true source of the thing with equal arbitrariness. Despite being intuitive to our modern sensibilities the issue is that this ease of understanding covers up more than it reveals.

The nature of both sentence and thing derive, in their natures and the possibility of their mutual relatedness, from a common and more primordial source... What presents itself to us as natural, one may suspect, is merely the familiarity of a long-established habit which has forgotten the unfamiliarity from which it arose. And yet this unfamiliar source once struck man as strange and caused him to think and wonder. (OWA 7)

This point is salient for the current argument in its agreement with the guiding hand of the investigation, that is, how to find what is unfamiliar and even bewildering on the basis of certain phenomena so that we can orient ourselves with openness and even “wonder” again. On a more practical level, there is also one major issue: this account does nearly nothing to get us any closer to the nature of the “thing” itself. According to the same intuition that gestured towards the thingly character of the artwork, not every entity seems to be a “thing”. Among other examples, Heidegger notes that human beings are not (or perhaps should not rightly be called) mere things. God *is* in some way but is hardly a thing. Even, “...the deer in the forest clearing, the beetle in the grass...” resist being thrown out as things among things. (OWA 4) To capture the purely thingly character of an entity, even non-living and artificed entities like a shoe or a clock which have their uses in addition to their thing-quality and are still not *just* things, the proper object of investigation would be, “Only the stone, the clod of earth, or a piece of wood... what is lifeless in nature and in human usage. It is the things of nature and usage that are normally called things.” (OWA 5) So, the issue with treating the thing as substance with qualities is that this assessment is applicable to any entity at all, not just the thing, in the same way that in the previous chapter defining a sign on the basis of pure relation was broadly correct to the point of being useless.

The second possibility is to move towards an account of ‘pure’ perception and ground things in sensation. Again we find reasons both reasons for dissatisfaction and valuable insights in the process of critique. On this model, what makes a thing a thing is some collection of sense data associated with it.

The problem is that in actual experience we almost never get pure sensation; what is proximately given in the experience of a thing is simply the thing. Heidegger considers the sound of a door slamming or a car driving by. What we get is not some collection of “tones and noises” that only afterwards get assembled or recognized intelligibly. (OWA 8) We hear most immediately the door in the slam, the car in the growl of the motor. “Much closer to us than any sensation are the things themselves... To hear a bare sound we must listen away from the things, direct our ears from them, listen abstractly.” (OWA 8)

Finally there is the possibility of assessing the thingliness of the thing, and therefore the thing-quality of the artwork, through the distinction between matter and form. Here what is thingly is the raw material, the stone for instance, and what makes it ‘art’ is the way that it is formed. This distinction has become the basis for most ‘aesthetic’ consideration of artwork, but the question is, does the definition originate with art and become relevant to things, or originate from the thing-quality of the thing? An immediate objection is that while this distinction seems to capture *something* of the relationship between artwork and thing, as with the previous two, it can also find equal utility in describing entities like equipment. An axe requires hardness of material to function and form to cut, for instance. (OWA 10) Equipment occupies all the same a strange but useful intermediate position between a ‘mere’ thing and a work of art, since it is crafted intentionally like art, but unlike the artwork, has an intentional utility that makes it the entity that it is, a “serviceability” for some project or another. The artwork, conversely, shares with the thing the fact that it seems to subsist entirely for its own sake. It is not ‘for’ anything. Heidegger suggests on this basis that equipment might be a uniquely valuable object to interrogate since it shares qualities with both types of entity being considered, and more than likely, any possible kind of being besides. (OWA 10) Even this development does not offer an easy solution (or even an easy problem), since reaching the thing by way of equipment implies that if we figure out what the equipmental character is and remove it or bracket it away, whatever is left will have the purely thingly essence we have been looking for. This, for Heidegger is doubtful, since it still imposes on and mutilates the concept of the thing while we are supposedly trying to get it in sight for its own sake. So, even though the thing possesses certain qualities, even though it is perceptible, even though it has something like matter or materiality in practice, none of these reveal the actual mode of being appropriate to the thing itself. Here, another hint:

The inconspicuous thing withdraws itself from thought in the most stubborn of ways. Or is it rather that this self-refusal of the mere thing, this self-contained refusal to be pushed around, belongs precisely to the essential nature of the thing? Must not, then, this disconcerting and uncommunicative element in the essence of the thing become intimately familiar to a thinking which tries to think the thing? (OWA 12)

Both in thinking the thingly quality of the thing, and for the purposes of the current argument, thinking through the work of art in the proper style, it is exactly the “disconcerting and uncommunicative element” that should be not only recognized, but accentuated to the highest degree. In the pursuit of this element, Heidegger still opts to interrogate equipment, since it is a clear instantiation of the matter/form distinction that has become a commonplace (if flawed) background, is accessible in everyday practice without needing a special investigation to delimit what counts as equipment, and still might have something to offer to both our notions of thing and what it is for an entity to be a work. In order to get clear on the equipmental character of the equipment, we encounter the first artwork of the essay, equipment exemplified by Van Gogh’s painted shoes.

Worth noting is that Heidegger engages in a bit of sleight of hand with this setup, since the point is not *really* to engage with the question of the thingliness of the thing, or the equipmentality of equipment for its own sake. Rather, by engaging with the most common claims of aesthetics regarding what makes the work of art what it is, it allows us to set aside ‘current pseudo-concepts’ before arriving on the right path. The two main takeaways for my project are that there is a deep unfamiliarity which is covered up and is a potentially rich source if we could manage to stand before it again, and that there is something ‘disconcerting and uncommunicative’ that is antagonistic to normal thinking but still represents a worthy aspiration for thought.

1.1 The Shoes

Before the shoes themselves, an invocation and warning:

All the more reason to be wary here. The diabolical is perhaps already caught, a supplementary bait, in the limping of these two shifty shoes which, if the double doesn’t make a pair, nonetheless tarp those who want to put their feet back into them, precisely because one cannot – must not – put one’s feet in them and because that would be the strange trap.”⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Restitutions of the truth in pointing [*pointure*]” in *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 275

“That’s one of the causes: the lace. A thing whose name is, in French, also the name of a trap [*le lacet*: “snare”]. It does not only stand for what passes through the eyelets of shoes or corsets. Our voices, in this very place –

– I do indeed notice, now, that strange loop

– Ready to strangle

– of the undone lace. The loop is open, more so still than the untied shoes, but after a sort of sketched-out knot.⁹⁶

Few aspects of OWA have generated as much dialogue and debate as the shoes, and Jacques Derrida wrote a dialogue of his own between at least two unnamed women on the dialogue between Heidegger and art critic Meyer Schapiro on the attribution (or lack thereof) of the shoes, the dialogues on this dialogue which have followed, what it is that the shoes ‘say’ in their obstinate silence, and the risks of engaging in such an endeavour – in trying to stick one’s own feet into them or substitute someone else’s to find the right fit of ownership and authority. The laces of the shoes wait, “ready to strangle”.⁹⁷

With this in mind, I aim to present the shoes in such a way that we do not linger too long and find ourselves strangled. The crucial aspect of Van Gogh’s shoes as an artwork is that they reveal the role that the work of art plays in revealing *truth*, in this case the truth of equipmentality, and that they give us the first glimpse of the tension between earth and world which allows entities to become intelligible in practice. I take a recent paper by Mark Wrathall to offer both a definitive conclusion to the art historical debate, and a good reading of the main argument contained in Heidegger’s text. This will serve as a guide to help us navigate. Now, to the shoes themselves.

We will take as an example an everyday piece of equipment, a pair of peasant shoes. We do not need to exhibit actual examples of this sort of useful article in order to describe it. But since what concerns us here is direct description [that is, description which does not presume any particular philosophical theory], it may be helpful to facilitate their visual realization. To this end, a pictorial presentation suffices. We will take a well-known painting by Van Gogh, who painted such shoes several times. (OWA 13, brackets added for clarification)

Here we can draw distinctions which will help us avoid common pitfalls. There are the shoes as an example of equipment, since the point of this section is trying to find the equipmentality of equipment,

⁹⁶ Ibid. 277

⁹⁷ There will be more to say on Derrida’s contributions to the shoe-discourse in Chapter V

the mode of being which is most essential to equipment as such. Next, there are the peasant shoes as a *specific* example of equipment, since equipment only functions as such in specific practice and as part of a world. Simply imagining ‘shoes’ would not be sufficient to tell us anything. Finally, there is the “pictorial presentation” which seems to facilitate the imagining of the peasant shoes but, as we will see, is not identical with them.

Now, shoes are made for a purpose and have composition to match, whether leather, cloth, wood, as the case may be. The equipmentality of the shoes is based in their *utility*. This is true, but trivially true and does not yet give us access to the deeper relationships at work. We are correctly identifying something based on a pre-reflective understanding that has not been made explicit.

In order for this [understanding] to be so must we not look out for the useful piece of equipment in its use? The peasant woman wears her shoes in the field. Only then do they become what they are. They are all the more genuinely so the less the peasant woman thinks of her shoes while she is working, or even looks at them, or is aware of them in any way at all. This is how the shoes actually serve. (OWA 13-14)

What we want, then, is to see *this* in action, the equipmentality in practice which is by necessity not directly accessible in the practice itself for the one so engaged, since shoes are for walking in and not staring at with a face of furrowed contemplation. “... as long as we only imagine a pair of shoes in general [equipment-shoes] or merely look at the shoes as they stand there in the painting [painting-shoes], empty and unused, we will never learn what the equipmental being of equipment in truth is.” (OWA 14) In the painting, the shoes are in a totally indeterminate location, lacking any indication of their potential usage in the fields, again keeping in mind here the demonstrative and pedagogic role of the painting-shoes. Nothing in the painting points towards their use. “And yet.” (OWA 14)

Heidegger imagines the life of a peasant woman who owns peasant shoes and uses them as part of a coherent daily praxis. What is revealed in this praxis is that her shoes are a crucial part of her relationship with her environment. In their weight, the affordances of the leather, the durable soles, the way that they accompany and reflect all of the struggles of the world of one who works the land, “[this] equipment belongs *to the earth* and finds protection in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within itself.” (OWA 14) Based on this section

alone Heidegger is indeed introducing a version of the earth/world tension that will be fully developed later but for now the key is that the equipmentality of the shoes as utility is actually based on their *reliability*, a reliability which depends on this tension. Mark Wrathall argues – and following his argument I take it to be correct – that reliability is central to what Heidegger is getting at in the shoes section. Wrathall defines reliability such that, “Equipment has reliability when it mediates for its user the competing demands of the world and the earth... The reliability of equipment grounds the usefulness of equipment by illuminating how the tasks facilitated by the equipment matter to us.”⁹⁸ On this reading, the usefulness of an entity, the fact that we *can* use it, finds a deeper grounding in whether or not we have historically contingent reasons to do so which gather together and respond to the very tensions we have been discussing. For the moment, two things are significant: First, the shoes *qua* equipment find their mode of being in how they straddle the intelligible world, the nexus of meaning and significance which we exist both in and as, and the given reticence of the earth, that which exists prior to our particular projects and which grounds the pre-‘material’ sense of materiality in things (the soil of the field, the leather of the shoe).⁹⁹ Secondly, this definition helpfully precludes the possibility that Heidegger is arguing for anything like the truth of shoes, the truth of peasant life, or some such schmaltzy provinciality which he is often charged with.

“But perhaps it is only in the picture that we notice all this about the shoes. The peasant woman, by contrast, merely wears them.” (OWA 14) The painting-shoes, then, reveal something about the equipment-shoes via the peasant-shoes precisely because in the way that the painting-shoes depict nothing directly of the peasant-shoes, and in this absence of location, the “empty and unused” shoes are able to suggest the way that shoes are employed which is usually invisible to the wearer. Shoes are formed in and as a particular style based on an understanding of the needs of the earth, in the freedom of whose “steady pressure” particular demands are articulated and responded to in and as the world of the peasant woman. As the shoes continue to stand ready for this relational mode of being, they continue to offer reliability. “In virtue of this reliability the peasant woman is admitted into the silent call of the earth; in virtue of the

⁹⁸ Mark Adam Wrathall, “Heidegger and Van Gogh’s *Shoes*”, *Word and Image* Vol. 41, No. 1, 13

⁹⁹ One of the other merits of Wrathall’s reading is its sensitivity and explicit reference to the fact that, as in the case of shoes *qua* equipment, Heidegger’s German is not univocal concerning the shoes. There are distinctions between shoes [Schuhe], for instance, and shoe-equipment [Schuhzeug]. See *Ibid.* 8 and GA5 13,18, *inter alia*.

reliability of the equipment she is certain of her world. World and earth exist for her and those who share her mode of being only here – in the equipment.” (OWA 14)

So, we have a working knowledge of the equipment-shoes by way of the peasant-shoes and with it a link between equipment, utility, and reliability. One point remains outstanding: the painting-shoes, and more broadly, the role of the artwork in the whole operation of the shoes, whether peasant or equipmental. Further, it remains to be seen what any of this did for our understanding of the relationship between the thing and the work. Heidegger claims that we have still learned something of this sort, “unexpectedly and, as it were, in passing.” (OWA 15) When we discovered the equipmentality of the equipment in reliability, this was not done by examining shoes standing before us, or observing shoes in practice, or learning about how shoes are made. “Rather, the equipmental being of equipment was only discovered by bringing ourselves before the Van Gogh painting. It is this that spoke. *In proximity to the work we were suddenly somewhere other than we are usually accustomed to being.*” (OWA 15, emphasis added) I have emphasized this last line in the service of the main argument of this chapter, that one of the major roles of the work of art is take us before the usual in such a way that it becomes thoroughly unusual, more on which as we proceed. For now, “The artwork lets us know what the shoes, in truth, are.” (OWA 15)

This is the real crux of the section. The work was not an expedient way to imagine shoes, something which may have been accomplished by other means. What is at work in the work is *truth*. When Heidegger says that the artwork lets us know what the shoes “in truth” are, this is not a claim about definitions or correctness of assertion regarding shoes.

Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, in truth *is*. This being steps forward into the unconcealment of its being. The unconcealment of being is what the Greeks called ἀλήθεια... In the work, when there is a disclosure of the being as what and how it is, there is a happening of truth at work. (OWA 16)

The painting-shoes in the work of art show the equipment-shoes, taken as peasant-shoes, in their equipmentality. The function of the work of art is only incidentally in this case related to equipmentality. It is the fact that the work of art was able to disclosure the *truth* of equipmentality that it is such a work. “The essential nature of art would then be this: the setting-itself-to work of the truth of beings.” (OWA

16) This is the upshot of the argument thus far, and justification for Heidegger's claim that we have quietly arrived at something more substantive regarding the work while we were looking for the equipmentality of equipment. Heidegger ends this consideration of the shoes with what I take to be a fairly authoritative statement that a strict equivalence between the peasant-shoes and the painting-shoes is unnecessary as part of the main argument. "But do we then mean that this painting by Van Gogh depicts a pair of peasant shoes that are actually present and count, therefore, as a work because it does so successfully? Do we think that the painting takes a likeness from the real and transposes it into an artistic... production? By no means." (OWA 16) The truth of the painting is bringing a being (the shoes) to its being (equipmental) by disclosing its grounding in the relation between earth and world. Neither equipment-shoes nor peasant-shoes are directly depicted, because the work of art *as* work does not hinge on accurate depiction of entities through representation. It shows the entity *in truth*.

As stated in the beginning of this section, the specifics of the relationship between the painting, shoes, and a peasant woman are of no particular importance on their own to the larger claims about art and paradox being advanced here. In better circumstances, it would be enough to summarize that in the discussion of the shoes we get a sense of the fact that entities come to stand as a result of their belonging to earth and world, and that the artwork is uniquely privileged in its ability to set the truth of beings into a particular being, that is, the work. It does this, in no small part, by suggesting modes of access to beings that we would not ordinarily encounter in practical engagement with them. This would suffice. The circumstances, unfortunately, are not better, and there is a large literature on what these shoes and this peasant woman mean for the argument. So, we will survey the existing debate in the literature, and just as we learned something about truth and equipment in the process of considering shoes, we will aim to learn something of the paradoxical quality of Heidegger's account of art while dwelling on these same shoes a little while longer.

1.1.1 *The Controversy*

In 1968, art historian Meyer Schapiro wrote a piece addressing Heidegger's treatment of Van Gogh's shoes. Schapiro had sent a letter to Heidegger asking him when and where he had seen the painting which inspired him to refer to Van Gogh's shoes in the first place, in the absence of any specific reference in

OWA, and Heidegger responded that he had seen the painting in question in Amsterdam, March of 1930. Based on this, Schapiro concludes that, “This is clearly de la Faille’s no. 255; there was also exhibited at the same time a painting with three pairs of shoes, and it is possible that the exposed sole of a shoe in this picture, inspired the reference to the sole in the philosopher’s account.”¹⁰⁰

The shoes in question ostensibly identified, Schapiro moves for the attack. Heidegger has misunderstood the painting entirely, since these are not the shoes of a peasant woman or a peasant at all, but Van Gogh’s own shoes, shoes worn as part of his urban existence of the time. Any attempt to derive the ‘truth’ of a certain kind of rustic life and the equipment pertinent to it from the painting is just wishful thinking that runs contrary to the reality of the situation.

Alas for him, the philosopher has indeed deceived himself. He has retained from his encounter with van Gogh’s canvas a moving set of associations with peasants and the soil, which are not sustained by the picture itself. They are grounded rather in his own social outlook with its heavy pathos of the primordial and earthy. He has indeed ‘imagined everything and projected it into the painting’. He has experienced both too little and too much in his contact with the work.¹⁰¹

The mistake laid bare, Schapiro makes three main claims against Heidegger: First and foremost, he has imagined peasant shoes where there are none. Secondly, even if these *were* peasant shoes, there is no reason we need the painted shoes to reveal the truth of equipment when a pair of extant shoes in front of us could serve equally well. Finally, Heidegger’s reading does not account for the rich experience of Van Gogh’s own subjective dealings with his daily paraphernalia which drew him to paint apparently ordinary objects with such love and attention, as recounted by his own letters and the recollections of Gauguin while they lived together.¹⁰² In light of this critique, do we hang up the shoes and call it a day, perhaps to salvage OWA with reference to the fountain or the temple? We find a variety of different responses in the literature, with or without explicit reference to Schapiro. Julian Young dismisses Heidegger’s section on Van Gogh as fine prose but “largely irrelevant”.¹⁰³ Dreyfus claims that while the section on the shoes is *not* irrelevant, “Whether, as art critics debate, the shoes are really a pair of peasant shoes or Van Gogh’s own

¹⁰⁰ Meyer Schapiro, “The Still Life as a Personal Object - A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh” in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994) 136

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 138

¹⁰² Ibid. 140-1

¹⁰³ Julian Young, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 22

shoes is irrelevant to how the picture works.”¹⁰⁴ Iain Thomson suggests first that if we have the right eyes to see and allow figures to suggest themselves from the textured background of Van Gogh’s brushstrokes, there does appear to be the form of a peasant lurking in shades of darkness.¹⁰⁵ Failing the reader’s ability to orient their vision like this, Thomson provides a phenomenological reading of the painting which emphasizes Heidegger’s use of “nothing” when he says: “There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes to which and within which they could belong; only an undefined space... A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more.” (OWA 14) I would like to settle the issue of the shoes differently, although we will return to Thomson’s ‘nothing’. I believe that if we take seriously the issue of the art-historical shoes which Heidegger referenced, Mark Wrathall has proven conclusively that Schapiro was too hasty in his assessment of which painting it so “clearly” was. That is, even if we grant (somewhat extravagantly) that this section of OWA hinges entirely on whether or not the shoes were of peasant stock, the argument still fails.

1.1.2 *The Museums*

Wrathall carefully assesses the material facts of the controversy based on all available information and historical records, establishing a small error on Heidegger’s part, and a large error on Schapiro’s. Noteworthy is the fact that Schapiro did not ask Heidegger to specifically identify *which* painting he saw, only *when* and *where* he saw it. Heidegger claimed that he saw the paintings in Amsterdam in 1930, and Schapiro made his initial deductions based on this fact. Now, there was such an exhibit, but Schapiro availed himself of an incomplete catalogue when he attempted to narrow which particular painted shoes were present, one which represented only half of the Van Goghs on display at the time and missed the inclusion of one still life of peasant shoes, at the very least.¹⁰⁶ The problems continue due to a slip on Heidegger’s end, when he likely misremembered where he saw the paintings in the decades that had passed since the visit to the Netherlands. Heidegger was in the Netherlands in 1930, but in the spring, before the exhibition in question opened in Amsterdam in September. The two possibilities are that Heidegger saw an exhibition in the Hague during this spring trip, which had significant overlap with the

¹⁰⁴ Hubert Dreyfus, “Heidegger’s Ontology of Art” in *A Companion to Heidegger* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005) 409

¹⁰⁵ Iain Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 87-8

¹⁰⁶ Mark Adam Wrathall, “Heidegger and van Gogh’s *Shoes*”, *Word and Image* vol. 41, no. 1, 4

collection to be displayed in September, including the relevant Van Gogh still lives, or, that he saw the painting in question during a similar trip in the summer of 1931, when again, much of the catalogue was still around and being displayed.¹⁰⁷ So, based on a close study of museum catalogues, personal letters, and travel itineraries, along with relevant classifications of Van Gogh's various painted shoes, Wrathall establishes that it is eminently plausible that Heidegger did in fact see peasant shoes by Van Gogh, and did not merely project some bumpkin fantasy onto an otherwise upstanding pair of city shoes as Schapiro claims. At bare minimum, Schapiro's line of deduction is materially flawed to the point where a charitable reading of the claims still implies serious carelessness and a failure of diligence.

Wrathall continues and addresses the remaining claims levied by Schapiro and others on the relationship between some extant pair of shoes, the 'peasant shoes' in the painting, and what this means for the thrust of Heidegger's consideration of the painting regarding truth. Some claims are easily dismissed. For instance, the idea that even if the shoes *were* Van Gogh's he could not possibly have owned peasant shoes while living in the city is unimpressive. Further, there is nothing to say that Van Gogh could not have modelled an intended pair of peasant shoes after his own shoes, city or otherwise, as part of a larger thematic. To deny this would be to claim that a staging of *Hamlet* stretches credulity because Yorick's skull we see on stage is merely plastic or ceramic, or that Dante Gabriel Rossetti was being dishonest by portraying his longtime model Jane Morris in romanticized settings that did not accurately reflect the English studio space. Art cannot be so fussy and uncreative as all that.

What we see when we see shoes out of use is a break in the easy use that normally makes up the role that equipment-shoes play in a particular practice. The painting, by showing us equipment without any significant philosophical baggage, makes available the argument presented earlier where equipment, via utility, is grounded in *reliability* which helps us meaningfully take up projects in the necessary tension between the earth and the world.¹⁰⁸ The record appears to be set straight on Schapiro's critique as a result of Wrathall's research, yet it is worth looking at one further response to the question of the shoes. In the following section I intend to introduce Iain Thomson's approach as an alternative that still ultimately

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 5-6

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 12

concorde with my main argument. This will be developed in a further section, but we can at least put the relevant pieces on the board for this move while on the topic of the shoes.

1.1.3 *The Nothing*

Thomson's main claim regarding the shoes in *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* is that Heidegger is to be taken seriously when he talks about the 'nothing besides' the pair of shoes in Van Gogh's painting. By experiencing the fact that everything which is intelligible, indeed the very possibility of intelligibility, is ultimately conditioned by something which is not intelligibly accessible, this is a way by which Heidegger's mysterious 'earth' is made manifest. Ultimately, it is this link with the earth that I want to call attention to for later, since my own argument also relies on the earth even where it does not require the 'nothing'.

As we have already seen, Heidegger does introduce the painting-shoes in a somewhat peculiar way. For example, "From Van Gogh's painting we cannot even tell where these shoes are. There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes to which and within which they could belong; only an undefined space." (OWA 14) Further, "A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more. And yet." (OWA 14) For Thomson, this visual ambiguity of the shoes and their setting is not merely 'nothing' as an absence of relevant context, it is in fact *the nothing* [das Nichts] which Heidegger refers to. In brief, the nothing is how we might meaningfully gesture towards the active refusal of the general sweep of disclosure to disclose its own origins along with it. In this way, as Heidegger states in "What is Metaphysics" among others, the nothing shares something crucial with Being itself in that it is a condition for the possibility of things in general and emphatically not itself a thing, not an entity among entities. Of equal importance is the distinction between the nothing and a pure nullity, a negation, or an absence. Things like absence only make sense on the basis of some understanding of presence, the very presence that the pre-disclosive or non-disclosive aspects of our phenomenal situation refuse themselves to. Because of the distinction between both Being and the nothing on one hand, and *entitities* which *are* on the other, Heidegger also wants to avoid speaking in such a way that we are forced to say 'the nothing *is*' one thing or another, thereby ascribing it some quality of Being which is definitionally impossible. The solution is to modify the noun into its own verb so that we may gesture towards the nothing and its unique way of being a non-null

non-being without making predicative claims. “The nothing itself nihilates.”¹⁰⁹ [Das Nichts selbst nichtet.] (WIM 90/GA9 114)

This is, for Thomson, the nothing which is given alongside the shoes. Based on the visual representation of the shoes (assuming that Thomson has correctly identified the shoes, which is of no real importance here), the background is alternatively suggestive and self-refusing. It brings us into a state that invites us to communion with the background and prevents total understanding. “To experience this “noth-ing” is to become attuned to something that is not a thing (hence “nothing”) but which conditions all our experiences of things, something that fundamentally informs our intelligible worlds but that we experience initially as what escapes and so defies our “subjectivistic” impulse to extend our conceptual mastery over everything.”¹¹⁰ The ‘nothing’ is a way of bringing us into contact with the otherwise elusive ‘earth’ which complicates the world of intelligibility that it allows to take shape and obscures in equal turn. The active refusal which backgrounds the foregrounded shoes exemplifies what happens, “...in great art, explicitly (where we actually see, e.g., that there is something we do not see at the heart of what we do see, and this initially paradoxical disclosure of what both conditions and withdraws from our experience is precisely what Heidegger calls “earth”).”¹¹¹ In closing, while Thomson places the emphasis of the shoes and to some extent the function of art itself slightly askew from my own preferred account, by claiming that the nothing is related to the earth of the strife in art, even this alternative position is compatible with the paradoxical character I am after. We must first complete our tour of the artworks.

¹⁰⁹ Sometimes translated more literally according to the German form, and more provocatively to literary or philosophical sensibilities, as “The nothing nothings” or even “the nothing noths”. This has, to put it mildly, caused controversy.

¹¹⁰ Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* 85

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 79

1.2 *The Fountain*

The Roman fountain

The jet ascends, and falling fills
 The marble basin round.
 Veiling itself, this over-flows
 Into a second basin's ground.
 The second gives, it becomes too rich,
 To a third its bubbling flood,
 And each at once receives and gives
 And streams and rests.

Der Römische Brunnen

Aufsteigt der Strahl und fallend gießt
 Er voll de Marmorschale Rund
 Die, sich verschleiern, überfließt
 In einer zweiten Schale Grund;
 Die zweite gibt, sie wird zu reich,
 Der dritten wallend ihre Flut,
 Und jede nimmt und gibt zugleich
 Und strömt und ruht.

Presented here in its entirety is the poem, “The Roman Fountain” by C.F. Meyer – the briefest entry of the three works in OWA, in many ways the most cryptic, and inarguably the least discussed in the otherwise overwhelming amount of secondary literature that OWA has generated. This is interesting because it is also the only work of art that is directly given, that is, not a description of Van Gogh’s painting, or an imagining of a Greek temple, but the poem itself, presented or re-presented as the case may be.

In this section I would like to establish two main points: Firstly, that the poem, like the shoes before and the temple to follow, participates in the setting up of truth with reference to the strife of earth and world. Secondly, that the curious mimetic quality of the poem suggests an important link between intelligibility and unintelligibility as fundamental horizons for both entities and art.

To build this up I will introduce three pieces on the fountain. First, Iain Thomson’s brief treatment, and then, more substantively, Karen Gover and Stephen Mulhall who both consider the role of reproduction and mimesis, that is, whether the poem captures something of a fountain, and if so, what this says in conjunction with Heidegger’s claim that the work of art is non-representational.

In *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, Thomson claims that the fountain is a sort of metaphor for Heidegger’s development of historical epochs of Being, the way that responsiveness to Being (or, alternately, textures of history afforded by *Beying*) shapes distinct eras of metaphysical thinking.

Inexhaustible Being fills the first basin, corresponding to Greek thought, then proceeds to Christian-Scholastic thinking, and finally, the lowest basin, modern technological metaphysics. “It thus seems clear that Heidegger includes Meyer’s poem because he believes it suggestively illuminates the way the history of being unfolds as a history of decline, a ‘fall’ that results from this history’s increasing forgetting of the source from which it ultimately springs – the Ur-sprung or ‘origin’ of Heidegger’s essay’s title – in a word: ‘Being.’”¹¹² While Thomson is of course correct that these epochs of being are present in Heidegger’s work of this era and beyond, and that there is perhaps a suggestiveness to the tripartite structure of the fountain, I hesitate to endorse without qualification. This interpretation is neither found nor strongly suggested in the text, and the idea of a symbolic or metaphorical reading of the poem does not seem to address the concerns which *are* explicitly raised, most notably the issue of representation in the work of art. The very introduction of the poem is framed as such:

What is given beforehand to the poet, and how is it given, so that it can be given once again in the poem? It may be that in the case of [Hölderlin’s hymn ‘The Rhine’] and similar poems, the idea of a copy-relation between a beautiful reality and the artwork clearly fails; yet the idea that the work is a copy seems to be confirmed in the best possible way by C.F. Meyer’s poem “The Roman Fountain”. (OWA 17)

And directly after the poem, again, “This, however, is neither a poetic depiction of an actual fountain nor the reproduction of the general essence of a Roman fountain. Yet truth is set into the work. What is the truth that happens in the work?”¹¹³ (OWA 17) I take *this*, rather, to be the main problematic of the fountain: *Something* is given to the poet which is then “given again” in the poem, and the idea that the work of art is a copy “seems to be confirmed in the best possible way” in Meyer’s poem, and yet, it does not depict a fountain or some essence of fountain-ness, but still somehow sets truth into the work. It is this point that both Gover and Mulhall profitably take up.

¹¹² Ibid. 70

¹¹³ With respect to Thomson, the line after this does ask, “Can truth happen at all and be, therefore, historical? Yet truth, it is said, is something timeless and supratemporal.” I take this to be a rhetorical preview of the discussion of truth to come later on in the essay, since Heidegger frames it against a position he clearly does not hold, i.e., ahistorical or ‘supratemporal’ truth, presumably here as the Latinized *adequatio*. In any case, the issue is not pursued any further in this section, and I think it asks too much of this one line to steer the thrust of the poem from the problem of representation to the historicity of truth when we, up to this point in the essay, lack the resources for that particular discussion.

In Karen Gover's "The Overlooked Work of Art in 'The Origin of the Work of Art'", she provides an interesting synthesis of Thomson's point regarding the operative 'nothing' in the shoes and the textual path of Heidegger's fountain. Her main claim is that Heidegger does not want us to fully reject representation or mimesis in the work of art, but representation should be thought on the basis of ἀλήθεια as dual clearing and concealing rather than correspondence between some extant entity or state of affairs and a suitable re-presentation of it. "It is rather the case that Heidegger, in keeping with a tradition within aesthetics that is as old as Plato, will denounce mimesis, but only in order to reinscribe it at a more profound level."¹¹⁴ This claim accords with much of what we have already seen, and what is to come in the temple, that is, that art instantiates the non-propositional truth which allows entities and peoples to come to stand and access anything like propositional truth. That is, the issue is not so much with understanding artwork as representational, as it is with what we mean when we ascribe a representation or mimetic quality to the work. What is being represented?

How are we to regard the artwork as a copy if it is neither a copy of a particular being nor its essence? What is left over for the work to represent? Nothing, it would seem. And it turns out that it is indeed Nothing that the artwork discloses: not an other being, not a universal, but the clearing in which beings come to presence. Perhaps what the poem represents, if it does, is nothing.¹¹⁵

This nothingness, as all good nothingness should be, is not a mere nullity, but manages to reveal the function of truth and art in the very way that the representation of the fountain actually veils the possibility of confusing it with the correct rendering of any particular fountain, and covers itself up in the same language that discloses it. The fountain itself is giving and receiving, flowing and catching, liquidly self-veiling in its appearance. I will admit at this point that I find Gover's claim that the poem represents "nothing" to be slightly unconvincing, even granting the fact that it is not traditionally representational, if only because it seems *very much* like the poem aims to capture something of a fountain. What I am more sympathetic to is the idea that just as the fountain is self-standing and self-veiling, just as the poem presents and hides the fountain in such a way that it cannot be this or that fountain with any surety, this does show

¹¹⁴Karen Gover, "The Overlooked Work of Art in Heidegger's 'Origin of the Work of Art'", *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 48, No. 2, Issue 190 (June 2008) 146

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 149

the non-corresponding truth as it functions in art. There is a self-referentiality which calls attention to the very tension between clearing and concealing that is necessary for it to come to stand as art in the first place. Crucially in this case, and distinct from Thomson's reading, is that what has been said does not reduce the essence of the poem, or the fountain, to this revelatory function. It is neither a symbol nor a metaphor. "It holds together the enigma of the work of art: it is a being that places itself into the unconcealment of beings that it opens up."¹¹⁶

What sums up Gover's account, and corresponds with the intuition I aim to preserve as it pertains to the larger project, is the following:

"Thus, Heidegger's persistent denials that the works he mentions are representations serve both to conceal and, paradoxically, to highlight the belonging-together of the representational act and the disclosive aspects of art. As with the essential belonging together of concealment and unconcealment, of truth and untruth, the mimetic framework for understanding art stands and falls with its essence as a happening of truth."¹¹⁷

To the extent that we understand art as a *work of art* which can ground non-propositional truth and not under the categories of traditional metaphysics or aesthetics, we understand its mimetic quality as one based on tension. For the poem to function as a poem, it is this tension that matters, or, put differently, the *strife* in which the represented truth as ἀλήθεια is set to the work.

Stephen Mulhall offers what is, in my estimation, the best current account of the fountain, and one which shares a good deal with the attention to detail in Gover's account, differing significantly and helpfully by emphasizing the role of the earth via the rift-design rather than the nothing. Like Gover, he begins by noting the fact that the fountain exists at a textual disjunction between an artistic 'copy' and a reproduction of something available, and that the question of mimesis is at the core of whatever Heidegger is up to with Meyer's poem. He also proposes that whatever sort of truth is happening here such that the fountain can serve as a copy of it needs to be radicalized beyond correspondence. "In short, there *is* truth in the view that the work of art is mimetic, but that truth can only be acknowledged... if we separate from the mimetic view any commitment to the prior existence of that of which the work is a mimesis, or to the

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 152

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 152

work of mimesis as a matter of re-producing - duplicating or reiterating - anything.”¹¹⁸ It is here that Mulhall makes a unique move compared to Gover and Thomson. Even though the mimetic or representational content of the work of art, in this case the poem, cannot either presuppose or reduce to the duplication of the fountain itself, this does not necessarily mean that the lack of presupposition bars any further relationship between the work and something of the fountain.

To this point, Mulhall references the fact that while not explicitly stated either in Heidegger or in Meyer, we do have some clue as to which particular fountain may have inspired the painting, and the scholarly intuition suggests that it is the “Fountain of the Horses of the Sea” at the Villa Borghese in Rome.¹¹⁹ While Meyer describes the central structure of the fountain and its basins accurately he leaves out one significant detail: the ornamental base with its leaping horses, quite a distinctive feature to leave unremarked. This absence is why the fountain is able to be mimetic without being correspondent-representational, and in fact, introduces the tension between the earth and the world via the *rift-design*. Essentially, the rift-design is the way that a particular setting-to-work of the truth in strife provides the basic formal qualities of a particular work of art. It pre-articulates the demarcations of give and take, the clearing and concealing, of earth and world, that a work of art as such instantiates. With regard to the poem, by detaching the foundation of the fountain which has been styled in the Roman (or some later interpretation thereof) style, and yet still capturing an aspect of it, it literally de-Romanizes it, that is, suggests the essence of the thing without reference to the Roman adequation-correspondence critiqued by Heidegger in the introduction to the works of OWA - it tears it out of its metaphysical scaffolding without thereby destroying it.

The absence from the poem’s fountain of the actual fountain’s marine horses would not then constitute a continued avoidance of the occluded ground on which this, and any other, thing reveals itself; it would rather amount to an implicit critique of the actual fountain as lacking authentic (call it metaphysical) support, and so to a drawing forth of the rift-design still hidden within it.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Stephen Mullhall, “Two Shoes and a Fountain: Ecstasis, Mimesis, and Engrossment in Heidegger’s *The Origin of the Work of Art*”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Vol. CXIX, Part 2, 210

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 211

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 213-14

Having considered both Heidegger's treatment of the fountain and its challenging position between representation and correspondence, and the secondary literature which has thus far attempted to clarify the issue, we are now in a better position to summarize the salient points for the current task of drawing out the paradoxical element in Heidegger's account of art more generally: Meyer's poem, like Van Gogh's shoes, is able to function as a work of art by virtue of the fact, and *only* by virtue of the fact, that it instantiates the strife between the earth and the world. This holds whether, according to Gover's account, this is because its mimetic value is supposed to 'represent' the self-referential self-concealing that is necessary for truth as ἀλήθεια, or following Mulhall's compelling reading, that the poem exposes the rift-design inherent in any work of art by de-coupling the fountain from its usual grounding and thereby calling attention to the radicalized and thoroughly problematized essence of the fountain which is 'copied' in the work. The value of the poem as work of art hinges on its ability to relate itself explicitly to the earth and the world.

1.3 The Temple

The temple is for my purposes, the work of art that expresses most strongly the connections between the major threads of the argument so far, in the way that the temple weaves together world disclosure, a condition of the possibility for the gods appearing as gods, and the setting of truth into the work. It is also the one that runs the strongest risk of redundancy due to the ground already covered both in this chapter and prior and for this reason its treatment will be comparatively brief.

Heidegger describes for us a Greek temple of beautiful marble atop a hill. It strictly speaking portrays nothing, but yet, as in the case of the fountain, this does not therefore render it an abstract or something untethered and unreachable, a noumenal fiction or purely formal artifact. The temple, as long as it is still functioning as a temple by setting up and keeping open a particular world (in this case, the world of the ancient Greeks), is responsible for the texture and possibility of disclosure of all of the entities, relations to entities, and projects which can meaningfully be engaged with by individuals who themselves are reciprocally constituted by these possibilities.

It is the temple work that first structures and simultaneously gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace,

endurance and decline acquire for the human being the shape of its destiny. The all-governing expanse of these open relations is the world of this historical people. From and within this expanse the people first returns to itself for the completion of its vocation. (OWA 21)

In other words, the temple gathers together and makes implicit (and by extension, potentially explicit) the basic shape of human existence in this place and time. Only in the world of the temple can someone like Achilles come to stand as a hero, and the possibility of a Christian saint is impossible for reasons that have nothing to do with the factual existence of Christianity at the time. The ethical and religious relationships opened up by the Christian world simply do not find their ground in this arrangement, nor could they. The shared understanding sets out success or failure conditions for both individuals and the community as a whole. Beyond this, individual entities also take on their shape and style.

“Tree, grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter their distinctive shapes and thus come to appearance as what they are.” (OWA 21) In the temple, the marble is interpreted and set forth as something which is heavy and beautiful, lustrous in the sun. The sun itself is captured in its radiance against the marble. The wind which whips around the structure reveals itself to be all the fiercer and the marble to be all the sturdier in the way they accentuate each other’s characteristics and therefore allow them to come to appearance *as what they are*. Even animals take on a shape, since some will be associated with gods and feasts, some for divination, some for sacrifice and some for personal consumption. These are not predicates which adhere to some pre-existing ‘animal’ essence which could be otherwise, they are simultaneous with the disclosure of the animal as such given the background sustained by the temple. “Standing there, the temple first gives to things their look, and to men their outlook on themselves.”¹²¹ (OWA 21)

The temple *sets up* a world, the “ever-nonobjectual” domain of intelligibility and praxis and *sets forth* the earth. It is in this work of art that the idea of the earth comes most clearly into its own, the strange non-material physicality, or perhaps equally aptly, non-physical materiality which provides the obscure solidity for the world to ground itself in, and which reveals itself only through this world, but revealed as

¹²¹ In this same section, Heidegger references the fact that the temple also establishes the solidity of the ground and the sweep of the sky overhead the structure, in addition to the gods which are able to come to be in the beauty of the temple and the conditions of birth and death (one might plausibly say, the *mortality* or status as *mortal*) of the people. In other words, something strongly suggestive of the *fourfold* despite not being called explicitly this.

something which is never made intelligible or accessible in the manner of the world. Heidegger gives two specific examples. First, the stone of the temple which is used in its construction, but not in the same way that entities with the mode of being of equipment implicitly involve materiality which then disappears in usefulness. The stone and other materials show themselves *as* being the things that they are which are capable of sustaining the world since they refuse to be questionable in the way that the particulars of the world are accessible for questioning or apprehending. “All of this comes forth as the work sets itself back into the massiveness and heaviness of the stone, into the firmness and flexibility of the wood...” (OWA 24)

If we were to attempt to get to the bottom of why the stone is what it is, we would only ever be able to appeal to methods and metrics which are supplied by our relationship to entities as granted by the world itself, and which are never capable of bringing lucidity to the earth. For example, the heaviness which is unconcealed in the rock.

But while this heaviness weights down on us, at the same time, it denies us any penetration into it. If we attempt such penetration by smashing the rock, then it shows us its pieces but never anything inward, anything that has been opened up. The stone has instantly withdrawn again into the same dull weight and mass of its fragments. If we try to grasp the stone’s heaviness in another way, by placing it on a pair of scales, then we bring its heaviness into the calculable form of weight. This perhaps very precise determination of the stone is a number, but the heaviness of the weight has escaped us. (OWA 24-5)

No matter what we appeal to we can never get behind the fact that the stone has allowed us to respond to it as being a particular way, and simultaneously made itself thoroughly incomprehensible outside of the limited particularity of the way it thrusts itself into the world and grounds comprehensibility. Likewise with colour. If we consider ‘red’, we can measure it by appealing to quantitative metrics of wavelengths, physical metrics of pigment or chemical analysis, but we never get a bit more ‘red’ than we started with, we have only managed to put to work a domain of analysis which lies utterly outside the pre-givenness of the colour itself as it shows itself from out of its hidden depths. “Colour shines and only wants to shine.” (OWA 25)

In essence, the earth is knowable only as something which refuses to be known, but crucially, at the same time, *must* be apprehended in some way such that the world can take shape. It refuses absolutely any inroads as if, just like with the gods, we could at one moment know less about it and at another time

more. “Earth shatters every attempt to penetrate it. It turns every merely calculational intrusion into an act of destruction... The earth is openly illuminated as itself only where it is apprehended and preserved as the essentially undisclosable, as that which withdraws from every disclosure, in other words, keeps itself constantly closed up.” (OWA 25) In the work of art the earth and the world are put into their mutually clearing and concealing reciprocal relationship, in which what is known rests on an essentially inexhaustible unknown, and what is unknowable nevertheless shows up. The work of art sets up strife, and in this strife, truth as clearing/concealing is able to be “won”, prior to any propositional truth, and *only* insofar as the strife is able to be maintained, sustained, intensified, preserved, but never resolved or flattened over. Heidegger’s treatment of the earthly materiality of the temple and the disclosed world of the ancient Greeks illustrates this function. So, what allows the temple to function as a work of art is the fact that the earth and world find their place of strife.

In summation, having examined the three works of art in the *Origin*: In each account, the work of art finds its necessary motivating force and functional uptake in the ontological tension between earth and world which is nevertheless instantiated ontically in the work. The basis of this tension is specifically located in the strangeness of the earth, and in the absence of this strangeness, there cannot be a relationship between the work and truth, which is to say, without this strangeness, art cannot be art. What remains to be shown is that this ontological tension is rooted in contradiction and so allows us to derive the same level of formal paradox operating here as in Heidegger’s account of the sacred.

2. The Contradiction and Co-Instantiation

My claim here is that there is something contradictory in the nature of the earth, and consequently, this produces a *double* contradiction in the strife which is, as we have established, a strictly necessary condition for the work of art to function. There is no need to insist that the contradiction we start with to generate paradox as horizon will need to remain obstinate in the case of art, but regardless, it *does* have to produce enough of a contradiction to be a genuine problem for thought that can facilitate the relation to the horizon as opposed to being folded under normal methods of assessment, in this case, aesthetic or negatively

metaphysical. I take it to be uncontroversial that at the very least, there is something about the earth that is opposed to the world, and vice versa. Heidegger says as much explicitly. The earth gives itself through the work, but never fully. The earth is a requisite for any possible decision and intelligibility, but only on the basis of something which is itself *not* up for decision and cannot be known via any means that the world might make available. If there were no tension it would be a gross misnomer to refer to this as strife, nor would it matter if it were “resolved”, thereby neutering the work of art into something which merely hangs on a wall or sits in a basement like so many potatoes in a sack.

The world is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people. The earth is the unforced coming forth of the continually self-closing, and in that way, self-sheltering. *World and earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another.* World is grounded on earth, and earth rises up through world. (OWA 26)

And further: “World and earth are essentially in conflict, intrinsically belligerent. Only as such do they enter the strife of clearing and concealing”. (OWA 31)

If the world is the coherently intelligible structure on the partial basis of which people and entities are made salient, what is it about the earth that would necessarily conflict with this, such that strife and therefore truth can happen in the work? It is the nature of the earth that it *cannot* be known, it refuses itself, it resists and repels any attempt to apply epistemic machinery. Nevertheless, because the earth is never separated from the world, and in fact “rises up” through the world, it is at the same time *equally essentially* known and intelligible. It is something which both essentially and necessarily known *and* unknown.

We can generate an even more explicit contradiction in the following way, starting from simple premises we have already grounded in the text, and formulating their necessary conclusion.

Premise 1: The earth is unintelligible and essentially “self-secluding” (OWA 25)

Premise 2: The earth and the world are essentially different and conflict with each other on the basis of

2.1 the world’s intelligibility

And

2.2 the earth’s unintelligibility

Premise 3: The earth and the world are necessarily related to each other in co-instantiation, the strife

So:

Based on P1 and P2, we can say that:

Intermediate Conclusion 1: The earth essentially resists co-instantiation with the world. The earth has feature *u*, unintelligibility, which is incompatible with feature *i*, intelligibility, which is equivalent to *not-u*.

And by corollary,

Intermediate Conclusion 2: The world essentially resists co-instantiation with the earth. The world has feature *i*, *intelligibility*, which is incompatible with feature *u*, unintelligibility, which is equivalent to *not-i*.

But:

Earth and world *are* co-instantiated, and necessarily so, as a condition for the possibility of entities as entities and a particular disclosure of being in history. “The earth cannot do without the openness of world if it is to appear in the liberating surge of its self-closedness. World, on the other hand, cannot float away from the earth if, as the prevailing breadth and path of all essential destiny, it is to ground itself on something decisive.” (OWA 27)

Therefore:

Intermediate Conclusion 3: The earth will necessarily have the incompatible features of *u* & $\neg u$ and therefore, the double contradiction:

Conclusion 1: A functioning work of art *a* will necessarily have the incompatible features of *i* & $\neg i$

Conclusion 2: A functioning work of art *a* will necessarily have the incompatible features of *u* & $\neg u$

There is a contradiction, and one which, to emphasize again, must be co-instantiated. Otherwise, we run quickly and irrevocably afoul of the injunctions from Heidegger earlier, or have to suggest erroneously that the work of art is earthy at some times but not others, and worldly in some times but not others. It must be both, at the same time, in the same way, if the strife is to be strife, if it is to find its *repose* as strife in the artwork.

Before moving on I would like to address a potential objection from elsewhere within Heidegger’s work, and one which I believe actually unfolds into a significant advantage to my argument thus far. In the first set of lectures on Heraclitus, Heidegger spends time talking about the relationship between the patron goddess of Heraclitus, Artemis, and the ἔρις, the *strife* that is articulated in both of them by the interplay of opposites, whether life and death, clearing and concealing, nearness and distance. Not least of which

among these sites of tension and interplay is the famous saying of Heraclitus, *Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ*, usually translated as “nature loves to hide”, but for Heidegger, after a series of increasingly deep modifications and interpretations, turns out to mean, “Emerging to self-concealing gives favor.” (H 100) If this seems rather far-afield from where we began, the link between the contradictory nature of the earth and the emerging-self-concealing of nature as φύσις is actually something maintained explicitly within OWA. “Early on, the Greeks called this coming forth and rising up in itself and in all things Φύσις. At the same time φύσις lights up that on which man bases his dwelling. We call this the *earth*.” (OWA 21, emphasis original)

We might, because of this, have reasonable suspicions that claims about this thinking of opposites in the context of Heraclitus might enjoy some continuity with the same thinking towards the non-metaphysical earth in OWA. If this is the case my argument appears to encounter problems. Heidegger describes what happens between apparent opposites most firmly in the language of turning towards and away. For example,

Here, in the realm of the thinker, what stands in opposition and appears to be mutually exclusive - namely, what turns against but also toward the other - is everywhere. Perhaps this turning-toward *must* even exist in order that one may turn itself against the other. Where such turning-toward prevails, strife (ἔρις) unfolds. The thinker resides in the nearness of strife. (H 10)

A few pages later, which I will quote at some length because of the obvious additional connections with the claims of sacred contradiction by way of nearness and distance I made in the first chapter:

Life and death turn against each other. Certainly. However, what turns against one another turns, at the moment of its most extreme opposition, intimately toward one another. Where such turning prevails, there is strife, ἔρις. For Heraclitus, who thinks strife as the essence of being, Artemis, the goddess with the bow and the lyre, is the nearest. But her nearness is pure nearness - i.e., farness. (H 15)

In both of these cases, we have what appear to be *contradictories*, without a doubt, but nothing of a *contradiction* as I have been articulating it. To make matters worse, when Heidegger does talk about contradiction, it is only to critique it. In the first Heraclitus lecture section 110a, titled “The ‘contradiction’ of emerging and submerging. The failure of logic and dialectic in the face of this ‘contradiction’”, we find an injunction against even treating these turning-toward-and-against pairs as contradictory. First, Heidegger

acknowledges the fact that in Heraclitus “the Obscure” [ὁ Σκοτεινός] as he was nicknamed, and implicitly in Heidegger himself so often charged with obscurity, there is the appearance of, “strange sentences that assert something contradictory.” (H 85)

If φύσις, in its proper essence, belongs to self-concealing, then is it the case that emerging would thereby be in its very essence a self-concealing? Emerging – a submerging? For serious thinking, this is clearly a pure contradiction that cannot be evaded through quibbling, sophisticated subtlety, or deceptive maneuvering. To say that emerging is submerging is like saying that day is night and vice versa, and sounds like the statement ‘light is dark’. (H 85)

The talk of ‘serious thinking’ is of course laden with irony. Serious thinking is *logical* thinking, thinking which cannot abide by statements like this, whether turning towards each other or flatly contradicting each other, serious thinking must either dismiss them as nonsense or find some dialectical process by which the apparent issue can be resolved in a higher unity and thereby cease to exist as an affront to all good intellectual manners and propriety. This dialectic, especially Hegel’s dialectical process, is unfortunately not fit for the job, since it amounts to, “an escape, a flight, and a cowardice of thinking – that is, it remains an evasion of the being that clears itself here.” (H 85) In order to attend to whatever φύσις is doing (here, again, thought in some continuity with the earth) we need to be able to somehow relate to it without needing to *do* something about it according to our own preferences based on a logic which is downstream from a certain kind of metaphysical and thoroughly un-Greek understanding of things in general. And yet, when emerging and submerging are taken together, the fact remains that at least at first, “...a ‘blatant’ contradiction [screams] and shouts at us from out of the saying.” (H 85)

Heidegger claims that logic of this sort which cannot suffer contradiction has dogged our every move for a *very* long time, counting no less than Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and even Aristotle among its victims. Logic is unable to capture what is happening in Heraclitus because it cannot hear it in the first place. Its supposed authority to determine what is able to stand as a worthy object of thought, or even a *possible* object of thought, is based on the way that objects reveal themselves to subjects, and both revealed through presence, which is to say, metaphysically. Considering again the contradictories earlier Heidegger makes the following statement:

The statement ‘the light is the dark’, when viewed with respect to the tin-god whose name is ‘the logical’, *means the same as ‘A is the opposite of A’*, which is clearly ‘illogical’. The statement ‘the

emerging is the submerging is similarly ‘illogical’. Were ‘the logical’ also already the true, and ‘the illogical’ already ‘the false’, then normal understanding would have to judge Heraclitus’s saying regarding φύσις to be false. (H 87, emphasis added)

We might first note all the scare quotes in this passage, since Heidegger is anticipating a further move (also found in OWA) where propositional-logical truth is dethroned as final arbiter of what gets to “be” in favour of the clearing-concealing ἀλήθεια. More importantly for my own argument: *Heidegger himself grants the classical formulation of contradiction (a & $\neg a$) as it pertains to φύσις, and transitively, φύσις in OWA, the earth.* Hence, my argument earlier that the earth with respect to its unintelligibility has the incompatible features of u & $\neg u$ is formally consistent with Heidegger’s assessment of the situation.

We are not clear of the objection yet, although we are nearly there, since Heidegger grants this formulation only to reject it. Let us recall that the main problem with ‘logic’ of this sort is the fact that in normal circulation this would render the formally contradictory state of affairs either false, an object for dialectical machinery, or to use a modern example encountered earlier in Casati, something which could be rendered as a dialethic ‘true contradiction’. None of these are acceptable since they fail to relate to the formal contradiction on its own terms; they fail to get it into “essential view”. (H 87) What instead needs to happen:

“We all – those of us here who come from conventional thinking – must first actually reach that place where our understanding stands still: only then, when this everywhere bustling and at the same time ‘normal’ understanding (which jostles about with the phrases ‘logical’ and ‘illogical’) comes to a standstill, can the other, essential thinking come to pass in such a way that the understanding that is standing still, with all of its vindictive and vainglorious presumptuousness, no longer interferes with it.” (H 87-8)

Heidegger dislikes ‘contradiction’ not because the concepts are not contradictory, which I will emphasize yet again, he grants, but because he takes the very notion of contradiction to be an imposition of metaphysical thinking which terminates thought instead of directing it. What if contradiction did not serve to dismiss or terminate thought, but instead, was something which demanded we suspend our usual right to arbitration and related ourselves to it as a horizon for thinking? This is precisely what I argued in chapter III. By expanding my definition of paradox beyond the merely formal identifier of paradox, which is based initially on encountering a classical a & $\neg a$, and then treating it as a sign which discloses the

horizons of unintelligibility simultaneous with the intelligibility of the world, so instantiated in phenomena like the sacred or the work of art, this expanded definition avoids the scope of Heidegger's critique of logical contradiction entirely. Far from proving a fatal issue for my existing argument, spending time with the possible objection lurking in Heidegger's Heraclitus lectures actually, to quote Heidegger on the fountain, found the argument for formal contradiction in both the sacred and the work of art "confirmed in the best possible way".

3. The Paradox

In the previous section, it was shown how co-instantiation of contradictory terms is operative in the work of art. To meet the full formal definition of paradox I am arguing for, an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate, we now need to establish more securely the ways in which we *must* take the contradiction in immediacy, and how we *can* take it up in action.

By immediacy, recall the lack of presumption of existing means of interpretation, lest we do metaphysical violence by not letting the phenomenon in question set the terms of engagement itself. I believe that Heidegger is explicit that to the extent that we can let the artwork function, this requires an ability to restrain ourselves from existing modes that might in some way *mediate* the phenomenon. First, we cannot recourse ourselves to metaphysical categories, as we have already seen in the opening framing of OWA when he discusses the substance/accident distinction, the subject/predicate relation as a linguistic consequence, the idea of "pure perception", and the matter/form distinction. (OWA 5-9)

Next there is the possibility of aesthetics where art is mediated through the lens of a particular type of experience between a pre-determined subject who stares at a work of object-art until the aesthetic magic emerges as a result of this encounter between two entities. Heidegger has no more patience for this than he does the explicitly metaphysical ways of dealing with the more physical or 'thingly' qualities of the work of art. In a dryly funny bit of dismissal, Heidegger discusses the difference between the Greek way of interpreting the beauty of art compared to modern aesthetics. "For us today, the beautiful is the relaxing, what is restful and thus intended for enjoyment. Art then belongs to the domain of the pastry chef." (IM

146) The problem is the way aesthetics covers up the actual role of the work of art. “For aesthetics, art is the display of the beautiful in the sense of the pleasant, the agreeable. And yet art is the opening up of the Being of beings. We must provide a new content for the word ‘art’ and for what it intends to name, on the basis of a fundamental orientation to Being that has been won back in an original way.” (IM 146) There are many other places where Heidegger critiques aesthetics as a means of mediating the role of art, too many to fully engage with here, but this example serves as a reference point.¹²²

Finally, Heidegger warns against the temptation to interpret art as a craft in the sense of physical craftsmanship being causally responsible for bringing an object from non-existence into existence by working a raw material according to a plan. In a very similar analysis to the beginning of “The Question Concerning Technology”, Heidegger claims that the original Greek sense of art and handicraft as τέχνη is a way of knowing. Things have to be disclosed in general in a certain way before anything like a specific entity like the worked quality of the work of art could even be possible. For instance, the silver chalice in QCT. The artisan already has to be sensitive to the properties of silver and what they offer (we might say its earthly aspect), the form of a chalice designed to fit the human hand and hold liquid, and the relationship between humans and gods such that a ceremonial chalice would be necessary for ritual libations. (QCT 220-2) For this reason, τέχνη reveals an entire network of significance and brings it out of unconcealment, and that initial disclosure on the basis of which things can be responded to and focused is nothing but truth as ἀλήθεια. “As knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, τέχνη is a bringing forth of beings in that it brings *forth* what is present, as such, *out* of unconcealment, specifically *into* the unconcealment of the appearance. Τέχνη never designates the activity of making.” (OWA 35) So, to the extent that the work of art is linked to craftsmanship or handiwork, it is only on the basis of an essential link between τέχνη and ἀλήθεια, which puts us in exactly the domain of the strife as we started from, and *only* insofar as we understand this link. If we attempt to *mediate* it through handicraft, we have lost our way. “The designation of art as τέχνη does not at all mean that the activity of the artist can be

¹²² Among others: OWA 3, “Über die Sixtina” in GA 13, MN 91-2, CIP §277, M 22-3, H 218-9

discovered *via* handicraft. What looks like craft in the creation of the work is a different kind of thing.” (OWA 35)

Heidegger does not present and reject these possible mediations and misinterpretations as if some other or future mode of mediation might better suit. It is a warning against any thinking which would apply existing categories of apprehension uncritically to the work of art. In other words, we must take the nature of art *immediately*.

This being the case, what are we supposed to do, and who is supposed to do it? It seems obvious that people make these mistakes of apprehension frequently and without any personal failure involved. The question of how to take the work of art immediately, that is, according to its contradictory essence, is intertwined (though not identical) with the issue of actionability. This brings us to the preservers. As Heidegger says, the work of art on its own has no power to causally impose itself on entities. “What is curious here is that the work in no way affects hitherto existing beings through causal connection. The effecting [Wirkung] of the work does not consist in taking an effect [wirken]. It lies in a transformation of the unconcealment of beings which happens from out of the work, a transformation, that is to say, of being.” (OWA 45)

For art to shift the very background against which entities and people can be intelligibly foregrounded, there must be people who can respond to the strangeness of the work without wishing to distort, dominate, or mediate the potentially novel way that things are fit together. One must submit to the ‘extraordinary’.

To submit to this displacement means: to transform all familiar relations to the world and to earth, and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to dwell within the truth that is happening in the work... This allowing a work to be a work is what we call its preservation. It is in such preservation that, in its createdness, the work first gives itself as the real which now means, is present in its work-character. (OWA 40)

In essence, not *everyone* has to take the work of art paradoxically, but *someone* does. Hubert Dreyfus gives a practical example of what this might look like when one encounters a radical new way of assessing things in general which both demands response and offers itself to practical uptake but refuses total clarity

in the way we might be accustomed to (or indeed comfortable with). In “Heidegger’s Ontology of Art”, he considers the role of Heidegger’s preservers in relation to the presence of the historical Jesus:

A world transformer such as Jesus can show a new style and so can be followed, as Jesus was followed by his disciples even though they could hardly understand what they were doing. But he will not be fully intelligible to the members of the culture until the preservers become attuned to his extraordinary new way of coordinating the practices – his new beginning – and articulate it in a new language and in new symbols and institutions.¹²³

The role of the preservers is to suffer through the extraordinary and take up the new disclosure so that the new relationships can be gathered together coherently and thereby ground a new intelligible *world* for a local where and when. As we have established, when the work *gives itself* and is *allowed* to be in its work character, this means in its role in setting the truth to work in strife, that is, in its paradoxical quality. So, if this is correct, to take the art *as art* means to take it paradoxically, without mediating its terms or attempting to reduce it to existing categories. If we *can* do this, as Heidegger states we can, since preservers presumably have existed previously to the extent that he claims worlds have worlded based on works of art (the temple, for instance), then we are justified in saying that the contradiction in which the co-instantiated terms are taken immediately must be actionable as well, giving us the exact terms necessary for the formal definition of paradox that we sought to establish in the text as a complement to the terms which defined the conditions necessary for the functioning of the sacred as sacred.

With our formal definition in place, we can briefly return to the additional paradoxical features of being a *sign* which discloses the unintelligibility of the world, and the idea that this sign gestures us to a horizon. Earlier, when discussing sign and signification in Heidegger itself, a paper by Taylor Carman helped to illuminate the path. On his account he correctly notices that there is an implicit correspondence between the work of art in 1930s Heidegger and the role of the sign in *Being and Time* era Heidegger. This remains true but in an inverse relationship to the one he suggests. Carman claims that the sign is a “curious hybrid” which is more than just equipment but less than the work of art. I take this to be correct, to a point. “Between his earlier and later views of these special sorts of artifacts, then, there is a certain discernible consistency, for at either stage they do what mere equipment cannot do; they reveal the

¹²³ Dreyfus, “Heidegger’s Ontology of Art” 417

‘wherein’ and the ‘whereupon’ of the world.”¹²⁴ As stated, on my model, it is not that the sign is a curious hybrid, but that the work of art is a specific class of sign, following the sign in WCT, which *does* disclose the character of the world, but in a way that reveals the groundlessness and instability of the world which necessarily accompanies any stability. This says, minimally and at this point hopefully without much controversy, that art instantiates strife. To reiterate, I am trying to articulate specifically *how* a work of art can arrest us in practice, what it is that elevates the genuine strangeness which can dislocate us from the usual from the merely peculiar. This is something that appears to be implicit in most accounts of art as they currently stand.

If there remains scepticism or unhappiness with the story I have been trying to tell up to this point, I invite the consideration of counterfactuals on any of the identifiers of paradox mentioned so far, that is, art that somehow lacks the characteristic of actionability, contradiction, immediacy, or co-instantiation of terms. Removing any one of these gives you a disfigured work of art which no longer meets the minimal conditions to have the mode of being that Heidegger asserts. Granting these yields the analytic definition of paradox.

Before concluding with a reading of a painting from El Greco which I will build on to give a practical example of how art might function in practice, one further consideration: Saying that the paradoxical quality of art is the active quality of the work of art which makes the strife lucid in practice is not the same as claiming that once we respond to this, it must remain the same sort of paradox forever and in all cases. If, after a preserver opens themselves to the truth of the work of art, the terms that appeared sufficiently contradictory to signal a crisis of thought suddenly drop out of priority in favour of some further horizon which is opened up by the risky relation to the work, this is fine. All that is needed is to take it paradoxically in a way that opens up this relation which goes on to demand radicalization of both relata of the relation, historical Dasein and the work *qua* work.

¹²⁴ Carman, “The Conspicuousness of Signs in Being and Time” 159



El Greco, *The Opening of the Fifth Seal* or *The Vision of Saint John*, 1608-1614, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

4. The Apocalypse

Revelation 6:9-11

“How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

In this verse of Revelation, the opening of the fifth seal is the consideration of the martyred faithful, given white robes while they wait and watch for the completion of the divine plan. El Greco's painting is interesting in a number of domains, but on the most surface level, seeing it displayed among its historical contemporaries strikes one with a certain visual insistence as to how utterly bizarre it is in style and composition. It stands out as singularly unique. This accords with the strangeness and singularity that Heidegger claims the work of art should embody.

That the createdness stands forth out of the work does not mean that it should be a salient feature of the work that it is made by a great artist... Rather, 'factum est' is what is to be held forth into the open by the work: in other words this, that an unconcealment of beings has happened here and, as this happening, happens here for the first time; or this, that this work *is* rather than is not. (OWA 39)

The visual impression of this work does much to impress the sheer *factum est* of it, that it exists rather than does not. Moving to what is actually depicted in the work the situation only complicates further. It shows us an end that still involves waiting, a moment which is not the moment, a revelation which reveals nothing. What is revealed is the fundamental attunement that Heidegger identifies with Paul's anxiety in the early church, and as the defining factor in what the message of the Gospels disclose. Following the discussion of the *παρουσία* and Heidegger's *Phenomenology of Religious Life* in chapter II, I will once again quote Benjamin Crowe on the issue, now in the context of its link to El Greco's artistic rendering, we might say, the mimetic copy of something which is not and cannot be re-presented as if it were an actuality which visually accords in the painting.

The apocalyptic situation is one in which every intelligible stance on the world meets with and is overtaken by something that permanently exceeds it. In the apocalyptic Situation, one has been exposed to a perspective that encompasses every human perspective and goes beyond it. Life has a new direction that it would never have discovered on its own.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Crowe, *Heidegger on Religion* 15

The apocalyptic ‘situation’ is what we get in *The Opening of the Fifth Seal*, insofar as all parties involved are firmly situated within the reality of the unveiling and held in tension within it. To take this immediately is to treat it not as just another painting hanging on the wall, but as a possible orientation towards things in general afforded by the radical world made intelligible by the Christian mystical tradition El Greco was receptive to. Now, to this, one might reasonably begin to object that the painting is currently hanging on the wall at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and therefore, has already become just another bloodless aesthetic object far removed from its original role as an altarpiece. Has it not been killed by metaphysics, and therefore, is only capable of offering tricks based on the subject-object distinction to whatever unfortunate Dasein might come across it? I believe Heidegger leaves the door ajar. Even when the art business has “begun to take hold” this can still offer the work a place from out of which it can shape history. (OWA 42) As long as what is ‘extra-ordinary’ about it still grabs us, arrests us, the work can still be a work. I contend that in this case, the art world has not succeeded in flattening out El Greco. Even displaying it among its artistic contemporaries only serves to accentuate the strangeness of the ‘factum est’ of the work, that such a thing existed and continues to exist.

Regarding actionability, we have a hint as to the attunement that we can hold ourselves open into: the active waiting that Heidegger identifies with our waiting for the gods and our receptivity to a new contouring of things in general and us along with it through the work of art, which Saint Paul revealed to the early church, and which El Greco depicts in the stretched out ecstatic forms of Saint John and the martyrs, waiting for a present apocalypse which has denied them their existing significances and wholly exposed them to their relation to God. Saint John, the recipient of the revelation, is depicted as participating in the very scene he is to witness, not as an aloof spectator, but in the fact that his revelation induced the same frantic despair as the future martyrs. Where he was is other, the relationship with his temporal horizons is other, who he is and what he is has been altered as a result of the encounter. Ironically, if we ask what of the apocalypse has been depicted, or what is representational about the piece that yields the attunement or offers uptake, the answer is something like ‘nothing’. The only thing even hinting at a supernatural element to the waiting is the presence of the angelic figures handing out garments.

Neither is there anything ‘symbolic’ here which would render the painting more comprehensible or give us a better understanding of Saint John’s vision or what it means to live in the possible eschaton. Like Gover says of the fountain, it is no symbol – it ‘holds the enigma together’. Anything that is represented is not a result of correct representation of some extant thing or state of affairs, but it does represent things in virtue of re-framing representation according to truth. We ‘understand’ the painting as a work of art, to the extent that we understand it at all, by exposing ourselves to this domain of tension at the fringes and the core of things that swept Saint John out of himself without absolving him of himself, and which El Greco depicted in its truth. What makes this possible, what the common language is between the sacred and the strife of the work of art, and that in virtue of which we can continue to relate ourselves to unknown ontological horizons and make our existence a problem again, is the paradox.

In closing, I argued in this chapter that Heidegger’s account of the work of art participates in the same formal paradox that we derived as the hinge for the sacred, and in a way that allows us to deepen some the intuitions we encountered in previous chapters, like the relationship between sign and the work of art, or the anxiety of the early church regarding the *παρουσία*, before giving a particular example from El Greco which can open up in light of such a reading. Now that the sacred and art are *intelligible* to each other by virtue of their shared paradoxical nature and their link to world-disclosure, we can revisit the opening claims and promises, putting this lens to work as an explanatory mechanism to show the privileged relationship *between* the sacred and art.

Chapter V: The Struggle of Paradox in Art and the Sacred

“When something is finished, it cannot be possessed. Nothing can be possessed but the struggle.” -
Flannery O'Connor, *A Prayer Journal*

The time has finally come to make good on the claims that have been advanced up to this point and to weave distinct but ultimately interrelated threads that have emerged into a coherent tapestry by putting the paradoxical element in Heidegger I have been articulating to work. It has been argued that there is a necessary paradoxical quality to both Heidegger's account of the sacred and the work of art. Necessary in that it captures conditions of the possibility of these two phenomena showing up and functioning according to their distinct modes of being and not as a metaphysical degradation, whether theological, aesthetic, logical, material, or otherwise. Paradoxical in that we can access them as an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate, and that this formal definition ultimately directs us via the sign-structure to a horizon of unintelligibility which is simultaneous with any intelligibility. When we relate ourselves to this, it involves an element of *risk* or potential *sacrifice*, since Dasein itself stands to be both radicalized and radically re-interpreted in this space. The paradoxical quality of art and the sacred is what allows them to offer unique ontic access to ontological (or perhaps better, pre-ontological) relationships which are constitutive for any practical disclosure of both Being itself in history and entities.

Since the convergence of themes we have hit upon is one that cannot be neatly distilled into prioritizing one of many over-determined angles of explanation and relation, I believe the best way of presenting my argument in action is by leaning into this fact rather than avoiding it. I will begin by presenting the main points of interaction between Dasein, the disclosed world, the strife in the work of art, and the sacred, in a way that captures the clear consistency of Heidegger's thought on the subjects where total terminological continuity might be otherwise wanting. From this, two main applications of paradox: First, the idea that paradox explains what I will call the general ontological *permeability* of our

situation. Second, that paradox also accounts for the *specific* and privileged relationship between art and the sacred in Heidegger, which would otherwise be hard to justify or motivate in the already crowded and holistic explanatory ecosystem he populates. With this established, I will return to a challenging yet highly suggestive passage from the *Contributions* we encountered in the beginning to show that we are now in a position to make informed progress in working through the link and the ‘hidden history’ between the gods and mortals that lies in the origin of art. Next, another example of paradox in practice at the intersection of art and the sacred in Heidegger’s work, this time in the brief and cryptic “Über die Sixtina” where he comments on Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna* and how this specific work of art facilitates not only the space for God to come towards the world, but the transubstantiation at the height of the mass it was intended to background, culminating in reciprocal themes of sacrifice and sacrament, taken up more fully in conversation with Derrida’s “Faith and Knowledge”. Finally, a summation, drawing from the language of the *struggle* between the countering of gods and mortals and the strife of earth and world we have already used to assess the role of paradox initially. Here, I will present the unity in the multiplicity, and the way that paradox is indeed the common language and the facilitating force behind some of the most challenging aspects of Heidegger’s work on art and the sacred.

1. Paradox, Permeability, Privilege

In previous chapters, we have developed a good sense of the relationships through which Being (or Being, as the case may be) is able to function in and as a particular historical disclosure, and how Dasein is given over to and responsible for taking up a stance on this disclosure so that it can be what it is in the first place. Art, the work of art which sets up the non-propositional ἀλήθεια in the *strife* between the reclusive earth and the intelligible world, is an entity which gathers and discloses an entire domain in which entities in general can come to stand as entities and Dasein is able to reciprocally understand itself on the basis of both these entities and the affordances of a particular historical situation. Simultaneous and equally constitutive with this is the space wherein we might reach a decision between Dasein as *mortal*, as capable of confronting death, and the dimension of the sacred. No less than art, our relationship (including a lack of explicit relationship) with the sacred discloses and foregrounds things in general against

a background which offers certain possibilities and denies others. For example, understanding the world as related to the sacred in an ancient Greek or ancient Israelite fashion would bring with it a responsiveness to the situation that is gathered and made explicit in cultural artifacts like sacrificial blades and fires, vessels for blood and offal, and a priestly class to oversee and mediate these practices. Within a Christian world disclosure, like of the high Middle Ages, the responsiveness might still in a sense necessitate altars and chalices, but of a profoundly different sort and based on a fundamentally incompatible understanding of what *sacrifice* means. Any possibilities for extant Dasein will be pre-conditioned on the basis of these dimensions, any *world* will come to take shape according to these contours of tension and decision.

It is true that there is, minimally, an implied relationship between the sacred and art in Heidegger's work of the early 1930s and beyond by virtue of some transitive property if we look at the way that Dasein and the world are disclosed in the manner just summarized. This is *minimally* true. However, there is a more explicit link that warrants examination now, and one which I believe stretches consistently across texts. One of the clearest instances is found in the *Contributions*. Here, Heidegger is speaking of Dasein, the human mode of being in phenomenological practice, as the non-identical *Da-sein*. Da-sein is not grounded 'objectively' in the human being, but as the way we can hold ourselves out into the bewildering singularity of our relationship with Being as the unjustifiable historical texture we are beholden to and yet unable to grasp via the intelligibility which it carves out for us in its absence. By setting up certain things as questionable and accessible and others as not, paths for any action and thinking acquire form and situatedness. Even if human Dasein is structured by its relationship with Being in this way, it is only when we grapple with this relationship without presuming extant methods or methodologies which themselves are contingent products of, in our case, a thoroughly metaphysical understanding of things in general, that Dasein can participate in Da-sein. "Da-sein is experienced not when it is represented as an object but when it is carried out and withstood as *Da-sein* through a dislodging move into it." (CtP 244) The *dislodging* move is of special interest here, which will be expressed more clearly as we continue.

Heidegger provides a depiction of what it is we *project* into, what it is we are dislodged into, apparently from human perspective, but in such a way that the entire previous situation is put into

question. This nexus of disclosure is *Ereignis*.¹²⁶ Ereignis, *adaptation*, guides both the ways that entities acquire a relational goodness of fit for certain things and not others, the way that they make themselves available in a historically and locally delimited network and significance, and on a more global *epochal* level, such as Heidegger seems to be employing here, also gestures at the way that the very possibility for *any* disclosure or entity is a result of an adaptive relationship between the earth and the world, of gods and human beings.



In this visual aid from Heidegger, the adaptation (E for *event* in the Rojcewicz and Vallega-Neu translation, but just as well, E for *Ereignis*) that Dasein must relate itself to and dislodge itself *into* such that it can come into its own as Da-sein is placed squarely at the centre of the exact relationships we have built up in previous chapters, and which also depict the *struggle* in the language of *Mindfulness* between the strife and the countering. (CtP 246) Bracketed off is the clearing-concealing truth as ἀλήθεια (here the ‘sundering [adaptation]’) set into the strife, the simultaneous intelligibility and unintelligibility that grounds a world articulated in a practice, and that the work of art bears as its ontic and ontological responsibility.¹²⁷ The world and the earth are set ‘against’ each other on the vertical axis while being unable to escape each other such that truth can obtain. On the horizontal axis, we see other familiar dimensions. From out of the central “sundering”, “arise respectively the historical human being and the essential occurrence of being, the nearing and distancing of the gods.” (CtP 246). “Here is no longer any ‘encountering’, no appearing for the human who has already been established in advance and merely

¹²⁶ Ereignis itself and how to best render it in English present uniquely difficult problems, neither of which can be fully or definitively parsed out here. It has been translated as “event” perhaps most commonly, “appropriating event”, “appropriation”, and “Enowning” elsewhere. I will use Mark Wrathall’s preferred and etymologically grounded translation of “adaptation” in text since it captures what I believe to be most crucial in the current context, although my general feeling is that this may be a word like “Dasein” itself that is better left untranslated and established ahead of time with some textual sketching before being taken up in its actual usage. See: *Adaptation* in the *Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*, especially pages 27-30, cited fully in end notes

¹²⁷ This is, at least, how I am reading the brackets, where Heidegger does not explicitly say so. He does say that the “sundering appropriation” is “the realm of strife”, and the full bracketing of the domain in which truth can also give ontic stability and ontological space for gods and humans which “veils itself in undecidedness” is coherent with what he says elsewhere. (CtP 246) Very little of my argument here hinges on the brackets, so if this reading is intolerable, I would welcome reasonable substitutions as necessary.

adheres henceforth to what appeared.” (CtP 246) In other words, even though the historical human being finds its situatedness and its primary relationship to Ereignis exactly where it begins, once it is related to Ereignis as such, once it is able to dislodge itself and hold itself out from Dasein into Da-sein, everything which has been previously established is now up for re-appraisal. The relationship involves a *risk* and a wager of the very self which would approach it (in accordance with what I argued we might expect from paradox in III.2.2). Finally, opposite-by-way-of-related to the ‘here’ of the risked human being, there is the ‘there’ of the gods. For each to be what they are, they must be adapted to each other so that the gods may be near as distant, like the non-spatial distance of the sky in the fourfold that helps us understand the distance which preserves the rightful otherness of divinity. In this picture, the central question and the nexus of all possible relationships in a particular arrangement of Being and beings is both revelatory of and constituted by the pairings and tensions of art and the sacred.

This privileged relationship between art and the sacred and the disclosure of things as a whole is not by any means limited to *Mindfulness* and the *Contributions*. It is significant and repeated throughout most of Heidegger’s middle to later work. A few more examples will ground us before discussing the nature of this privilege and what permeability means in this arrangement. In “The Overcoming of Metaphysics” from 1938-9, Heidegger questions even the ontological difference, and how far that can take us in actually moving beyond metaphysical thinking. Even this differentiation is tied back to Ereignis as that which allows the ontological difference between being and beings to find their adaptive relationship. “But, as the [adaptation/Ereignis] (of the difference), being first lets beings separate out from one another and so ‘move into’ the clearing; but what is borne out in this way is what is borne out [Aus-trag] into being as God and man, as world and earth.” (MN 67) Further, this happens in a way that is not a mere projection of human origin or perspective. Finally, in Heidegger’s thinking along with Heraclitus, one of the things (among others) that allows his thought to respond to something essential before it became metaphysically translated is the ability to understand the link between the disclosure of things at all and the gods in art as τέχνη, the non-technological grasp of this same disclosure necessary for anything like craftsmanship or ποιήσις as bringing-forth. The Goddess of Heraclitus, Artemis, is described according to her inauguration

and sustenance of the essential *strife*, ἔρις. Heidegger's characterization of Artemis is significant and will be quoted at some length:

The Huntress, who tracks the living so that it may find death, bears the signs of play and death – lyre and bow.¹²⁸ Her other sign, 'the torch', is, as the fallen and extinguished torch, the sign of death. The Light-Bringer is the Death-Bringer. Life and death, like light and night, correspond to one another, in that they at the same time 'contradict' one another. Artemis the elevated one, through her appearing, lets this 'contra-diction' peer into beings as a whole. She is the appearance of the oppositional, and nowhere and never is she disposed to balance the oppositional, or give up the oppositional entirely in favor of one side. The Light-Bringer *is*, as the Death-Bringer, the appearance of the oppositional. She is this because she originally lets the unfamiliarity of the strife peer into the familiar. (H 21)

Heidegger concludes by saying, "The attempt to consider what is for the inceptual thinker Heraclitus the to-be-thought will encounter light and fire, play and life, and will discover strife in all of them. What the goddess Artemis lets appear through her own appearing points to what is, for the thinker, the to-be-thought." (H 21) There is much to work with here. First, we have the same polarity we have seen between strife (recalling that the free 'play' of Artemis which Heidegger links with φύσις is the same φύσις that he identifies directly with the *earth*, the inscrutable self-concealing that grounds intelligibility, see: OWA 21 and chapter IV.2) and receptivity to the sacred. Artemis shapes beings *as a whole* by setting up (we might say, *adapting*) *contradictories* towards each other and sustaining them *as contradictory*. When Heidegger scare-quotes 'contradict', as before, this signals that the admitted appearance of contradiction is not to be dealt with by dialectic or rational dismissal on account of the offensiveness of contradiction to respectable thought. Artemis herself refuses this sort of activity. To the extent that we are able to direct ourselves to this action the unfamiliarity of the strife is able to "peer into the familiar". Indeed, directedness towards these contradictories and what they mean for being is the proper domain of the "to-be-thought". Put differently, they represent a limit of thinking which we think towards as a horizon for anything whatsoever and which stand to shake us out of wherever it is we stood when we first directed ourselves. It is the contradictories which are intrinsic to the dimensions opened up in the strife between earth and world and the countering between gods and humans which allow this unique relatedness as

¹²⁸ Heidegger links the free unfolding of play as something which fundamentally belongs to φύσις just before this, tightening the thematic links even further. (H 21)

their distinct privilege, even though, once so apprehended, even the mundane may be understood as participating in the same tensions. Our first indicator for thought is the offensiveness of the contradiction. “... every time we bump up against the apparently irreconcilable and oppositional, the essential is stirred.” (H 27)

One final example of the connection between the pieces currently in play: In *Mindfulness*, Heidegger discusses possibilities of thinking towards the gods based on a knowing-awareness, a pre-understood direction to thought which cannot be captured in any series of facts or statements ‘about’ the object of thought as if it were already captured, similar to the role of the *Vormeinung* in *Being and Time* (or, better, the defense of the possible role of formal indication offered in chapter III.3). In fact, the more this knowing-awareness is receptive to its lack of clear target that is simultaneous with the direction of the target, the more what is most “question-worthy” is a certainty. “Considered calculatively, this uncertain ‘certainty’ lies beyond the reach of any science.” (M 197) The first possibility of thinking, noting here that its distinction as one among other possibilities does not imply any mutual exclusivity, determines whether we are able to think towards not just the gods, but by thinking towards the gods, we are able to reach what is most essential in our relation to being. “Whether in order that such things [adapt] themselves, [beyond], truth, godhood, human domain, history, and art succeed to reach, primarily poetically and thinkingly, the origin of their sway and their ownmost [ereignis] through the grounding of *Da-sein*.” (M 198/GA66 230, translation modified) Here again, pressing hard enough on the question of the gods seems to have something crucial to do with not just the gods, but unveils a deep connection that encompasses the mutual link between art, the sacred, the way that a world is disclosed, the pre-ontological adaptation of these things to each other in a particular historical arrangement, and the possibility of *Dasein* to ground itself as *Da-sein* to the extent that it can relate to this nexus and abandon previous mediations.

In these examples and in the problematic of the work up to this point there are two main questions that remain and which I believe my account of paradox is strongly suited to answer, aside from the existing correspondence which I have already noted as we analysed the texts. First, by what mechanism and on what basis can Heidegger claim that *Dasein* is able to orient itself towards these horizons, art and the sacred, that both structure and delimit possible experience and represent an absolute limit for thought

local to experience? Secondly, why do art and the sacred enjoy the privileged relationship that they do? For Heidegger, once we have a certain phenomenological clarity or the right investigative instinct, it seems that we can interrogate nearly anything and reach valuable insights, whether a jug, a hammer, a silver chalice, or a bridge. Why out of all the possible entities or phenomena do these two occupy such a central role, not just individually but in relation to each other as well?

To the first question: On the basis of what I have argued so far, that the sacred and art both have a necessary paradoxical quality, and on the basis of what we have seen textually, that these two dimensions structure the condition of the possibility of Being or being taking shape historically, this paradoxical quality confers what I will call an ontological *permeability* to things in general, even within metaphysics.¹²⁹ To the extent that there exist paradoxical phenomena, which means according to my definition that these phenomena must be *actionable* and offer some practical relation in their paradoxical quality, and in conjunction with paradox as a *sign* which discloses an overall unintelligibility simultaneous with the intelligibility of things in general, this means that there are possibilities for Dasein in the world (and without ever *leaving* the world or needing to invoke some supra-worldly or supra-temporal other realm) to nevertheless experience anew the strangeness of the world, to be re-oriented from the thinking appropriate to entities to the thinking which is most appropriate to Dasein itself, like we saw in “What Calls for Thinking”. Paradox as sign (Chapter III.1) reciprocally reveals Dasein as a sign (Chapter III.1.1-2) which is oriented towards limits, at which it has to risk itself. Ontological permeability via the paradoxical quality of art and the sacred explains Dasein’s ontic access explicitly towards ontological horizons.

To the second question: Even though there are other possible routes of phenomenological access from entities towards Being, the paradoxical quality of art and the sacred accounts for the *privileged* position they hold in the overall schema. In both cases the paradoxical quality is what grants them the space to function according to their proper mode of being and prevents the decay or danger of misapprehension that comes with metaphysical thinking. Taking art paradoxically now means neither

¹²⁹ Metaphysical thinking, for its part, will likely neither agree nor recognize any impediment to its rights of conceptual domination, since it is the nature of enframing to totalize. However, at least for now, this tendency has not yet shut off all opportunities for alternative routes of uptake. The enframing veil still exists despite being permeable.

more nor less than being receptive to the strife and refusing to mediate art through aesthetics or with recourse to reductive materialist accounts. This is the realm of the preserver who is responsible for experiencing the strangeness of the work that allows it to be a happening of truth, and then articulating this for larger uptake in historical practice. It is to take the initial contradiction in the earth, recognize the necessary co-instantiation of its contradictory qualities, refuse to mediate it, and yet hold it open as an actionable possibility to relate to. If these conditions are met, the work of art *is*. If they are not, it is not. In the same way, taking the sacred paradoxically means being receptive to the strangeness of its known unknown quality, its near distance, its otherness which still looks into the familiar, and not yielding to theological or scientific methods of appraisal, rather taking these difficulties as something to orient us. Without this element maintained and even accentuated the dimension of the sacred might become sterile theology, to name one possible misstep.

What explains the privileged position of art and the sacred is the fact that they are unique among other phenomena by having their paradoxical quality as a *necessary* quality of their mode of being if properly related to by Dasein. We can interact with a hammer as equipment and do it no injustice if we never once interact with it *as equipment*, that is, with full view towards its relational aspects and what is implicit in it. It is the nature of both art and the sacred to be accessible both implicitly *and explicitly* in their disorienting relational aspects. Treating them as paradoxical raises this quality to a relatively high degree of clarity.

There is one additional consideration that can be raised after the preceding analysis. Due to the way that paradox is ontic access to ontological strangeness or unintelligibility that nevertheless does not dissolve intelligibility into nonsense or non-existence, it possesses precisely the hermeneutic quality that Heidegger seems to require in order that Dasein's relation to it will have truly global consequences, both for entities and for Dasein itself. Relating to the paradox radicalizes both sides of the relation. This, for example, also provides a mechanism by which Dasein could plausibly access and withstand the grounding of Da-sein.

We have now put the account of paradox developed earlier to work and made preliminary progress in demonstrating its explanatory value. To further demonstrate the usefulness of treating art and

the sacred paradoxically we will return to a quote from the *Contributions* that served as a part of the opening problematic, and give it a close reading with several layers of nested and inter-related definitions and spaces for explanation that will emerge.

2. Preparing the Un-usualness and Un-naturalness

In the introduction I presented a selection from Heidegger's *Contributions*, challenging and enticing in equal measure. After arguing for a necessary paradoxical quality that can be derived from both the sacred and the work of art, and developing this definition to include the sign-structure and a limit which we can orient ourselves towards, the previous section's work provided a basis to incorporate what I am calling permeability and to account for the privileged relationship between the main themes of this endeavour. In this section I will return to the opening selection and read it closely and thoroughly using the arguments and definitions that have emerged since we last encountered it, with the intention of once again showing the benefits and relative economy of paradox as an explanatory tool. This will be done by assessing the quote – non exhaustively – at twelve different angles including key phrases and definitions, overall themes, and implied relationships to be made explicit via paradoxical thinking.

The quote in question occurs in §277 of the *Contributions*, titled, “‘Metaphysics’ and the origin of the work of art”. Like in the essay and lectures devoted to the same topic, the issue, here framed in being-historical language, is how to consider art without appealing to the metaphysical assessments which have up to the point pre-determined what counts as an acceptable method for doing so. “Overcoming metaphysics means giving free reign to the priority of the question of the truth of being over every ‘ideal’, ‘causal’, ‘transcendental’, or ‘dialectical’ explanation of beings.” (CtP 396) To ‘overcome’ metaphysics actually requires a pursuit of the *origins* which we are still living out and which we must contend with, rather than a mere moving ‘beyond’. For this reason the search for the origin cannot appeal to any historical study of ‘art’ as a field or academic classicism, which would both understand the ‘origin’ as something like ‘calendar time that is sufficiently prior to the date of investigation.’ As in the essays, art also

fails to be taken originally if we index the work of art to individual productive skill of the artist. Indeed, all of this only reinforces the *absence* of art understood something which can ground truth.

The absence of art is grounded in the knowledge that the approval and agreement of those for whom 'art' is a matter of enjoyment and lived experience can decide nothing as to whether the object of enjoyment stems at all from the essential domain of art or is merely an illusory product of historiological cleverness, borne by the prevailing goals of the age. (CtP 397)

There is another way. "As to the knowledge whereby the absence of art *is* already historical without being publicly known or conceded within a constantly increasing 'artistic activity', this knowledge itself pertains to the essence of an original appropriation which we call Da-sein." (CtP 397) So, to the extent that we can still interface with this origin *historically*, that is, as it is being played out in an epochal disclosure of Being which guides possibilities for extant Dasein, the key is nothing else than the way that Dasein is able to withstand radicalizing and problematizing itself in *Da-sein*, recognizing this non-objective historical texture as such. And now the matter at hand:

"Steadfastness in Da-sein prepares the disintegration of the priority of beings and thus prepares the unusualness and un-naturalness of another origin of 'art': the beginning of a hidden history of the reticence of an abyssal encounter between gods and humans." (CtP 397-8)

We will closely examine this statement according to the parameters detailed at the start of the section.

2.1 "Da-sein"

This will be relatively brief in light of the prior explanation, but still warrants some time for further connection with the project as a whole. Da-sein is non-identical with the 'human' Dasein usually discussed in Heidegger, but is related to it insofar as Dasein must venture itself into Da-sein, into the space where historical being is able to determine the arrangements between entities and between gods and men, earth and world. Dasein is necessarily the genesis of this transition because of our metaphysical situation, we cannot but 'start' where we already are, but becomes a problem for itself within the same horizons that we encountered earlier in the chart of *Ereignis*. "Da-sein moves (though not localizable anywhere) away from the relation to the human being and reveals itself as the 'between' which is developed by being itself..." (CtP 236) Consider this in relation to the work of El Greco in the opening of the seal. Saint John and the martyrs are thoroughly displaced without thereby becoming absolved of themselves, they are

elsewhere and held out into what is most immanent from a non-standardly spatial understanding of 'elsewhere'. To move away without moving, to relate oneself to the horizons which have always been there but are now there *explicitly*.

To do this involves no small amount of existential risk, again, referring back to chapter III.2.2. "The question of who the human being is possesses now for the first time the openness of a path which nevertheless runs amid the unprotected and upon which the storm of being is thus allowed to rage." (CtP 237) Unprotected, in that the previous pre-reflective stability of the general intelligibility of entities and Dasein's relationship to them cannot serve as a sure footing anymore, the simultaneous *unintelligibility* dislodges everything out of security. Lest we think that Da-sein itself is only instrumentally or tangentially related to the strife and the countering, Heidegger states in the being-historical *Mindfulness* that Dasein's relation to Da-sein is in fact intimately connected to this relational whole of horizons. "... any attempt at grasping Da-sein predominantly or even exclusively with a view towards man remains inadequate. The Da-sein is equally fundamental for god and is equally fundamentally determined by the relation to the world and the earth which preserve their swaying [proper essence] in Da-sein." (M 282/ GA66 328, translation slightly modified) This connection would be far more troublesome, I believe, in the absence of the preceding argument, since we can now avail ourselves of both the privilege of the work of art and the sacred as ontically paradoxical ways of becoming oriented to the ontological horizons which shape the space for any historical intelligibility, and the general permeability that obtains such that Da-sein could ever relate itself to these horizons as Da-sein in the first place, and with global consequences. "Just as little as the 'world' and the 'earth' remain unaffected by the swaying radiation of god, just as little is Dasein - [adapted] by [being] as settlement - ever related only to *man* as his ground." (M 283/ GA 66 239) Da-sein is therefore firmly at the nexus of the sacred and art, reciprocally defined and jointly responsible for the relationships through which being is able to provide the sweep of historical situations, and as before, can be explained as such with reference to the way that these relationships rest on a *paradoxical* quality which determines the point of access for extant metaphysical Dasein.

2.2 “Steadfastness in Da-sein”

It should follow fairly naturally from the previous section that on my reading, what allows us to be ‘steadfast’ in Da-sein is the ability of Dasein to be grounded both ‘in’ itself (since the role of Dasein in grounding Da-sein is what is most appropriate to it, considered being-historically) and also *exceed* itself, to hold itself out beyond all previous definitions and conceptualizations of itself, and without recourse to even the hope that there will be ‘something’ waiting. This is the space of relating to the horizon gestured to by the paradox and by taking the paradox as a sign, here calling special attention to the discussion of the sign-structure in relation to “What Calls for Thinking” where Dasein *itself* is a sign that refers ‘beyond’ itself into what is not yet thought but to-be-thought. (H 21/M 198/Chapter III.1.1-2) So, to be steadfast in Da-sein is to relate to the paradox (whether the paradoxical quality of art, that of the sacred, or the general displacement made available by both) without mediation and to withstand the risks and dangers of Da-sein, risking one’s very self while remaining open to the possibilities and re-orientations of adaptation. We might fairly say that this relation is *alienating* since it accentuates what is strange alongside and as the partial condition for what is familiar and reveals Dasein in this same light.

In the midst of the forgottenness of being and the destruction of truth, it must not be expected that the leap into Da-sein would happen—and be intelligible—immediately. On the contrary: the supreme alienation. Therefore, the task is to raise this alienation even more—but in such a way that in it at the same time bridges are slung for a taking hold of steadfastness. (BN IV 175)

Here, in the midst of metaphysics where being and non-propositional truth are overshadowed by being as presence as truth as correspondence, another opportunity for paradox to explain the mechanism by which this alienation is “raised” and also used as a potential “bridge” towards steadfastness. If paradox alienates and problematizes Dasein and directs it towards its unknown horizons, but nevertheless remains an actionable possibility if taken up in relation to art and the sacred, this fulfils the basic requirements of what Heidegger is attempting to prioritize here. It accounts practically for both the dislodging and the preparatory role of paradox, since it is only a direction for orientation and not a final result with pre-determined content.

2.3 “prepares the disintegration of the priority of beings”

The emphasis here should fall on “prepares”, following what has just been said on the subject of steadfastness in this context. By recognizing the simultaneous intelligibility and unintelligibility that structures things in general via the paradox as sign, even though this can only generate a relation and not a result, it has a preventive role in keeping previous mediating concepts from rising to the fore as if they were still self-evident. On some level this preparation, perhaps coinciding with the *final* disintegration of the priority of beings rather than being, can orient us towards what Heidegger calls the “second beginning” or “other beginning”. This is a placeholder term for our final overcoming of metaphysics and along with this, the acquiring of the vantage point to see metaphysics as what it is for the first time. To properly grapple with the origin of metaphysical thinking that we have inherited and lived out is the essential route to this “other” beginning, a going back that launches forwards, not unlike the drawing of an archer’s bow. Again in the *Black Notebooks*, and immediately following the previous quote on steadfastness, Heidegger comments on this preparation for overcoming and makes a connection that will be especially helpful to gather the threads we have been so far attempting to unite:

The long preliminaries for the second beginning. It is essential to maintain this preliminary character—and not become weak in the sense of a false strength for a supposedly actual and immediate second beginning. Yet how in all this at the same time a lack of knowledge is operative. Questioning—Why is there at all something rather than nothing?— as the running start into what is alienating in the alien character of the “there.” (BN IV 175)

Clear enough is that we cannot expect the other beginning as if it were a singular event that would happen to a pre-determined subject, as other things ‘happen’. There is weakness in wanting this adaptive re-orientation to somehow correspond with our expectations, since the very subject which expects is also to be risked absolutely. Heidegger brings up the sacred immediately after this and it is a move which might seem slightly arbitrary unless we are attentive to the previously discussed link in the *Ereignis* chart in the *Contributions* between the gods and the ‘there’ which accompanies them. (CtP 246) The ‘there’ in this case is in fact the domain in which the gods can be gods, which is to say, the way their mode of being is partially constituted by their utter refusal to submit to the usual methods and concerns of our human

projects. Our 'here' and their 'there' come into the fullness of what they are only by respecting this nearness as distance. To grasp this and withstand it: alienating, paradoxical. Heidegger continues.

Not to give a reassuring-theological "proof" that explains God— not to eliminate the alienation as something extraneous—instead, to make even everything familiar seem alien. Where is God? The prior and more proper question: do we have a "where"? And do we stand within it, such that we can ask about God? The alien character of the "there" as perseverance of the "where." (BN IV 175)

Permeability and sign-structure stand as implicit mechanisms and efficient explanation yet again. If we allow the paradox to orient us towards the alien unintelligibility in everything familiar and resist the urge to mediate, if we take this up and live out the paradoxical quality as such (for example, like in the anxiety of Saint Paul in the face of the immanent and therefore radically imminent παρουσία), we are suddenly in the domain where there is space for human Dasein to find its relational 'where' all the more fully in relation to the alien 'there' of God. Paradox accommodates the permeability of this strangeness between ontic experience of the paradox and the ontological structures which allow any possible 'here' or 'there' to find their shape and disclosure.

In this way we can see more clearly the important link between the steadfastness of Dasein in Da-sein and the preparation (through alienation) of the priority of beings, and in such a way that also incorporates the horizon of the sacred we have been attempting to clarify along with it.

2.4 *"and thus prepares the un-usualness and un-naturalness"*

If we take ontic orientation towards the ontological horizons of unintelligibility via the paradox as I have been arguing, this mechanism should be a straightforward step, especially in light of the alienation which appears as a global feature as a consequence, and in such a way that this un-usualness and un-naturalness, following Heidegger's quote, is related to another origin of 'art'.

2.5 'art'

To reiterate the set-up of the current section, the scare-quoted 'art' is not *art* as instantiated in the *work of art*, but is in fact the entity which is the purview of the business of art history and aesthetics and collectors, that is, art interpreted metaphysically. It is that which conceals the underlying *absence of art* and occludes

our route of access by smoothing over the tensions and pre-determining the art-entity. What is it, then, to have another origin of this art?

2.6 "another origin"

Another origin here is nothing other than *the origin*, the origin of the work of art, the truth as ἀλήθεια which is set into the work via the strife between earth and world. If steadfastness in Da-sein dislodges entities and Dasein into a preparatory strangeness, there is an analogous motion here to the way that overcoming metaphysics requires a going-back to go forwards, an understanding of the source of the conditions of the possibility of the metaphysical understanding that has come to predominate. Along these lines this is the relationship between 'art' and the origin of the work of art, which is to say, the attunement by which things become thoroughly *unusual* is what facilitates an understanding of *art* rather than 'art'. If this is true, then this accords with the reading I advanced in chapter III where a necessary paradoxical quality must be accessible in order for preservers to have their unique role in bringing the strife of the work into articulable practice that can set up a coherent world for a historical people. It is the paradox which allows the formal conditions of art as such to become permeable and therefore accessible for uptake in practice. Now, continuing with the quote, how does Heidegger characterize the nature of the origin of art? As with the link between steadfastness of Da-sein and the strange 'there' of God in the *Black Notebooks*, I believe the motivation and mechanism for this link would otherwise prove somewhat inscrutable in the absence of a good account of what might draw these domains together and make them intelligible in their privileged relationship, such as paradox provides. The other origin is, "the beginning of a hidden history of the reticence of an abyssal encounter between gods and humans." (CtP 398)

2.7 "beginning"

Again, this beginning is not a novel event that takes place on a fixed and decided timeline, as if yesterday we took on a new project that is of a kind with the projects we might take on today, like learning to play the piano. It requires a thinking towards that which we are already oriented in a nascent way because this *beginning* is already underway, and its absence as an explicit beginning is what has made space for our meanderings through metaphysics. Hence, it is the beginning of a "hidden history".

2.8 “hidden history”

The “hidden history” of the encounter is hidden in plain sight, in what is most usual and most unobtrusive, hidden because literally un-thinkable according to the metaphysics of presence despite being the ultimate source of this particular disclosure of any intelligible situations. This is why dislodging both Dasein and entities through the paradox (as articulated in 2.1-4) is the proper mechanism to generate the “un-usualness and un-naturalness” that prepares our ability to understand the hermeneutic quality of this history. If we relate to art and the sacred in their paradoxical quality, the relationship between the paradoxical phenomena and the participation in the sign-structure which discloses a *general unintelligibility* can then be read back into things in general, bringing out something deeply un-usual in the usual. This relation dislodges us without actually putting us anywhere ‘else’, as if there were anywhere to be, since the strangeness it reveals is the history that has already been taken up, but now for the first time with some degree of lucidity. It is the hidden history of the “reticence of an abyssal encounter between gods and humans”. (CtP 398)

2.9 “History of the reticence”

When we speak about the reticence of the encounter, especially within the context of being-historical thinking, this is another instance of crucial distinction between Heidegger’s space for the sacred and typical theological or ontotheological renderings, in that we can no longer even be sure what it is that has passed us by, that which we have already decided on, and are still possibly living in the shadow of as it continues to pass us by. However it is we think back to this, which is to say, think towards it, must be tempered by the experience of withdrawal and absconding. As we saw in Chapter II, the gods as such are not experienced as everyday things are experienced, if they are to be something genuinely godly. This holds doubly for the way we think towards the original adaptation of humans and gods to each other which we are still experiencing.

It is necessary to briefly consider a unique element of Heidegger’s being-historical thought that may have up to this point been fairly conspicuous in its absence: the “last god”. Indeed, much of the talk about ‘reticence’ [Die Verschweigung] in the *Contributions* takes place around this last god. This is an

especially obscure intersection in what is already a web of relative obscurity in the *Contributions*. “To speak of the *last* god – is that not a degradation of God, indeed pure and simple blasphemy?” (CtP 322) The most efficient route of ingress is to begin with that the last god is *not*. It is not a specific deity or some sort of ur-deity lurking behind the scenes. Its status as the ‘last’ god does not imply a sequential arrangement of western religious traditions spanning roughly from Greek divinity through the Christian world and into an unknown future at which point we might encounter this last, final, deity. It is not a terminating understanding of divinity, a last idea of god that implies a more enlightened atheism afterwards. Finally, it is not strictly equivalent with what has been said about the sacred up to this point, although it is related. Beyond this, accounts vary somewhat dramatically. We will consider what Heidegger has to say on the subject first, especially alongside the reticence we are trying to elucidate in connection with art and the sacred.

The last god appears as an extremity, an event horizon where everything once again is put up for decision and adaptation. This territory is the domain of certain “future ones”, thinkers and poets receptive to what is most essential and most unusual and capable of risking travel where, “the storm of being is thus allowed to rage.” (CtP 237) This is the same which has been said of Dasein allowing itself to be the radicalized site of Da-sein: “Da-sein: the thrusting move through all relations of the remoteness and nearness (intrusion) of the last god.” (CtP 317) We will return to the remoteness and nearness soon. First:

[The last god] will raise over his people the simplest, yet most extreme, oppositions as paths on which his people wander beyond themselves, so as to find their essence once again to make the most of their historical moment. World and earth, in their strife, will raise love and death to their highest level and will integrate them into fidelity to the god and into a capacity to endure the confusion, within a manifold mastery of the truth of beings. (CtP 316)

What the last god does is to partially determine beforehand and continuously the way in which it remains reticent and absent, demarcating an unknown and unknowable ‘there’ in relation to a particular ‘here’, thereby allowing for world and earth to structure a particular historical unfolding of being in which a people wander “beyond themselves”, that is, into the various possibilities and permutations which obtain as a result of this forgottenness. The paths lead, provided they can be withstood, back to the beginning, beyond themselves now according to their ‘essence’ as the human being understood relationally and non-metaphysically, understood in a world which is always already permeable to what is unusual. When the

strife and tension between world and earth and love and death are accentuated, ‘fidelity’ to the god becomes a willingness to risk a previously understood ‘essence’ of calculable humanity before the possibility of another one, albeit one marked by confusion to the extent that it can be ‘marked’ by anything. The ‘mastery of the truth of beings’ can be understood other than the ‘mastery’ of technological enframing – as a receptiveness to the truth of beings through clearing and concealing, nearness and distance, something which is freely given and will not tolerate being snatched.

If this sounds familiar, or very similar to what I have been driving towards in the previous discussions of the sacred more broadly, that is exactly the point. I believe that the “last god” is meant to point out the space and the possibility specifically of taking up the god question as a pressing and deathly serious *question* again. By recognizing that our historical paths thus far are possible on the basis of a decision which has *receded* from the foreground, and in fact are the playing out of this recession, in the way that a tide recedes to reveal more or less of the beach and shape the space for possible usage of the beach on a given day, this recognition already puts us near the relationship between givenness and what we are willing to give up to drive towards this “hidden history”. “The last god is not the end; the last god is the other beginning of the immeasurable possibilities of our history.” (CtP 326)

As Günter Figal points out, the articulation of the last god in a way that is at least semantically distinct from the rest of the discussion from the gods is a preliminary step meant to orient us both *as we currently find ourselves* and in such a way that we are directed back towards disclosures of being that have taken place such that we cannot use our current situation to explain them. “The last god does not manifest, does not reveal itself; it withdraws itself—and this means also that it withdraws from its mythical conception into a figure and from determination in philosophical concepts, insofar as this determination is obtained through an interpretation of beings as a whole, through an ontology.”¹³⁰ Despite this, and in fact in tandem with this, there is still a link between the reticence of this hidden history and the sacred that manifests in history in the more mundane sense, and which is still functional in its ability to hew out a site of unintelligibility that makes the two paths permeable to each other. “This world can be called ‘profane,’

¹³⁰ Günter Figal, “Forgetfulness of God: Concerning the Center of Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy*” in *Companion to Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) 199

‘of this world,’ ‘disenchanted’ only insofar as it is related to another, past world in whose place it stands. In this respect, the sacred in the forms of myth and revelation is a presupposition for understanding the modern world. The modern world is articulated as modern with respect to what is past in it.”¹³¹ On this reading, which I take to be correct, even the apparent godlessness or ontotheological disenchantment of modernity still obtains on the basis of a primary decision on what is or is not question-worthy about the gods, a decision which is itself rendered baseless and groundless since we are thinking *out of it* but perhaps not yet *towards it*. This is why the hidden history of the reticence is that of an *abyssal encounter*.

2.10 “abyssal encounter”

This is a relationship we have already seen in Chapter II.3.21, again in relation to the way that gods and humans encounter (or, counter) each other. An abyssal encounter is one that grounds without ‘grounding’ in the sense of providing a causal or rational bedrock which we might develop to our usual metaphysical satisfaction regarding an entity or state of affairs. We cannot attempt to somehow get ‘behind’ this abyssal grounding, or to see it from the ‘outside’, as it were. It gives us something of a ‘that’ without an accompanying ‘why’. Once the gods and human beings reciprocally determine each other and set up the way things in general might become accessible historically, the nature of this original adaptation cannot itself be something encountered among these possibilities. An example might be found in a game of pool. Once the original rack is broken and the balls are scattered on the table into their opening arrangement, there are any number of possible moves and possible games that might be played, but the nature of the game is such that the opening arrangement is no longer up for question or interpretation, why it must be *these* paths and angles available and not others, nor can the relationship between the cue ball and the coloured balls be altered. The arrangement provides the space for the game but is not ‘in’ the game, nor is the opening rack. In the same way, the encounter which set us along the paths we currently find ourselves on, and the arrangements which sustain them, are abyssal since it is their absence and inscrutability which allows space for decisions and things in general.

¹³¹ Ibid. 202

Even though this is a concept that has been related to the gods previously there is one significant being-historical link we are able to make now, and with better justification than if it were treated earlier in the project. In *Mindfulness* and while discussing the subject of the work of art taken being-historically, he makes the extremely provocative statement, “Now art has the character of *Da-sein*, and moves out of all striving concerned with ‘culture’.” (M 27) What could he possibly mean by this, especially given what we have already examined concerning the relationship between *Dasein* and *Da-sein*? The distinction between art as culture-object and art taken being-historically is obvious enough at this point, but for art to have the character of *Da-sein* in a way that makes sense, something strange indeed must be happening here.

“‘Artwork’ now is the gathering of purest solitude unto the [abyss] of [beyond].” (M 28/ GA66 37) The abyssal quality at work is operative on two levels in this arrangement. First, the relationship between the artist and the artwork, which is as much as we see in OWA. The work of art stands in some relationship to a creator, without a doubt, but the salient feature of the artwork is ultimately *that* it exists and not *by whose hand* or *why* it exists. It is solitary in its singularity. The artist has no authority or claim of priority to the work of art as a site of truth, despite the fact that the work as work and artist as artist are only these things because of the createdness of the work. “Precisely where the artist and the process and circumstances of the work’s coming into being remain unknown, this thrust, this ‘that [dass]’ of createdness, steps into view at its purest form from out of the work.” (OWA 39) Similarly, because the work of art is grounded in some extant arrangement such that it can take place at all, and even a sense of materiality by way of the earth, but in grounding truth and opening up the space within which beings become intelligible, cannot be interchangeably or retroactively *justified* on the basis of any of these connections to entities. Again, the abyssal quality emerges as a site of the negative-space of beyond which we have already discussed at some length.

Now it becomes slightly sharper why Heidegger employs the language of sacrifice in what follows to describe the abyssal relationship between the creator and the work. “Artwork’s complete lack of relation to beings and to their familiar organization guarantees in itself a belongingness to the creator which does not ‘biographically’ connect the creator to the work, but casts creator’s *Da-sein* as ‘sacrifice’ unto the [abyss].” (M 28/GA66 37) The lack of relation to beings in this case does not mean that the work of art

does not shape the space for beings to obtain as what they are, since this is a necessary consequence of its very happening. What must be emphasized is that by divorcing the work of art from beings *and their familiar organizations* we have reached a horizon where both the world to be gathered and disclosed by the art and the consequences for the creator are put up for radical re-appraisal. For example, whoever designed or built the Greek temple in OWA was not somehow immune from the practical realities that came along with it, the need to sacrifice, the social and political obligations that would have been relevant for a people living in the eyes of the gods, and so on. If we understand the work of art *as such*, which means paradoxically on my reading, we cannot but stumble upon an orientation which threatens to disorient whatever network of significance and self-definition we previously existed as, it represents a *risk*. A site for *sacrifice* on the level of both the “human” Dasein into Da-sein and whatever notions we may have had of art are themselves sacrificed insofar as the work of art now has the *character* of Da-sein.

“But this ‘sacrifice’ too can no longer become an ‘object of mourning and revering, because remembrance of such a ‘sacrifice’ would still revert to a spiritualized cultural operation and deteriorate into the ‘dis-humanization’ of art.” (M 28) The abyssal quality of this arrangement does not even permit the sort of stability which would render it publicly comprehensible. We might profitably think here of the difference that Kierkegaard raises between Abraham and Agamemnon in *Fear and Trembling*. Both are fathers who are called by the divine to sacrifice their children. In the case of Agamemnon, the army departing for Troy is stymied in a windless port because of the anger of Artemis, who, having suffered a perceived slight from Agamemnon, is now spilling her wrath on his entire nation. A prophet delivers the message that the only way to appease the goddess is for Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia. The fact that there is a greater good to appeal to – the health and success of the state – in exchange for an act of painful sacrifice that can be shared in sympathy by all, is what makes this act *tragic* for Kierkegaard, but not an act of true faith. There is still an ethical dimension which acts as a stable background against which the act can be justified.

...when the soothsayer proclaims his sad task and proclaims that the deity demands a sacrifice – then it is with heroism that the father has to make that sacrifice... And however solitarily the pain enters his breast, for he has only three confidants among his people, soon the entire

population will be privy to his pain, but also to his deed, to the fact that for the well-being of the whole he was willing to offer that girl, his daughter, this lovely fair maiden.¹³²

This sacrifice may be an object of “mourning and revering” because the central axis, here that of ethical duty, still holds. Conversely, Abraham can make no such claim, and in fact cannot be made intelligible at all in his decision to lead Isaac to the mountain for sacrifice. He has no greater good to appeal to, nothing other than the act of sacrifice before God which could motivate the act itself. It is alternately an act which is closed off from every prior relation and one which is exposed infinitely to the fact that everything could be different than it currently is. “Abraham cannot be mediated, which can also be put by saying he cannot speak.”¹³³ There is no one, on this picture, who could even presume to share his mourning or offer sympathy. “...where was that envious eye so barren as not to weep with Agamemnon, but where was he whose soul was so confused as to presume to weep for Abraham?... Abraham one cannot weep over. One approaches him with a *horror religiosus* [holy terror] like that in which Israel approached Mount Sinai.”¹³⁴

In this way, when Heidegger talks about the abyssal sacrifice involving both the Da-sein character of art and the Da-sein which is grounded in human Dasein, it cannot be made an object of consideration mediated through existing modes of interpretation of either, standard arrangements of beings or entities, or otherwise. This is in absolute agreement with the role he sets out for the preservers of art as well, who as we have established, are the necessary participants in the strangeness and singularity of the work of art, safeguarding its tensions, its paradoxical quality, against the temptations of aesthetics or connoisseurship.

... the more purely is the work itself transported into the openness of beings it itself opens up, then the more simply does it carry us into this openness and, at the same time, out of the realm of the usual. To submit to this displacement means: to transform all familiar relations to world and earth, and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to dwell within the truth that is happening in the work... This allowing the work to be a work is what we call its preservation. (OWA 40)

Familiar themes of risk at the limits of the horizons both instantiated and sustained by the work, coherent with the even more urgent themes of sacrifice present in the being-historical rendering of this relation.

¹³² Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006) 66

¹³³ Ibid. 70

¹³⁴ Ibid. 71

Returning to the previous thread from *Mindfulness* on the sacrifice and the abyssal nature of art, Heidegger continues,

What is ownmost to “sacrifice” – a word all too easily misinterpretable in the context of the heretofore – consists in reticently inhabiting in an awaiting that is bequeathed [to us] for the truth of [being], the truth which as such has the struggle between countering and strife as its ownmost. Therefore, it *is* only work that within the mutual calling forth of the sway of the earth and the sway of the world puts to decision the sway of gods and the ownmost of man. (M 28/GA66 37-8)¹³⁵

We have now come full circle within the discussion of what sort of “reticence of an abyssal encounter between gods and humans” is happening in the original quote from the *Contributions*, and revealed a reciprocal spiralling definition from the relation between the sacred and art to the nature of the abyss in this context and back to the relation itself. The abyssal quality of Da-sein in *art* turns out to be an invitation to simultaneously and reticently remain in a state of active and non-mediated relation to this horizon in our *awaiting* of it, our ability to be receptive without forcing the space we are directed towards to submit to our eagerness or calculative cleverness. Based on the arguments of chapter III, what allows art to do this and to make these sorts of demands is its paradoxical quality, and because the space of the countering between gods and man demands its own paradoxical quality, to be attuned to one is to be receptive to the other and vice-versa. Hence, why the work in relation to the sacrifice of Dasein to the abyss by way of the paradoxical also “puts to decision” what of god and what of man as the respective poles/horizons for a particular way being is able to adapt these two to each other and allow them to find any kind of stability or identity *as these things*. Describing the encounter as *abyssal*, read alongside the paradoxical quality common to art and the sacred, manages to reveal a space for significant explanatory work in a fairly modest point of entry.

¹³⁵ This theme was encountered previously, in passing, in chapter II. The freely given rain and fruits in the thing are sacrificed gratefully in the form of pouring out wine as libations, uniting the earth (the fruit), the sky (the given, the sacramental, the sustaining rain which falls), the gods (as the adored ones offered libations) and the mortals (the human beings who abide in this coherent domain as those who can die and are receptive to what is sacramental and what is sacrificial). In other words, the fourfold establishes a particular shape which historically instantiates these relationships.

2.11 “Encounter”

As we saw in chapter III.2.2, the encounter is the original predetermination of the *countering* of gods and human beings, the shape they take and the space they have both relative to each other and as themselves (and specifically articulated in a way that presumes no fixed ‘essence’ of either to appeal to other than the happening of this encounter itself). The “abyssal encounter between gods and humans” made available by a relation to the origin of art is possible on the basis of the essential permeability of this decision space into everyday experience by way of the paradox.

2.12 Return to the Origin

After an extended and careful reading of the constituent terms and relationships being laced together in the opening quote from the *Contributions*, we can now re-state it and summarize the findings as they bring out both the internal connections between art and the sacred and the explanatory role that my account of paradox in Heidegger plays. “Steadfastness in Da-sein prepares the disintegration of the priority of beings and thus prepares the un-usualness and un-naturalness of another origin of ‘art’: the beginning of a hidden history of the reticence of an abyssal encounter between gods and humans.” (CtP 397-8) Art and the sacred both function according to an element of paradox which is necessary for their respective functioning, and which is the crucial element that separates their *essential* functioning and their metaphysical decay. Without the paradox of the earth in the strife, art cannot ground truth. Without the near distance of the gods, the mysterious ‘there’ which presides and delimits the ‘here’ of humanity, we are left with ontotheology, reductionist metaphysical atheism, or theistic idolatry. This paradoxical quality is what explains both the privileged relationship between art and the sacred insofar as they can both serve as horizons for particular disclosures of being (as the historical happening of being), and gives us a way of teasing out the way in which our current situation is ultimately still *permeable* to this happening of being for those who can withstand the paradox and allow themselves to be guided towards an objectless orientation which risks everything that currently *is* according to standard intelligibility.

[Being’s] truth, i.e., *the* truth itself, essentially occurs only if *sheltered* in art, thinking, poetry, deed. It therefore requires the steadfastness of *Da-sein* that repudiates all the semblant immediacy of mere representation. Being essentially occurs as the [adaptation] [Ereignis]. That is the ground

and abyss of the god's availing of the human being or, conversely, of the availability of the human being for god. But this availability is withstood only in Da-sein. (CtP 201/GA65 256)

So, to be responsive to the paradoxical quality is to problematize oneself and accept a potential re-orientation with no recourse to previous self-conceptions or extant relationships between subject and object, or even subject and subject in the form of psychologizing. Only then can the relational Dasein of the human being become the site and grounding of Da-sein which can be actively receptive to being. This is preparatory and already accentuates the *unusualness* latent in things, in my account, the function of the paradox as a sign which reveals essential unintelligibility simultaneous with intelligibility without either collapsing into each other. To the exact extent that this is possible it prepares the “disintegration of the priority of beings”, since beings can no longer enjoy the intuitive and dictatorial position of speaking on behalf of Being itself without their stability and easy presence. The ‘art’ of aesthetics and metaphysics, likewise, can no longer claim priority, and the other origin of art is possible to glimpse, that is, *the origin of the work of art*. Since art and the sacred have their shared language of the paradox, thinking through this origin in relation to the “hidden history of the reticence of an abyssal encounter between gods and humans” helps us non-explicitly and yet attentively abide in the space made available by the unobtrusive withdrawal of the shape and texture of the very place we already find ourselves.

If art gives us the ‘horizontal’ dimension of being, the way a coherent world takes shape and either facilitates or denies certain avenues of praxis and questioning, the domain of the gods provides the intimately related ‘vertical’ dimension, the relationship with the ‘other’ that either looks in and offers possibilities or leaves us to define ourselves against its absence, but in either case, is absent in its presence and present in its absence through this same dimension. For this reason, to be directed towards the paradoxical quality of either art or the sacred and to do it in a way that risks everything is the means by which we can make sense of the links between art, the sacred, and world-disclosure (whether taken locally or being-historically) that Heidegger has been asserting. Paradox explains the relationship itself and the means by which we can sacrifice Dasein to the ‘abyss’ as Da-sein, since, as permeable through the paradox, things *in general* can be hermeneutically re-interpreted in light of the paradox instantiated in art and the sacred.

On this note, sacrifice and sacrament are closely related themes which have gently emerged in the previous analysis, and offer a natural transition to the next opportunity to illustrate the functional application of my reading to Heidegger's work in this domain. "Über die Sixtina" is a short and curious piece which considers the role of both the sacred and art and their essential entwining through a discussion of Raphael's Sistine Madonna. If there is a valuable opportunity to be found in the existing texts, this is almost certainly it.

3. Sacrifice and Sacrament in the Sistine Madonna

Heidegger's "Über die Sixtina" was written in 1955 to commemorate the postwar return of Raphael's masterpiece to the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden. It is short, barely three complete pages of text in the thirteenth volume of the *Gesamtausgabe*, but contains a concentrated representation of every major connection and theme I have been attempting to develop so far. I would like to isolate and examine three main points: First, what is the relationship between the work of art and the sacred being put forward? Second how is it that the sacred is able to directly serve as the 'content' of the work of art? Third, what can we learn about the link between sacrifice and sacrament on the basis of the Sistine Madonna?

3.1 The Place of the Madonna and the Transubstantiation

We will begin with a general overview.¹³⁶ The opening line is one which I believe we should take quite seriously. "Around this image gathers every yet unresolved question of art and the artwork." (GA13 119) That is, it is not that we have lost access entirely, but the fact *that* these questions are unresolved is the space that has been disclosed on the basis of our metaphysical understanding of art, similar to the "hidden history" of the abyssal encounter that lies at the origin of art that we examined in some detail in the last section. The Sistine Madonna therefore represents a site where we might take up explicitly our historical position with regard to the general situation we are already living out. The 'image' of the Madonna is, likewise, to be taken in a sense that is prior to any interpretation by the art-history world. "The word

¹³⁶ All references to "Über die Sixtina" in this section will be made according to their GA13 pagination, and all translations are my own done in grateful tandem with Wei Yong.

“image” should here only mean: Countenance in the sense of the looking-ahead as arrival.” (GA13 119)¹³⁷

The link between the image and the arrival will become clearer as we continue. The art-historical reception, according to Heidegger, would have us arguing over whether the Madonna is best characterized as window-painting or a panel-painting, as if the correct answer to this question could tell us something valuable about the essence of the work itself. This, of course, is not the case.

“That the Sixtina has become a panel painting and a museum piece: in this the true history of Western art since the Renaissance conceals itself.” (GA13 119) What conceals itself here, among other things, is the fact that art has become an aesthetic object which has been pre-determined according to its fittingness for a certain type of subject-object ‘experience’ best suited to a museum space. The work is no longer able to speak according to its own essence, the essence which would allow it to ground truth, and certainly not the essence of *this* piece which would allow it to play the role it was originally intended for in a church. Heidegger recalls a conversation in the past which exemplifies this. His old friend, Theodor Hetzer, spoke lovingly of Raphael’s Madonna, but also endorsed the sort of aestheticization which is the death of the work. “...I was dismayed by his observation, which said that the Sistine ‘is not to be bound to a church, does not require a specific installation.’ This is correct, thought aesthetically, and yet lacks the actual truth.” (GA13 119-20) By denying that there might be any kind of privileged context for the work to function, his friend has failed to appreciate the link between the work of art and a particular space of intelligibility and praxis which it accommodates by gathering together pre-reflective meanings and making them coherent on the basis of an enigmatic givenness. In other words, by making the work of art an object to be shipped around as audiences desire, the strife in the work has been covered up.

Wherever in the future this work may be ‘set up’, there it has lost its place. It remains denied the ability to unfold its own essence, that is, to determine this place for itself. The painting fails, transformed in its essence as a work of art, in the unfamiliar. The introduction to the museum, which retains its own historical necessity and right, keeps this unfamiliarity unknown. The museum presentation levels everything off in the uniformity of the ‘Exhibition’. In this there is only placement, no places. [In dieser gibt es nur Stellen, keine Orte.] (GA13 120)

¹³⁷ Original: “Das Wort “Bild” soll hier nur sagen: Antlitz im Sinne von Entgegenblick als Ankunft.” “Entgegenblick” is tricky here, since there is no English that can directly capture both the ‘looking-towards’ aspect of the word and the built in sense of the ‘glance’ [Blick] that is set against [Entgegen] something else.

Whatever the essence of this piece is, it is something that demands treatment beyond the usual art-historical or aesthetic considerations. And yet, the considerations between panel-painting and window-painting are not *entirely* irrelevant, if we understand properly what it is for something to represent a window. Heidegger admits himself a few “speculations” on the subject. (GA13 120) To orient us, let us first briefly consider the material ‘facts’ of the piece. The Sistine Madonna was originally designed as a typical panel piece, a part of a triptych designed to decorate an altar. And yet, it also has something of the window painting to it, since the image of Mary carrying the baby Jesus at the centre and the accompanying coterie of angels below are all framed by painted green curtains, pulled back enough to reveal the figure but nevertheless calling attention to the fact that something is being revealed by virtue of this opening. To the extent that there is a discernible background, Mary emerges from a soft glow and the intimation of clouds, but there is nothing that would allow us to see *past* the figures into their source or extend our perception beyond what is given. So, returning to the question of window or panel, the painting can in one sense be aptly described as a window-painting since, like a window, it frames out and delimits a space for something to appear. It does not *create* or *generate* that which may appear, but it does gather it. It *admits* what arrives. “But in the single event of this single picture [Bild] the picture does not appear in addition through an already existing window, but the picture itself first forms [bildet] this window and is therefore also no mere altarpiece [Altarbild] in the accustomed sense. It is an altar-picture [Altar-Bild] in a much deeper sense.” (GA13 120)

This deeper sense is the fact that the Sistine Madonna, in its original home in the San Sisto monastery in Piacenza, was instrumental in the very performance of the Mass, especially the Transubstantiation by which the Eucharist changes in substance to the physical presence of God. Ivica Žižić, in one of the few commentaries devoted to “Über die Sixtina”, describes the true artistic essence of the Sistine Madonna as a *ritualwork*, which I believe effectively captures the thrust of Heidegger’s own “speculations”.¹³⁸ If the window-character of the painting facilitates an arrival, the arrival in question is that of Mary bringing Jesus into the world, and the two emerging together out of a background of divinity

¹³⁸ Ivica Žižić, “Stepping into the World” Martin Heidegger’s Remarks on the ‘Sistine Madonna’, *The Heythrop Journal* 57 (2016) 3, *inter alia*

which is itself hidden by the emerging figures. There are several inter-related instances of mutual arriving and clearing concealing happening at once, within the gathered space of the parted green curtains. First and foremost, “Mary brings the infant Jesus in such a way, that she herself is first brought forth in her arrival through him, which in each case co-delivers the hidden preserving of her origins.” (GA13 120) Mary bringing Jesus forth both into the world and into view can only be what she is as the *Theotokos*, as the mother of God, *through* the fact that she is responsible for the decision to accept the incarnation. Likewise, Jesus, the one being carried, is the incarnation which is responsible for the changed essence of the one bringing him. This mutual arrival is what is gathered and shown as what is glanced towards.

Furthermore, in the fact that there is a sacred origin of both which is only visible *through* these figures, visible as invisible, arriving though never explicitly arrived as something present in the depiction, the preserving function of the image extends to preserving the space for the sacred to remain ‘other’, that is, to remain as the sacred in its ‘there’ as we encounter it from our ‘here’. The fact that the image allows the arrival of the sacred offering itself while refusing to compromise its mystery is what motivates Heidegger to make the further claim that, “In the picture, as this picture, occurs the appearance of the incarnation of God, occurs that transformation, which happens [ereignet] on the altar, ‘the Transubstantiation’ as the ownmost [das Eigenste] of the sacrifice of the mass.” (GA13 121) The Sistine Madonna captures not the accurate representation of some extant figures but the relationships necessary for divinity to come to presence *as divinity*, and in so doing, prepares the space for the highest and most significant part of the mass which it was designed to complement.

This brings to a fine point an instantiation of the privileged relationship between art and the sacred that I have been working to provide an account of via the paradox. Despite having a specifically sacramental role, the Sistine Madonna ultimately *does* remain a work of art with its function tied to being a happening of truth. “So the picture forms the place of the unconcealing sheltering (the ἀ-λήθεια), as which unconcealing the picture essences. The manner of its unconcealing (its true-ness [Wahr-heit]) is the concealing appearing of the origin of the God-man.” (GA13 121) Here, as explicitly as we have seen anywhere, is a direct correspondence between the paradoxical nature of the work of art (since as we have established in chapter III, without the paradoxical qualities of the earth which render the art a space of

strife, there could be no productive tension for ἀλήθεια to be set into the work) and the equally unusual concealing appearing, known unknown sacred, what for Kierkegaard is specifically *the* paradox – Christ as God-man. It is only on the basis of one that the other can come to stand as what it is, both sacred and art.

As Žižić puts it,

...the Sistine opens up in its own sacred world by bringing forth the truth of Incarnation and by its performance as a ritual work. Its function emerges from ritual practice and [participates] within the liturgical memorial... From this theological perspective, since the Sistine is understood as an act of disclosure, namely, as the unveiling of the Incarnation, it shows itself constitutively rooted in the event of Revelation. The image, therefore, represents the sacramental emanation of the event; it is the face which makes visible the sacramental coming into presence.¹³⁹

This is a good summation of what is at stake in the question of the Sistine Madonna, both for Heidegger, and for my own argument. Heidegger's treatment of the Madonna exemplifies the relationship between art and the sacred via paradox on at least two levels. On the first, more formal level, to forgo metaphysical and aesthetic interpretations of the work, which is to take it according to its truth as clearing-concealing, is to provide the condition for the possibility of the sacred manifesting as sacred, since they both require a suspension of metaphysics via their shared paradoxical quality. The work of art brings out the sacred and is able to do so because it discloses the world as fundamentally *permeable* to something other than occurrent entities and calculative enterprises. At the same time, on a more practical and mimetic level, the givenness of the sacred *as other*, as something which arrives without ever closing the distance and becoming exhaustively captured by our gaze, is what is being 'represented' in the work of art. Because the art portrays the conditions which dislodge participants from the relationships which constitute everyday life and invite a relationship to something which is impossibly yet actually given freely of its own nature, it invites recognition of the miraculous paradox of the transubstantiation.

The Sistine Madonna functions as a work of art which opens up space for a particular appearance of the sacred in a localized practice. Returning to the question of placement of the work where we began, the relationship between the formal – paradoxical – qualities that link the work of art and the space for

¹³⁹ Ibid. 8

the sacred in the Mass allows us to further justify Heidegger's claims on where the Madonna actually belongs.

The painting is the appearance of the interplay between time and space [Zeit-Speil-Raum] as the place, on which the sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated. The place is ever an altar of a church. This belongs in the painting and vice versa. To the ownmost appearance of the painting corresponds necessarily its isolation in the inconspicuous place of one church among many others. This church in turn, and that means each one of its kind, calls for the single window of this single image: it founds and consummates the structure of the church. (GA13 121)

The Sistine Madonna belongs in the church in Piacenza, then, not because of its historical or artistic-biographical links to the church, but because the work taken as a *ritualwork* can only function according to its nature within a sacramental setting. Both the form and the content of the artwork reflect the permeability of things in general as an explicit orientation towards what is unusual and unintelligible within a disclosed world, and refer to the artwork and the sacred as corresponding features of this particular piece. This is why the piece can “desire” or “call for” [verlangen] the church even from its deracinated position in the exhibition. (GA13 120) Insofar as the work is also the work of a *place*, it shares important qualities with the temple of OWA, further reinforcing the general status of the Sistine Madonna as being of a kind with the sort of Heideggerian art we have so far been considering. Just as the Madonna both “founds and consummates” the church, the temple provides a space for the god and so comes into its fullness as a temple. Steven Haug connects them in the following way: “Works like the Sistine and the temple belong to their place and their place belongs to them because the putting into place of the work opens up the space for the coming forth of a god. In the setting up of the work, the place becomes a holy place and the space within which God or a god is present.”¹⁴⁰

We have at this point followed the major threads of Heidegger's “Über die Sixtina” and seen how in this example of art and the sacred coming together explicitly both according to their formal-ontological qualities and their explicitly revealed content, the mechanics of this interaction can be explained in some detail by my account of paradox as the shared quality between these two phenomena, and the fact that paradox is what captures the permeability of things in general to strangeness and unintelligibility that shake

¹⁴⁰ Steven Haug, “A Discussion on Heidegger's ‘Über die Sixtina’”, *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Summer 2020) 790 ft.29

us loose from our usual modes of uptake. Heidegger concludes “Über die Sixtina” by saying, “Nevertheless, I realize all of this remains an insufficient stammer.” (GA13 121) I would like to now venture the hubris to stammer on a bit further still, and connect the sacramental and sacrificial themes of the Madonna to the sacrifice of Dasein as Da-sein we touched upon in the previous section.

2.2 Sacrifice and Sacrament

In this section I would like to revisit key arguments from Chapter III.2 on why the paradoxical quality common to art and the sacred represents a limit for intelligibility, a horizon which cannot be captured under the terms which we might use to first apprehend it, and against which we must in some sense *risk* ourselves. These arguments will be revisited in tandem with the notion of sacrifice between Dasein and the being-historical Da-sein in section one of the current chapter, and with reference to the more practical elements of the sacred that get taken up in specific religious traditions. I believe the risk inherent to relating to paradox is hinted at in the way that the Sistine Madonna sets the scene for the sacrifice and sacrament of the mass, and that, taking this as a special and somewhat paradigmatic case of the themes of the current project in which both are not only explicitly present, but actually require each other as the point of access and given content of the phenomena, we might be able to flesh out the notion of risk itself as sacrificial. This point will be developed with reference to a final piece of commentary on “Über die Sixtina” by Fritz Wefelmeyer, in which the notion of subjectivity is (erroneously) introduced, before drawing from Jacques Derrida’s notions of the *event*, or, that which is utterly singular, and the *machine*, that which is repeatable, determinable, and deterministic within a given horizon of intelligibility to further emphasize the stakes of relating to the paradox.

Much like considering the origin of art and the origins of the Sistine Madonna itself in the church, we must go back in order to advance. Returning to the Madonna and its existing commentary, Fritz Wefelmeyer traces the various artistic and theological interpretations of Raphael’s mother and child from Novalis through Herder and Hegel, and finally to Heidegger. Wefelmeyer refers to the relationship between revealing and concealing present in art in OWA and the fact that Heidegger moves away from the traditional emphasis on the subjective-aesthetic experience. However, despite this, he provides the following as a kind of practical takeaway from the piece: the subjectivity of the spectator is frustrated

because of the lack of firmly revealed essence (based on the inherently non-propositional nature of art's content for Heidegger), and we as the viewer find ourselves taken by the "inexhaustible" character of the work.¹⁴¹ He then claims that, "as Heidegger fails to discuss the question of the subjectivity of the artwork, he remains totally oblivious to the essential part played by the spectator."¹⁴² He goes on to say that Heidegger's own "subjective" reception of the work misses the fact that just as communion cannot function without a recipient, we are "shaped by our subjectivity."¹⁴³

To put it mildly, this is an odd stance to take considering the fact that his own summation of the work referenced OWA only a few lines before, which does its best to move beyond the historical subject-object relation which has come to inform our modern views of art as an aesthetic or historical object to be viewed and 'appreciated' in some sense. The subject is not absent from OWA (or Heidegger's *Sixtina*), but rather, the happening of truth through art is simultaneous with any historically conditioned subject; it provides a means for the subject to (re)interpret itself and make sense of itself within a world.

By suggesting that the main takeaway of the Sistine Madonna for Heidegger (albeit translated by Wefelmeyer from "the language of philosophical discourse" employed by Heidegger) is merely a bottomless well to be gazed into by a pre-conceived subject, he is essentially suggesting that we reduce the Madonna to exactly the kind of "panel painting" that sits in the museum in Dresden, and which Heidegger so lamented.

I believe that Wefelmeyer is correct insofar as the work of art does "frustrate", or at the very least complicates, the subject. I also believe that he misses the mark substantially when he charges that Heidegger was oblivious to the role played by the "spectator" or that he envisages a communion without recipient. On the contrary, I contend on the basis of the argument up to this point that while Heidegger certainly has little positive contribution to a theory of the spectator beyond metaphysical admonition, he has quite a lot to offer on what it is to be a recipient of communion, of how the 'subject' is related to the sacramental givenness of things. Wefelmeyer's critique also aligns with a valid concern raised by Richard

¹⁴¹ Fritz Wefelmeyer, "Raphael's Sistine Madonna: An Icon of the German Imagination from Herder to Heidegger" in *Text Into Image: Image Into Text* 118.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 118

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 118

Polt on what to make of the sacred in Heidegger's Contributions relative to actual worship in the way that he seems to want elsewhere, like in the famous quote from Identity and Difference we encountered earlier on the ontotheological god being far too abstract to warrant dance, sacrifice, or any uptake commensurate with what it is to encounter something of the divine in practice. (ID 72) Polt worries,

The Contributions run the risk of reducing the gods to an aspect of the relation between [beying] and being-there. Could any people revere a god they did not believe to be a being separate from them? The gods seem to become nothing but a totemic symbol – a dimension of import, but not anyone to whom anything could be important. Heidegger could retort that when we insist that the gods “transcend” humanity, we presuppose a fixed sense of what it means to be human. But this argument is dubious, and it remains all too easy to interpret his gods as, “an ‘idea’ or ‘values’ or a ‘meaning’, the sort of thing one cannot live and die for.”¹⁴⁴ (CtP 22)

It is possible to assess both of these critiques, the role of the subject and the role of the sacred as an ‘other’ that does not just slip into metaphor or abstraction, with an illustrative example and the notion of sacrifice and sacrament that have emerged from reading art and the sacred as having a paradoxical quality. In the prior chapters the role of the subject has, of course, been a constant theme that has been weaving in and out of the existing conversations. We started from the introductory admission that the entire argument is only possible within the context of metaphysics, that is, from within the prior assumptions about Being that have conditioned western philosophy up to this point and which have on some level informed the starting position of Heidegger, the author, and the reader. Whatever it is we are as ‘subject’, even if this subjectivity becomes a phenomenological problem, is already in play far before any philosophical work. This applies equally to any engagement between Dasein and either art or the sacred, since art cannot survive without preservers who are willing to experience the strangeness of the *strife* and the sacred is set apart from (and set back towards) the human beings who are then situated to recognize any particular presence or withdrawing of this dimension. However it is we might approach these phenomena, paradoxically or in a deficient (aesthetic, ontotheological, etc) manner, there is a brute pre-reflective givenness of both the phenomenological subject and a horizon of intelligibility that is presumed as a necessary condition to ever approach anything *like* art, god, or the shoes on our feet (peasant or otherwise). The question at hand is then to address the concerns noted earlier and to bring us towards a

¹⁴⁴ Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) 213

conclusion to the role of paradox more broadly – how do we get from the pre-giveness of things to the radicalization of things via relation to paradox without reducing everything to an abstraction or misinterpreting the role of the ‘subject’ who is both required for questioning and reflectively put up for questioning?

The territory we find ourselves in is unusual but also happens to be the natural habitat for much of Jacques Derrida’s work on art and the sacred; as such he will serve as a guide for some of what follows. First and foremost, on his picture, there is a sense of *fidelity* to what is given that we seem to want to maintain, an implicit faith in where we are such that we can be anywhere, but of course, as a result, we are exposed to the conditions of the possibility of things being radically otherwise. Consider the problem of the attribution of Van Gogh’s shoes once more, this time from Derrida’s perspective (and aside from my claims in Chapter IV.1.1-2 that Mark Wrathall has effectively solved the issue of attribution, which still stand). Derrida raises the possibility that the entire historical argument over the pair of shoes was itself based on a *bet*, since if we are being totally honest about the content of the picture, we have no real guarantee that we are even dealing with a *pair* of shoes. For all we know, Van Gogh may have painted two left shoes, or two right shoes, or two shoes from other pairs. While this provocation is undoubtedly funny in its own way, it raises a very real issue. In order to get anything at all off the ground, any space for discourse or disagreement or intelligibility, it requires a space of *faith* which can only be ventured by risking a bet, and one which will never be totally equal to the task at hand, since the content of what remains undecided from the perspective of one deciding will never be comparable to the content of what is accessible. One can only bet on what one cannot justify, following Kierkegaard’s warnings we have explored about trying to mediate or pre-rationalize decisions in the face of the paradox. However, with this in mind clearly, it seems that there is no real space to even recognize the scope of the potential wager. The shoes, then,

...can’t be paired, or compared, or bet on. For a bet always comes back to a comparing. Furthermore, there has to be a difference which would permit it. But what about when there is no longer any difference? Shall we then say... that the bet becomes impossible? Or on the contrary: that the only thing left for us to do is to bet? That *there is nothing else for it* but to bet?¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Derrida, “Restitutions” 376

For Derrida, by betting on the pair in order that there might be an end to betting and a shared space for argument or forward discourse, both Heidegger and Schapiro have become strangled by the shoes since they effectively *hedged their bets* without knowing it.

That they gambled on the pair? And that they did so – (no) more bets – in order to avoid the risks of betting? Which they did not succeed in doing, since you have to reckon with the wager of the unconscious or the unconscious of the wager, if you prefer... They bet on the pair, on comparison, on a wager that limits the risks of the *absolute* wager, which limits *itself* and *tightens itself* to the point of self-strangulation. To the point of tying itself so as not to absolve itself. For the cunning twist stems from the fact that the *absolute* bet must never exclude the disparate or absolute unevenness.¹⁴⁶

Whether or not this is entirely fair to Heidegger's position is essentially irrelevant, although Derrida does suggest rather cryptically earlier in the essay that Heidegger's work on art can be better understood if read "otherwise" alongside his work on the fourfold, also read "otherwise".¹⁴⁷ We will not bet on interpreting this for now, beyond the general agreement with this point in the previous chapters. What is of interest is the fact that on two levels, the attempt to relate to a work of art through a given paradigm (here, attribution) and the possibility of discourse and intelligibility in general hinge on a necessary tension between what is pre-given, what is bet upon, and what is only decidable as utterly undecidable, what requires an *absolute* wager against what is, relative to where we started, absolutely "uneven". On my reading, this *absolute* wager which makes art intelligible as a point where things are revealed but also volatilized is the relation to the paradoxical quality of art. Still, has this gotten us any closer to understanding the role of the subject? Of sacrifice? It has.

We start from a position of faith in the given. On the basis of certain phenomena, we are forced to bet, not just on what might come afterwards, but even for that which has come before, since in the face of the paradox, the unintelligible is revealed as a simultaneous structural feature of things in general along with the intelligible. We see a disconnect between what makes sense and therefore what is capable of maintaining this sense in a determinable way and the singularity of what has erupted through this usual sense making and asserted itself as unique, questionable, problematic. These two things, like the earth and the world, seem to be utterly at odds. If we have sense and stability, from whence the singular which

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 376

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 352

deviates from sense and cannot be reduced to standard modes of doing things? How would we even get to such a place? If we fully grasp the exceptional and destabilizing force of art and the sacred, how would we grasp them as such without a stable background of intelligibility which would allow them to not only show up at all, but show up in contrast to the way other phenomena come to stand? And what of the person related to both? Or even related to one? These are not easy questions.

Derrida, in “Faith and Knowledge”, remarks on the contradictory nature of things in general as they pertain to the non-reasonable faith required for anything reasonable, and what structures faith out of pure abstractness and makes it accessible at all for practice. That is, to have anything like the world as it is given to us, we rest on at least two axes of functional contradictions which only become more imposing as we approach them lucidly. This should at this point sound like a familiar story. This state of affairs is also intrinsically linked to sacrifice.

Noting here briefly that in OWA Heidegger proposes that founding a state with accompanying laws and conditions for the existence of a historical people is itself a happening of truth via the strife, sharing its formal qualities with the work of art irrespective of whether we want to draw a strict equivalency for the moment, Derrida brings out the relationship between the space of art and the space of the sacred via the paradox strongly. (OWA 37)

[Faith without dogma] is announced wherever, reflecting without flinching, a purely rational analysis brings the following paradox to light: that the foundation of law – law of the law, institution of the institution, origin of the constitution – is a ‘performative’ event that cannot belong to the set that it founds, inaugurates, or justifies. Such an event is unjustifiable within the logic of what it will have opened. It is the decision of the other in the undecidable...¹⁴⁸

Within the space opened up by this event, the intelligible world is placed onto the earth, and the origins of things in general in an act of ‘faith’ are themselves rendered unthinkable, meaning that we have access to the dimension for a spontaneous decision as to how we will take up matters of practical faith, even in a world which has the very convincing appearance of being subject to rational relations. In other words, the possibility of the sacred and the possibility of the work of art functioning as such are based on a

¹⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge”, *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2010) 57

relationship of mutual paradox that remains accessible, though not *intelligible* as the space opened up by this relationship is intelligible.

Wherever this decision founds in foundering, wherever it steals away under the ground of what it founds, at the very instant when, losing itself thus in the desert, it loses the very trace of itself and the memory of a secret, ‘religion’ can only begin and begin again: quasi-automatically, mechanically, machine-like, spontaneously... For the best and for the worst, without the slightest assurance or anthro-po-theological horizon. Without this desert in the desert, there would be neither act of faith, nor promise, nor future, nor expectancy without expectation of death and of the other, nor relation to the singularity of the other.¹⁴⁹

Put differently: the countering between gods and human beings, the hidden history of an abyss, and here framed in a way that explicitly makes room for uptake by a ‘subject’. Not ‘the subject’ as construed in any particular way, no “assurance or anthro-po-theological horizon” but nonetheless, it is this space that allows for faith, relation to the other, and practically so.¹⁵⁰ Now we are starting to get somewhere.¹⁵¹ We have a good articulation of the space we start from, the relationship between the clearing-concealing of strife and the countering of gods, the risks involved with relationship to paradox that allow for any particular arrangement (and even the mundane arrangements), and the generation of a space that provides the possibility of not just meaning in the abstract but acts of faith properly speaking.

This might still all seem a bit ephemeral. Polt’s concerns especially were raised regarding the unsatisfying abstractness of the sacred taken so formally. Therefore, as a final example of a paradoxical situation that unites subject, practical uptake of faith, and a final horizon of absolute alterity that retroactively destabilizes the logic and situatedness which allowed access to it, I would like to briefly discuss what I think is one of the most beautiful and baffling anecdotes in the Christian tradition: the beatific vision of Thomas Aquinas. According to the tradition based on reports of brother Dominicans, Aquinas was engaged in his pre-dawn prayers and adoration before the cross in the chapel. Suddenly, a voice emanated from the cross: “Thou hast written well of me, Thomas: What recompense dost thou desire?”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 57

¹⁵⁰ It bears mentioning that for Derrida this space, because of its lack of necessary content, also has made available the sort of current universal ‘secular’ ethics which are enshrined in projects of democratization and national morality

¹⁵¹ In addition to the groundwork on the subject of moving beyond anthropological horizons developed in chapter III.2.1

¹⁵² Alban Butler, “St. Thomas of Aquino, Doctor of the Church and Confessor”, *Lives of the Saints*, Vol 3. (London: Burnes and Oates, Limited, 1899) 69-70

His answer: “No other than thyself, O Lord.” A short time later, while celebrating Mass, Aquinas was granted a moment of the beatific vision (or something very much like it) – a direct apprehension of God. We have no direct record of what he experienced because he never wrote or publicly lectured again. We do know, however, that his friend Brother Reginald encouraged him to continue, and Aquinas responded, “Reginald, I cannot, because all I have written seems like straw to me.”¹⁵³ This is a hard situation to parse. It cannot be that the work was actually bad, else it would not have warranted the blessing he was granted. At the same time, the nature of the blessing was such that it retroactively called into question the very path which was taken to arrive there, and the possibilities that seemed worthwhile for the person who originally oriented himself towards them. Interfacing with the sacred yielded a situation where the sacred, and the one who allowed the sacred to speak as such rather than asking for rewards that would correspond with existing relationships between entities, radically re-framed every point of reference. What was sacramentally given, in this case, the access to the sacred through a particular historical tradition, was then offered up sacrificially (not inconsequentially, during a Mass) and exposed to something utterly singular. In Derrida’s terms, an event – something which cannot co-exist with the previous logic, “...a thinking of what remains real, undeniable, inscribed, singular, of an always essentially traumatic type, even when it is a happy event: an event is always traumatic, its singularity interrupts an order and rips apart, like every decision worthy of the name, the normal fabric of temporality or history.”¹⁵⁴

Derrida is responsive to many of the same tensions as Heidegger, but by developing more intensely and specifically the tension between what is given, what is singular, and the fact that we can access one through the other in a way that resists mediation and cannot be subordinated to any existing relations, we now see as well that by risking or wagering against the horizon of the paradoxical, whether in response to art or the sacred, this wagering is nothing less than a willingness to *sacrifice*.¹⁵⁵ Sacrifice what? Potentially

¹⁵³ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 9

¹⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Typewriter Ribbon”, *Without Alibi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 135-6

¹⁵⁵ While I do maintain that there are productive and informative affiliations between Heidegger and Derrida in this domain, as they both attempt to work through questions of art and the sacred without uncritically presupposing a metaphysics of presence as the proper means to do so, it bears acknowledgement that there are limits to these affiliations and much like the treatment of Kierkegaard earlier I do not wish to imply strict equivalence. Derrida, in “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, for example, believes that Heidegger along with Nietzsche and Freud form something of a circular firing squad and ultimately undo their own critiques of both the existing tradition and each other (when relevant like Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche) by drawing the terms of their critique from metaphysics itself and re-enforcing these lingering systematizing biases that seek to re-establish some

one's very self; not in a suicidal blood sacrifice, but in the sense that the relations which constitute Dasein will be held in suspension and potentially re-oriented, thereby changing whatever it is that Dasein was (simultaneously, and just as well, 'is', since the temporal relations move in both 'directions', like in the world of the early church). This is the domain of the thinker, the poet, the saint, yes, the divine 'madness' of someone like Hölderlin. This derangement one is exposed to is not at all the sort of thing that might be explained psychologically, but on my account reflects the orientation to the world as demarcated by an essential unintelligibility which can still be responded to meaningfully. As Heidegger says in the lectures on Hölderlin's "Remembrance":

For when seen from the perspective of this illuminating psychological-biological explanation of the work as "product" of "someone insane," the word of the work does not have its say, but only the presumptuous know-it-all attitude of those who are supposedly "normal" and not deranged. The poet was indeed deranged, in the sense of a de-rangement [Ver-rückung] of his essence, which was removed from the night of his era. This essential derangement then had as its consequence a "deranged-ness" that was certainly also unique in kind. Yet from this consequence, the ground can never be grasped. (R 38)

In Aquinas's silence no less than the trauma of Derrida's event and the sort of ecstatic worship that we tend to associate with the presence of the divine, being in relation to the paradox does facilitate a certain non-psychological "derangement" – and an important one.

Returning to Polt's concern, how is it we are supposed to pray or sacrifice to the being-historical gods, how are they supposed to matter to us?⁹ Let us assume a strange situation: One in which a people had no access to an existing religious tradition which might gather practices for worship around a recognition of the otherness, the paradoxical quality, that allowed the divine to announce itself in the first place. Likewise, let us assume no theophany or revelation which might come to them. In this setup, we might additionally imagine someone who *was* nevertheless highly attuned to the decision-space of the gods as the source of meaning, and the countering relationship which sets us into our 'here' and them into their 'there'. In a situation like this, Polt's non-religion of being-historical gods made manifest, those so

sort of "center", even if this is a to-be-determined question of Being. For Derrida, Heidegger has not fully escaped or instrumentalized his methodological links to the existing tradition. I am sceptical as to how far this critique lands given the self-awareness of method bordering on neuroticism that Heidegger exhibits throughout his body of work, but that is a discussion better suited for elsewhere, having now sketched out some limits to Derrida and Heidegger's common grounds.

disposed will by definition still feel the pull towards divinity without any 'divinity' to accompany it. To say this much is to already recognize things as being sacramental in their unjustifiable givenness. What is left to sacrifice, to put up as stakes in the wager, is Dasein itself, exposed to the paradox at the heart of things and without any higher court of appeals. This is the ultimate horizon that can never be taken away from Dasein as long as there is some route of access to the co-instantiated contradictions, taken immediately and with the actionable orientation *towards* this horizon. Active waiting is still a sacrifice. Since the gods are partially constitutive to any particular way that being can allow things to take shape within a historical epoch, and Dasein is the radical point 'between' these possibilities, the paradoxical quality of the gods (whether in specific rites or in a more broad sense) or in the work of art (as something which achieves the same orientation towards shared horizons of unintelligibility) is the route by which Dasein might always find its way, or, to lose it, to become de-ranged. It amounts to the same here.

Being: the hearth-fire in the midst of the lodging of the gods, a lodging which at the same time is the estrangement of the human being... How to find being? Must we light a fire in order to find the fire, or must we not rather reconcile ourselves to *watching over the night first*? Thereby the false days of everydayness must be resisted. The most false of those days are the ones that profess to know and to possess even the night when they illumine and thus eliminate it with their borrowed light. (CtP 383)

If all else fails, if we can recognize the night as the night, that is, if we can handle the unintelligible which structures things just as much as what is intelligible, and use this paradox, the night can still remain a place of waiting and watching and most of all a place free of easy, everyday answers, without being lit up and eliminated by metrics which would dismiss this angle outright as irrational, nonsensical, or other fiendishness which is rumoured to surface at night. To Wefelmeyer's concern: There is here, and remains, a firm role for the subject, as long as we don't confuse subject for spectator with a fixed essence set over and against a world of objects. The work of art does indeed challenge the subject, but in such a way that it challenges 'the subject' itself, potentially. To Polt's concern, and following this same line of thought: Even granting some extreme situation where *all* we have access to is the gods as illustrated in their being-historical context, the world is still sacramental, and we still have the ability to respond practically in gratitude and sacrifice.

What I have hoped to show in this section is that in addition to the other elements of my account of paradox which we have given space to work out and apply to various textual issues, the fact that the paradoxical quality of art and the sacred represent a horizon that requires *risk*, as I argued in Chapter III.2.2, is equally productive in an explanatory capacity because of the themes of sacrifice and sacrament which seem to gently run throughout Heidegger's work on the subject, and which are brought out more explicitly by Derrida.

4. Test Cases and Loose Laces: Art and the Sacred Tied Up

In this chapter I have endeavoured to take the definition of paradox in art and the sacred that was derived from the text in the previous chapters, and apply it to what I take to be exceptionally tricky and paradigmatic questions that arise when we consider the two domains of Heidegger's work together. Additionally I attempted to show that some of the more constructive elements of my definition, such as that of the sign-structure which discloses a horizon that Dasein can risk or wager itself in the face of, were not arbitrary or tacked on but valuable in the pursuit of getting clear on what Heidegger was up to when he linked art and the sacred, whether specific local gods or the structural pre-ontological relations which make possible the shape of historical epochs and the entities which can obtain on the basis of them.

One emergent solution was the way that the paradoxical quality common to art and the sacred explains the *permeability* of things in general. By this I mean the fact that we can orient ourselves to specific phenomena (the work of art, for example), and if we are attentive to the necessary contradictions that allow this phenomenon to function, it has a hermeneutic quality by which this strangeness can be read back into things in general. This is why, at least for now, metaphysics has not totally snuffed out our capacity to be reached by something singular and staggering, even if what is staggering is the absence of what we are looking for, the fact that the god has withdrawn. In fact, as we saw in section 2, an encounter such as this which is no longer directly accessible is precisely the course we already find ourselves on. This brings us to the second emergent solution. Why, out of all the possible routes of phenomenological access and overdetermined relationships which structure the condition of the possibility of intelligibility,

does Heidegger suggest that the work of art and the sacred have any privileged relationship? Why are the struggle and adaptation that demarcate historical epochs between the axes of the strife of earth and world and the countering of gods and men? Because art rests on the paradoxical strife (by way of the *earth*), and the countering rests on the paradoxical relationship between nearness and distance, known and unknown, taking up a stance on one brings a historical Dasein (or a historical people) into a position to take up a stance on the other. Most other entities and phenomena more broadly might have a *latent* paradoxical quality which can come to the fore with a hermeneutic re-interpretation of things in general, but art and the sacred have a necessarily *patent* paradoxical quality. Hence, their privileged relationship. Between the unintelligible earth, the intelligible world, and our self-interpretive position either in the eyes of or the absence of gods, we have all the dimensions within which we find ourselves and lose ourselves.

A further consequence: Art and the sacred are mutually salvific. In the absence of truth-grounding art and the domination of aesthetics, it is possible to recover something of art's function if we come to understand the way that the sacred functions, that is, its paradoxical quality. This is evidenced in the discussion on "Über die Sixtina", it is why the art can yearn for the church even from the halls of the museum. The relationship between the sacrament given up and the self-giving nature of the appearance of Mary and Jesus in the painting mutually reveal each other. Likewise, in a time where ontotheology dominates (or another form of privative metaphysical relation to the sacred), the founding of a work of art has every opportunity to gather a new space for the gods, to make a place holy or mark out things as beautiful in a way that calls our attention back to the questions that were overlooked in previous disclosures of the world. Even careful consideration of existing works of art can shake us loose from preconceptions.

Finally, because there is a continuity of form between the paradox necessary for instantiations of art and the sacred within a world, and the paradoxical strife and countering which shape entire swaths of history, this allows us to recognize the sacramental character implied in Heidegger's account of world-disclosure. Things are given, unjustifiably by the terms which are set up *by* this givenness, and concurrent with the silent withdrawal of the initial encounters. The proper response to this, in the sacrifice of blood and harvest to old gods, the sacrifice of the Mass, or the sacrifice of one's self in relation to previous

arrangements of things, is sacrifice. One question remains: why would we want such a thing? Despite the perhaps gloomy appearance of this state of affairs, and despite the obvious danger that comes with operating in metaphysics as we are, the constant risk of being bamboozled or led astray even deeper into false security, we do have such a reason. As Heidegger says in the end of “The Question Concerning Technology”, it is in fact Dasein’s *highest dignity* to engage in this sort of thinking, thinking of what we are not yet thinking, thinking towards a domain which refuses itself. Thinking, if I may venture my own reading, towards the horizons opened up by relating towards the paradoxical quality in art and the sacred. Where we have been destined, destined understood along the lines of the “hidden history” of section 2, what is most original and not most determined ahead of us, this is what we have been *granted* – granted as given, given without having earned (or deserved, in some cases), granted sacramentally.

The granting that sends one way or another into revealing is as such the saving power. For the saving power lets man see and enter into the highest dignity of his essence. This dignity lies in keeping watch over the unconcealment – and with it from the first, the concealment – of all essential unfolding on this earth. (QCT 235)

Thinking through art and the sacred as paradoxical, rather than reducing their status into a murky irrationalism or reducing Dasein into a confused victim of the world’s comings and goings, is in fact a way that we can make sense of things within metaphysics by sacrificing this prior sense-making in the service of a higher good: the dignity that we still have and the possibility that we can be receptive to Being in novel and perhaps even salvific ways.

Chapter VI: Conclusions

“There’s a lover in the story / But the story’s still the same / There’s a lullaby for suffering / And a paradox to blame” – Leonard Cohen, “You Want it Darker”

It is time to take stock and settle accounts of what has been said and what remains to be said on the subject of art, paradox, and the sacred in Heidegger. We set out in the beginning to try and find a foothold to get clear on what Heidegger is up to when he draws together his accounts of the work of art and the question of God, and the role that the human being in a disclosed world occupies in this strange and challenging picture. The foothold was a paradoxical quality both common and necessary to the constituent parts of this arrangement, which yielded further positions for constructive explanatory claims, including a way of grounding the *privileged* relationship between art and the sacred and the way in which the disclosed world – even and especially within metaphysics – can still become permeable to a sacramental givenness which can reciprocally demand sacrifice.

1. Re-tracing the Path

In **Chapter II** I presented Heidegger’s efforts on what I referred to as *the sacred*, the general concern in his body of work with the domain of god(s) as both a dimension of possible historical happenings of Being and the object of actual worship and spiritual praxis. While the sacred contains specific foci and angles which are sometimes irreducible to each other, I claimed along with Benjamin Crowe that these directions of thought on the subject can at least be rendered consistent with each other, and on my reading the consistency was on the basis of their shared reliance on a paradoxical quality. It is here, by examining the way that the sacred is presented, that I derived my analytic definition of paradox from the text: an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-instantiated and immediate. The contradiction served as a first sign that the nature of the phenomenon in question was resistant to usual modes of uptake or thinking, since our apprehension of phenomena in general could only be from where we currently are, and yet, remained available to us and could make demands on us, drawing the contradiction out from the

strictly logical or semantic domain where it was initially appraised and into an actionable relationship on the basis of the contradiction. The formal definition of paradox was derived and tested against three specific styles of Heidegger's thought on the sacred: the gods and divinities of the fourfold, the being-historical gods which serve as a structural axis which demarcates possible epochs and peoples, and the apocalyptic world of Saint Paul and the early church. Finally, I argued that while Heidegger was not necessarily arguing *towards* a particular religious tradition, or even anything that needs to look like 'religion', as both a human being and a thinker he was arguing *from* a position that accommodated and included traditional extant religion.

In **Chapter III** I constructively expanded this definition, which was sufficient as an identifying formal quality but insufficient to do the explanatory work that the project demands. This yielded two further claims: first, that we can apprehend the paradoxical quality of art and the sacred as a special class of sign which discloses a general unintelligibility of the disclosed world which is, to borrow a phrase from *Being and Time*, 'equiprimordial' with its intelligible structure - simultaneous with and equally fundamental with but irreducible to. Secondly, that we can relate ourselves to this quality as a horizon which can be profitably read analogously with Kierkegaard's work on the paradox, especially where Heidegger and Kierkegaard both emphasize that for the person interested in having anything to do with paradox as such, this represents a personal risk or an existential wager, on which *everything* may hinge. I then addressed the most recent and most sustained work on Heidegger and paradox by Filippo Casati and defended my position against his claims and critiques which would have otherwise threatened my project on the basis of formal indications being fatally vague. Not only did this turn out not to be the case, but in the process of the defense we were able to explore an important distinction that manages to salvage my definition of paradox from Heidegger's own concerns, namely, that paradox is a *direction* for thinking and a horizon that we may relate to without any implication that this directedness is a terminating definition with discrete content. Thinking towards the paradoxical quality of art and the sacred is a preliminary orientation meant to provoke further thought and dislodge old paradigms.

Chapter IV independently derived the same analytic definition of paradox as an essential quality of Heidegger's work of art. This time it was derived from the role that the essentially unintelligible *earth*

plays and the way it is part of the interplay of the strife with the intelligible *world*. The chapter started with a tour of the various artworks in Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art", the historical reception of the shoes especially, and a brief introduction to Jacques Derrida as an interlocutor on the subject who would re-appear in the final main chapter. As an independent example of what a paradoxically-informed treatment of art might look like, especially in conversation with elements of the sacred explored in chapter II.4, I offered a reading of El Greco's "The Opening of the Fifth Seal" and what sort of comportment it both discloses and offers.

Finally, in **Chapter V** I attempted to show the explanatory value of the reading I argued for and used a variety of difficult yet important passages and relationships first introduced as examples to frame the main problematic as ways to stress test my work. This included close reading of a line from the *Contributions* which was paradigmatic of the link between art and the sacred I have been trying to develop and clarify beyond the hints that Heidegger offers. As a result of this we were finally able to give a speculative answer to the question of why Heidegger seems to privilege the relationship between art and the sacred. From there we were able to assess a singularly important, if brief, part of Heidegger's oeuvre in relation to my concerns: "Über die Sixtina", his commentary on Raphael's Sistine Madonna as both artwork in the established sense and "ritualwork" in its connection to facilitating the sacred as part of the Mass. In this case the accounts of art and the sacred I developed were not only formally brought together but explicitly referred to each other in the content of the work. Further, with reference to Derrida's work on art and the sacred, an implicit theme gently emerged into its own: the role of sacramental givenness and sacrificial responsiveness as a feature of both things in general and the specific routes of access made available in the themes of this project.

To summarize in the most concise possible terms: There is a necessary paradoxical quality – an actionable contradiction in which the terms are co-extensive and immediate – which can be independently derived from Heidegger's accounts of both art and the sacred, and which is necessary for either to function according to their respective modes of being. This quality may be apprehended as a unique class of sign which shows all disclosed intelligibility as being concurrent with and permeable to a general unintelligibility, which we can relate to as a direction for thinking, a horizon at which everything is risked,

radicalized, and problematized for a potential re-appraisal once we are exposed to the struggle of Being again. On this basis, art and the sacred obtain the privileged relationship that Heidegger establishes but does not fully justify in particular, and we can make informed steps towards de-mystifying crucial aspects of his later work.

Paradox, according to my opening claims and the stages of argument and engagement just re-traced, illuminated the nexus between art, the sacred, and world-disclosure.

2. Situation and Further Consideration

With the main claims reviewed and summarized I would like to situate this project in the wider literature and suggest future avenues for research based on what has been done here. I believe that this effort represents a novel contribution to the existing scholarship for at least two reasons. Firstly, while there is plenty of work on Heidegger's account of art like we have seen from Julian Young, Iain Thomson, Mark Wrathall, Stephen Muhall, Karen Gover, and others, and there is an established and currently expanding consideration of Heidegger on the sacred as exemplified by John Caputo and Benjamin Crowe, there is a surprising want of secondary scholarship which treats their relationship for its own sake or as more than just an incidental connection. On the contrary, based on the numerous passages we have dealt with from Heidegger's output after *Being and Time*, I contend that this relationship is crucial to orienting oneself in his later project, and even preliminary steps towards explicating this area such as the ones just taken identify and address a very real need. Secondly, with the notable and very recent exception of Filippo Casati, the subject of paradox in Heidegger is virtually uncharted territory, and again, territory that I think we ignore to our own detriment.

Naturally, despite what I would like to consider positive and constructive forward steps taken here down new paths of Heidegger's texts, there is much that is still preliminary due to scope and more that remains for potential research in the future. For instance, we might now have an interesting vantage point from which to assess Heidegger's own statements on his relationship to the existing tradition, like in his early correspondence to Karl Löwith wherein he describes himself as living out his starting commitments,

such that, “This facticity of mine includes—briefly put—the fact that I am a ‘Christian theologian.’”¹⁵⁶ If this is so, it certainly takes a strange route, but now, potentially one which can make sense *as* strange. Additionally, I believe the emphasis on paradox in Heidegger might help with his claims from the same letter that,

I must take the whole of Christian philosophy into consideration, since I want to regard it backwards, in reverse order.... Even Kierkegaard can only be theologically unhinged (as I understand theology and will develop in the winter semester) What is of importance in Kierkegaard must be appropriated anew, but in a strict critique that grows out of our own situation. Blind appropriation is the greatest seduction...¹⁵⁷

If Heidegger, as I claim, incorporated an element of paradox into his account of the sacred and the works of art which ground our situatedness in any particular disclosure of the world, this suggests that we should take him seriously at his word here, that what is of importance in Kierkegaard *was*, in fact, appropriated anew as pertains to the metaphysical situation at hand.

As a final and perhaps most important suggestion for future uptake of whatever progress has been made here, the practical aspect which has been revealed, the way in which art and the sacred can dislodge us, the way that the Sistine Madonna can still call out for the altar, may reveal buried under apparent pessimism a well-hidden element of soteriology operating in his later work (albeit one that is neither subject to strong-arm tactics nor reliably promised on an ontological level – as before, unearned grace and sacramental givenness take precedence). The more thoroughly entrenched we are in metaphysics, the more total will be the scope of what is radicalized by a genuine openness to what is most challenging in the strife of art and the countering of the sacred. On this path of thinking, his endlessly suggestive quote from his final interview that, “Only a god can save us” might equally well invite participation, reconciliation, and mutually saving the god by our willingness to give up our current preconceptions and wait, waiting for that which may wait for us.¹⁵⁸ This and other possibilities, for now, must remain “an insufficient stammer”. (GA13 121)

¹⁵⁶ Martin Heidegger, “Letter to Karl Löwith on His Philosophical Identity”, *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, Volume 9, Special Issue (2012). 220

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 220

¹⁵⁸ Der Spiegel, “Only a God Can Save Us: Der Spiegel’s Interview with Martin Heidegger”, *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1976) 227

I claimed in the beginning that Heidegger's work on art and the sacred could be illuminated by an account of paradox, and it is my sincere hope that what has been written and argued thus far has developed this point to a reasonable degree of clarity, and suggested some further routes of exploration on the basis of this contribution to otherwise obscure areas of the text. In this respect, and like much of Heidegger himself, this remains preliminary to the real questions of art and God, a conclusion that sets the stage for beginnings. One man perhaps instantiated this sort of 'last word' the best: Pontius Pilate. In writing the disputed claims of kingship at the head of the cross prior to the crucifixion of Jesus, thinking that this was the final word on the subject and disregarding the objections of the Sanhedrin, it instead heralded the beginning of an entire religious tradition, likely to the surprise of nobody more than Pilate himself. In the philosophical spirit of paradox, preliminary ends and final beginnings, and in the words of Pontius Pilate: "Quod scripsi, scripsi." "What I have written, I have written".¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ John 19:22

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