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Everything is Under Control: Buber's Critique of Heidegger's Magic

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Abstract

As part of a religiously-oriented analysis, Martin Buber associates Martin Heidegger's later philosophy with magic. The present article is dedicated to explicating and evaluating this association. It does so, first, by fleshing out how Buber comes to depict Heidegger as an advocate of magic. Then, by examining other appearances of the category of magic in the wider context of Buber's dialogical oeuvre, it demonstrates that what he has in mind when he invokes this category is a specific manner of human appeal to the divine marked by manipulation, utility and control. Finally, it evaluates the affiliation of Heidegger with magic: first, by comparing the metaphysical presuppositions undergirding the logic of magic - specifically the conceptions of, and interrelations between, 'language' and 'being' - with Heidegger's views, and second, by judging whether the claim that Heidegger promotes manipulative, utilitarian, and power-laden attitudes can be justified in light of his analysis of 'technology'. The article ultimately argues that Buber misattributes magic to Heidegger, and that this misattribution better reflects the theoretical framework through which Buber justifies his dialogical position than an apt assessment of Heidegger's thought.

Everything is Under Control: Buber's Critique of Heidegger's Magic

In his essay "Religion and Modern Thinking", Martin Buber associates Martin Heidegger's later philosophy with magic.[1] In this 1952 work, Buber addresses what he saw to be Heidegger's magic, Sartre's atheist existentialism, and Carl Jung's Gnostic psychoanalysis as representing three perverse and dominant religious dispositions of the contemporary world, over against which his own dialogical thought is situated. The present article tries to do three things. First, flesh out how Buber comes to depict Heidegger as an advocate of magic. Second, explain what Buber understands by the category of magic and how this sheds light on his interpretation of Heidegger. Third, evaluate this interpretation.

"Religion and Modern Thinking" constitutes Buber's most extensive engagement with Heidegger since his critical analysis of *Sein und Zeit* in the 1938 "What is Man?" lecture series.[2] Now, unlike the earlier engagement, Buber focuses on Heidegger's later thought and specifically on his "theses about the divine". His critique of Heidegger in terms of magic draws primarily on his reading of certain passages from the 1947 publication "Letter on Humanism" and from the series of

[1] Buber (1965). Originally published as Buber (1952). On Buber's analysis of Heidegger in this lecture series, see Herskowitz (2017). My interpretation differs from Novak's (1985) and Gordon's (2001).
[2] Buber (1947). Originally published as Buber (1938).

commentary essays and lectures about Hölderlin's poetry that Heidegger wrote throughout the 1930s and 1940s which were collected in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* (first edition 1944, second edition 1951).[3] A seasoned reader of Hölderlin, Heidegger's dedicated attention to the German poet over the span of this period stood in the forefront of his effort to formulate an alternative route for Western thought based on how he interpreted Hölderlin's understanding of the relation between language and being. Heidegger believed that this poetry holds the key for the possibility of 'another beginning' for Western thought, to be enacted by a constructive confrontation with the first beginning in ancient Greece. This second inception, he held, was inextricably bound to the destiny of the German *Volk*, ancient Greece's modern inheritors. Hölderlin, therefore, was "the poet who still stands before the Germans as a test".[4] It is unsurprising that Heidegger's interpretation of the German poet elicited a response from Buber, for he, too, was a steadfast reader of Hölderlin, and, like Heidegger, drew the poet into the orbit of his own thinking. Buber's 1952 essay thus participates in an ongoing assault on Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin that he conducts in various writings throughout the 1950s.

Buber approaches later Heidegger from a religiously-oriented perspective, highlighting Nietzsche's saying about the death of God as the departure point for Heidegger's general effort to think beyond 'the absolute' in metaphysics and religion. He alludes to the passages from "Letter on Humanism" where Heidegger complains against the association of his thought either with atheism or with indifference with respect to the question of God's existence. These interpretations are shallow and misguidedly metaphysical, Heidegger objects, because he is occupied with "the thinking that thinks from the question concerning the truth of being", which "questions more primordially than metaphysics can". The trodden question about the ontic existence of the entity 'God' is secondary and reflects a general impoverishment of thinking that does not delve deeper into the truth of being of God. Thus, Buber recognises that unlike Sartre, Heidegger is no atheist. Rather, his thinking seeks to prepare the grounds for an ontological turning-point that will allow for the return of the divine in unprecedented forms. Heidegger, then, aims to think anew the "relation of existence to the divine" (1965, p. 71). This, presumably, would be a philosophical aim that Buber, the famed theorizer of human-divine 'dialogue', would have easily identified with. Yet Buber believed that Heidegger is deeply erroneous in his manner of thinking on this matter. Indeed, he ultimately judges that Heidegger's 'thinking anew' in fact replicates a familiar - and flawed – tendency in the reflections on the human relation to the divine: that of magic.

[3] Heidegger (2000).
[4] Heidegger (2002a, p. 50).

The critique of Heidegger's magic centres on two points that, in Buber's mind, are interrelated and reflect some of the main religious deficiencies of Heidegger's scheme: the very notion of 'the gods' and what Buber interprets as the fundamentally cognitive path of their re-appearance. Buber explains that Heidegger sees the present as an epoch of "a double lack": the old gods have departed but the new gods have yet to reveal themselves. The present world is vacant of gods, though they can be 'resurrected', as it were. Heidegger's musings about the 'return of the gods' and the future appearances of the divine, Buber commentates, are particularly concerned "with those presuppositions of future reappearances which pertain to human thought, human thought, that is, about being" (ibid, p. 74). The most urgent task for thought, therefore, is "the thinking through of the basic religious concepts, the cognitive clarification of the meaning of words such as God or the holy" (ibid, p. 71-72). Buber is referring here to the important statement in "Letter on Humanism", appearing right after Heidegger's aforementioned denial of atheism. There Heidegger writes (1994, p. 267):

> "Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word 'God' is to signify. Or should we not first be able to hear and understand all these words carefully if we are to be permitted as human beings, that is, as eksistent creatures, to experience a relation of God to human beings? How can the human being at the present stage of world history ask at all seriously and rigorously whether the god nears or withdraws, when he has above all neglected to think into the dimension in which alone that question can be asked?"

Buber is aware of Heidegger's insistence that "it is not for man to decide whether and how the divine will reappear" because this takes place "only through the fate of being itself" (Buber, 1965, p. 72). However, he comes to interpret Heidegger as holding the view that the 'fate of being' does not come about independently of humans, but rather "it is precisely in human thought about truth that being becomes illuminated" (ibid, 72). This means two things that have bearings on our discussion. First, that the Heideggerian gods are placed under the immanence of being and therefore are in some way knowable. This, Buber challenges, runs contrary to the truism that throughout history those who have been designated as divine or godly have not been knowable objects but rather transcendent beings. This is an odd argument on Buber's part, for history is fraught with counter-examples of immanent beings deemed divine and godly. It appears that he is relying on circular logic according to which the cases he has in mind are solely those that fulfil his criteria for being godly or divine in the first place. Nevertheless, this assertion allows him to negate Heidegger's view and affirm that the divine or godly is only that transcendent Being that makes

itself present to humans in immanence through the revelatory experience of *relation*. Second, this means that humans have an active and indispensable role in the reappearance of the gods in Heidegger's scheme. Dasein is the site in and through which the 'sending of being' comes to pass, and the gods reappearance is linked to the cognitive clarification of fundamental religious concepts in human thought. The reappearance of the Heideggerian gods occurs through the fate of being which is fastened to human thought. The conclusion that Buber draws from this line of reasoning is that humans conjure [*beschwören*] the Heideggerian gods to appear as objects of thought.

This brings Buber to associate Heidegger with magic. For, as he claims, whether or not the gods are conjurable "has always distinguished religion from magic" (ibid, p. 75). Buber seems to have in mind sympathetic magic, which operates through a logic of analogies and differences, the effectivity of which is contingent on the successful establishment of a link between reality and the lingual denotation representing it. James Frazer called this the "law of Similarity" (1998, p. 11). In magic there is an equivalence of sign and signified. The word for, or name of, a thing is not an arbitrary denotative designation - it holds the essence of the thing, reflecting its real being. The passage from "Letter on Humanism" is interpreted as exhibiting this logic: the cognitive clarification of the word 'God' is tantamount to the evocation of this word which will affect and conjure God.

It is obvious that associating Heidegger with the category of magic is intended to be depreciatory. For Buber, magic is more than a perverse mode of enacting the religious relation with God; it is an impediment on such a relation. Charging the position he associates with Heidegger, Buber writes:

> "for he whom man imagined that he had conjured up could not, even if he yet figured as god, be believed in any longer as god. He had become for man a bundle of powers of which man's mysterious knowledge and might could disposed. He who conjured was no longer addressed nor was any answer any longer awakened in him, and even though he recited a prayer, he no longer prayed" (ibid, p. 75).

Magic, in Buber's conceptualization, allows for no mutual relation or partnership in dialogue, and thus leaves no room for divine presence. Neither the appealer nor the appealed are independent in magic: the human is in need of the gods' power, and the gods are coerced to appear. The gods of magic are no God: for the conjuring person, they are merely a 'bundle of powers' ready to be exploited. In Buber's view, however, both God and the human must be independent for genuine encounter to be achieved. Relationality presupposes and requires independence and freedom. "God does not let Himself be conjured, but he also will not compel", Buber affirms. "He is of

Himself, and He allows that which exists to be of itself" (ibid, p. 75). The human-divine relation requires divine grace, but also human preparation and openness. "Being turned toward us, descended to us, showed itself to us, spoke to us in the immanence", Buber proclaims. "The Coming One came of his own will out of the mystery of his withdrawnness; we did not cause him to come" (ibid, p. 74-75).

By designating Heidegger's views as magic, Buber positions the German philosopher as a foe to his dialogical thinking. Indeed, Buber insists on stressing the differences between his own views and Heidegger's, even when ostensible similarities emerge. For instance, he states that whether or not humans are willing to give themselves to God and respond to his address with their whole being "may have an immeasurable part in the actual revelation or hiddenness of the divine" (ibid, p. 76). This seemingly recognises, at least in part, the role humans play in the appearance of God, blurring, in effect, the strict distinction between his dialogical thinking and what he considers Heidegger's magic. However, to ensure the stability of this distinction, Buber continues:

> "But there is no place between heaven and earth for an influence of concept-clarifying thought. He whose appearance can be effected or co-effected through such a modern magical influence clearly has only the name in common with Him whom we men, basically in agreement despite all differences in our religious teachings, address as God. To talk of a reappearance of this conjured god of thought is inadmissible" (ibid, p. 76).

Buber also identifies in Heidegger's readings of Hölderlin testimonies to what he, Buber, calls "the dialogical principle". He cites, for example, the account Heidegger writes in "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" regarding the gods in the context of his reflections on the line from Hölderlin's *Hyperion*: "Since we are a conversation" [*Seit ein Gespräch wir Sind*]: "The gods can only enter the Word if they themselves address us and place their demand upon us. The Word that names the gods is always an answer to this demand" (ibid, p. 76).[5] This would seem to be in consonance with Buber's insistence that the human-divine encounter occurs through the initiation of divine address to which the human responds, a response that necessitates preparation and readiness. However, Buber immediately assures that all further utterances by Heidegger about the human encounter with the divine indicate that the German philosopher has distanced himself from this promising path. "It appears to us", Buber writes, "as if pregnant seeds have been destroyed by a force which

[5] Understandably, this is one of Buber's favorite lines from Hölderlin. He similarly mentions it, while explicitly polemicizing against Heidegger's interpretation, in Buber (2003a, p. 83-85). This statement also concludes the original German version of Buber's essay "Dem Gemeinschaftlichen folgen" (1956), though it is omitted from the English version, published as "What is Common to All" (1988b). An early version of Paul Celan's famous poem "Todtnauberg" began with this Hölderlinian line as well. See Gellhaus (2002).

has passed over them" (ibid).[6] In this context, it should be noted that it is likely that Heidegger's notion of 'naming the gods' [*Nennen der Götter*] resounded to Buber as connected to the category of magic as well. This notion is evoked repeatedly in *Elucidations*, including in the passages to which Buber refers in his essay. There Heidegger muses (2000a, p. 56-59):

> "We – human beings – are a conversation. Man's being is grounded in language; but this actually occurs only in *conversation*…Since we have been a conversation – man has experienced much and named many of the gods. Since language has authentically come to pass as conversation, the gods have come to expression and a world has appeared…But when the gods are originally named and the essence of things comes to expression so that the things first shine forth, when this occurs, man's existence is brought into a firm relation and placed on a ground".

It appears, thus, that Buber interprets "the cognitive clarification of the meaning of words such as God or the holy" as the 'naming of the gods', and that he takes this 'naming' to be the lingual or cognitive act of evoking the name of a god in order to conjure him.

Magic in Buber's Oeuvre

We can illuminate the conceptual intimacy Buber claims exists between Heidegger and magic by noting that for Buber, 'magic' refers to a very particular spiritual phenomenon. In the wider context of his dialogical writings, it is almost a technical term, denoting a coercive and instrumental solicitation of the divine. This specific religious perversion stands in contrast to what Buber deems 'proper' religiosity because it involves a manipulative exercise of power. One can gain a fairly good idea of what Buber views as the correct form of human-divine interaction by negating the characteristics he attributes to magic. Indeed, positing a contrast between relational religiosity and magic is a consistent feature of Buber's thought after he centres on the theme of 'dialogue' in the beginning of the 1920s. In *I and Thou*, he writes (1958, p. 109):

> "What distinguishes sacrifice [*Opfer*] and prayer [*Gebet*] from all magic [*Magie*]? – Magic desires to obtain its effects without entering into relation, and practices its tricks in the

[6] Another such moment is found in Buber's reproach of Jung's psychology of religion, where he quotes Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche to express his own view. "To Nietzsche's saying, 'All the gods are dead, now we desire that the superman live!'", Buber explains, "Heidegger, in a note otherwise foreign to him, adds this warning: 'Man can never set himself in the place of God because the essence of man does not reach to God's sphere of being…the superman does not and never will step into the place of God". Concluding this long quote from Heidegger, Buber judges: "these words compel one to listen with attention. One must judge whether that which is said or intimated in them does not hold true to –day and here" (1965, p. 91-92).

> void. But sacrifice and prayer are set 'before the Face', in the consummation of the holy primary word that means mutual action: they speak the Thou, and then they hear".[7]

Magic constitutes a form of non-relation between the human and God. It operates according to a logic of cause and effect that inserts a mechanistic aspect to the human-divine interaction. Expecting foreseen results, it destroys the possibility of mutuality and genuine openness to the unknown – what Buber terms faith as trust - that is required for dialogue. "To wish to understand pure relation as dependence", he notes in *I and Thou*, "is to wish to empty one of the bearers of the relation, and hence the relation itself, of reality" (IT, 109). The depraved consciousness of magic is based on the misconception that the human-divine relation can be achieved by means of control; indeed, that God *is* controllable. The god of magic is an 'It': it is a stable, familiar, evocable 'force' that can be hauled for the sake of human profit through an imposition of power. Treated as an instrument and approached through the determinations of utility and control, the god of magic cannot be a 'Thou'. This is alluded to in "Religion and Modern Thinking" when Buber referred to "man's mysterious knowledge and might" forcing the gods to appear. In a similar vein, in the 1928 lecture "The Faith of Judaism" Buber speaks of magic as "the exploration for the domitable mystery".[8] As he explains in this lecture, magic, alongside Gnosis, is a distortion of, and threat to, religion correctly conceived. These two spiritual forces "do not attack religion from the outside; they penetrate into religion, and once inside it, pretend to be its essence". With regards to magic, Buber writes (1948, p. 22): "he who thinks he can conjure [*beschwören*] [the mystery, God] and utilize [*benützen*] it, is unfit for the venture of true mutuality". The distortion of magic is located in its presumption that with "the performance of prescribed formulas and gestures" it can conjure and control God's manifestation (ibid).[9]

Buber's objection to the coercive attitude undergirding magic also impacts the way he understood the history of the religion he claimed was most attuned to the dialogical situation of human existence: Judaism. According to his counter-history, the Essenes and Jesus, Hasidism, and his own dialogical thought are exalted moments in Jewish history in which the dialogical principle informing the human-divine relation is acknowledged. In contrast, Kabbalah nourished from the spiritual distortions of gnosis and magic and as such is not only an impoverished spiritual moment but an internal threat to the religious reality of Judaism. This judgment of Kabbalah stems

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[7] In a correspondence with Franz Rosenzweig from around this time, Buber insisted on the antithetical relation between 'magic' and 'prayer', even despite Rosenzweig's suggestion to perceive the two as standing in some form of continuum. See Glatzer and Mendes-Flohr (1991, p. 272-276).

[8] Buber (1963, p. 194-195). In English: Buber (1948, p. 21-22). I have occasionally altered the translation. See also Smith (1965).

[9] On Buber and Gnosis, see Mendes-Flohr (1991); Brague (2002); Feller (2013); Erlewine (2016).

especially from its practical theurgical elements, which Buber considered acts "of 'violence'" (ibid, p. 21). His dispute with Gershom Scholem and his students over the depiction of Hasidism and its message is anchored in his understanding of Kabbalistic theurgy as an instrumental and coercive appeal to God, standing in contrast to the dialogical religiosity of Hasidism.[10]

Buber's understanding of magic in terms of utility and control and as antithetical to dialogical religiosity can also be seen in his interpretation of theophany at the Burning Bush, detailed in the book of Exodus. In this episode, Moses requests to learn the name of the God sending him on his mission, and God responds with the enigmatic *Eheye Asher Eheye* (Exodus 3:14). In both "The Faith of Judaism" and, in a more developed fashion, in the later work of biblical hermeneutics, *Moses*, Buber interprets Moses' request as reflecting the logic of sympathetic magic. He finds support for interpreting this episode in such terms from his understanding that the surrounding Egyptian cult 'religion', which constituted the historical and conceptual background for this biblical scene, was "little more than regulated magic" (1946, p. 53).[11] "When the Egyptians require their gods", he explains, "they invoke them by uttering their 'true' names in the correct fashion, and the gods come and do what is necessary". Requesting the name of a god indicates the appealers' desire to seize "the secret of the name, [so] they could conjure [*beschwören*] the god, and thus coerce him to manifest himself to them and save them" (1948, p. 23). The theophany at the Burning Bush is for Buber a momentous event in the history of the religion because it is here that "religion is demagicized" (1946, p. 53). For him, the dialogical human-divine relationship is revealed here through the duplicity in God's response to Moses' request. Buber interprets the first *Eheye* as: "I am and remain present". This constitutes "the implied reply to those influenced by the magical practices of Egypt, those infected by technical magic: it is superfluous for you to wish to invoke me [*herbeibeschwören*" (ibid, p. 52). The second *Eheye* is interpreted to mean: "He who promises his steady presence, his steady assistance, refuses to restrict himself to definite forms of manifestations; how could the people even venture to conjure and limit him!" (ibid). God's response, in this reading, is an anti-magic statement, polemicizing against the Egyptian practice of forcing the gods to reveal themselves and of dictating the manifestations of their revealing. What emerges from this event is that the relation with the biblical God is categorically different from the gods of magic because he is always present, and therefore there is no need to invoke him. Conjuring him is necessarily bound to fail, moreover, because it is impossible to restrict and control

[10] Scholem (1971); Schatz-Uffenheimer (1967). The Scholem-Buber debate has prompted a staggering amount of secondary literature.

[11] It should be noted that Buber insists that Moses anticipated that the distressed Israelites would have expected him to learn the deity's name in order to be able to control it; Moses himself did not hold such obscene views. A similar insistence on disassociating a venerable religious figure – Jesus - from the vestige of magic can be found in Buber (1951, p. 19-20).

the ways in which he reveals himself. As Buber summarises his reading of God's enigmatic response: "if the first part of the statement states: 'I do not need to be conjured for I am always with you', the second adds: 'but it is impossible to conjure me'" (ibid, p. 52-53). From these examples it can be seen that Buber has in mind a particular mode of human appeal to the divine when he speaks of 'magic'. This appeal is characterized by power, utility, and predictability that devastates mutuality and hinders the possibility of enacting a human-divine dialogue. 'Proper' religion, that is, dialogue, stands in opposition to magic just as independence opposes dependence, freedom opposes coercion, trust opposes control, and mutuality opposes manipulation.

For Buber, magic is a sustained spiritual tendency that constitutes a persistent threat on the possibility of dialogue. By linking later Heidegger to magic – and thus implying that his philosophy advances a framework in which the human-divine interaction is fraught with interest, manipulation, and control - Buber makes clear that Heidegger's later philosophy instantiates a spiritual illness to which his own dialogical thought can serve as a remedy.

Heidegger's Magic?

Turning now to address Buber's claim about the ideational links between magic and Heidegger, I wish to argue that the general concerns, animating logic, and underlying assumptions of magic, as understood by Buber, are deeply at odds with Heidegger's thought. The French philosopher Jean Wahl seems to have already recognized this when he noted (1967, p. 499) that "it seems at least that Buber has exaggerated Heidegger's involvement in what Buber calls 'modern magic'", though he does not offer an argument to support his assessment.[12] In what follows, I present an argument to this effect.

We can begin to see that Heidegger's views differ in a fundamental way from the features of magic (as Buber puts it to use) when we acknowledge that some of his basic philosophical presuppositions are at variance with the those operating in magic. This is so, most notably, with regards to the conceptions of 'language' and 'being'. Sympathetic magic, as Buber correctly notes, presupposes that language can perfectly capture the essence of Being, and therefore, with the correct knowledge and vocalization, one can gain access and control it. This conception rests on a metaphysical unity of Being and language, whereby language is understood as representational. Moreover, on this account, both Being and language can be fully accessible, transparent, and unconcealed. It should be noted that the correlation of language and Being is not necessarily

[12] As we shall see, judging the link between Heidegger and magic as an 'exaggeration', as Wahl does, is an understatement.

essential to the way Buber understands the category of magic, given he approaches it through the prism of relationality and mutuality. Presumably, he would equally object to forms of magic that do not require this account of language and Being, since magic, categorically, hampers the possibility of dialogue. Nevertheless, Buber indicates that Heidegger's philosophy concurs with these metaphysical presuppositions, and this, as we shall now see, is a position that is foreign to Heidegger.

As Heidegger repeatedly affirms, neither language nor being are simply 'there', present-at-hand, waiting and susceptible to be taken hold of. Being is neither a being nor the totality of beings, nor the actual existence of entities, nor still the ultimate everlasting Being. "The essence of being", he writes, "is such that, as a self-revealing, being reveals itself in a way such that a self-concealing, that means, a withdrawal - belongs to this revealing" (2010, p. 25). The illumination of being, its self-revealing in beings as what they are, is an event that comes about by means of and by the possibility of the concealment of other ways of disclosure. As a giving-withdrawal, being fades into the background, as it were, in order for beings to be made manifest. We cannot possess being because, strictly speaking, there is *nothing* to possess. We can, however, (and this, for Heidegger, is the most urgent *challenge*) 'own' it in terms of owning *up* to it; and in so doing, 'own' ourselves. Heidegger believes that traditionally philosophy has been oblivious of this feature of being as disclosure from concealment, as *a-letheia*, and of the difference between being and beings. Instead it has been occupied with beings and has forgotten the question-worthiness of the question of being [*Seinsvergessenheit*]. This seems to be an apt description of Buber's stance in "Religion and Modern Thinking", where he is openly unwilling to accept Heidegger's unconventional account of being. "I shall only confess", Buber admits, "that for me a concept of being that means anything other than the inherent fact of all existing being, namely, that it exists, remains insurmountably empty" (1965, p. 73).

That magic – and Buber - deal exclusively with the ontic and are therefore at cross purposes with Heidegger can further be seen when we consider his notion of 'language'. While the theme of language is a long-standing concern for Heidegger, his interests do not lie with what one may call 'ordinary' language - either the worn-down, shared linguistic currency employed in common forms of everyday communication, or even any sort of 'ideal language' that operates in magic, both of which function by means of phonetics and semiotic signs. For Heidegger, this is a secondary modality of language. The essence of language is not lingual. As he writes in *Elucidations* (2000a, p. 56-57) in the passages interpreting the line "Since we are conversation":

> "What we usually mean by 'language', namely, a stock of words and rules for combining them, is only an exterior aspect of language… Even where man's ability to speak is present and is put into practice, the essential event of language - conversation – does not necessarily occur".

Heidegger's primarily interest is in what may be termed 'originary' language, understood as the pre-linguistic ontological dynamic of world-disclosure (Wrathall, 2011). Language is the mysterious force that organizes the world as a general, coherent, and unified 'setting', orienting us towards entities in such a way that they become meaningful to us. Through a dynamic of concealment and disclosure that gathers and lays out references as part of a stable context, language offers the underlying structure of meanings by which things in the world obtain intelligibility and show up to us as what they are. Heidegger views language 'the foundation of world' for it alone brings beings into the presence of their apprehensibility. "The essential being of language is Saying as Showing", he defines it later. "Saying sets all present beings free into their given presence, and brings what is absent into their absence" (1971b, p. 123, 126). In this way, 'originary' language opens the world as a field of meaning about and in which ordinary communication (or silence) is made possible. This conception of language allows us to understand Heidegger's notion of the 'word'. A 'word' - for example, 'the holy', 'divinity', 'god' that Heidegger implores we must "first be able to hear and understand […] carefully" and that Buber based his affiliation of Heidegger with magic on - is not a representation; it is the gathering of an ontological nexus by means of which beings come to be understood. In his interpretation of Stefan Georg's poem "Das Wort", Heidegger writes (1971a, p. 66): "The word itself is the relation which in each instance retains the thing in itself in such a manner that it 'is' a thing". This is no ontic relation between sign and signified, the likes of which Buber has in mind. The word, like the structure of *logos* as it features in Heidegger's later writings, plays a role in allowing beings to be beings. "About the 'word'", he clarifies, "we also said that it not only stands in a relation to the thing, but that the word is what first brings the given thing, as the being that is, into this 'is'; that the word is what holds the thing there and relates it and so to speak provides it maintenance with which to be a thing" (ibid, p. 82-83). Calling to pay careful attention to the words 'god' and 'holy' as Heidegger does in "Letter on Humanism" means considering the process by which the nexus of stabilized relations gather and bring into presence entities from within a proximity to the holy. Only in so doing can the question of the nearness or withdrawal of the god be addressed seriously.[13]

[13] Interestingly, Buber attended this lecture and referred to it critically in his essay "The Word that is Spoken" (1988a). Cf. Kraft (1966, p. 80). Buber's essay was written as a paper for a conference Buber organized together with Heidegger

It becomes evident from this conception of language that however obscure Heidegger's account of 'the gods' may be, 'the naming of the gods' does not denote the utterance of certain gods' names.[14] The difference between these forms of naming resides, among other things, in the fact that in magic, language is treated as a tool at the disposal of humans to cull the gods, while Heidegger insists that "Language is not merely a tool which man possesses alongside many others; rather, language first grants the possibility of standing in the midst of the openness of beings" (2000a, p. 55-56). Heidegger also unstitches the possible understanding of the reappearance of the gods and the evocation of language as one of cause-and-effect when he states that "the presence of the gods and the appearance of the world are not merely a consequence of the occurrence of language; rather, they are simultaneous with it" (ibid, p. 58). Simultaneity and reciprocity rather than causation and control feature this occurrence. The very idea that humans can have a hold on language, as is the case in magic, is incomprehensible from this perspective, because "language […] is the foundation of human being" (1971b, p. 112). Instead, the 'naming' of which Heidegger speaks is an attunement to the orderings through which beings come into presence as what they are; it is appropriating the relation between being and human beings that opens up a domain for meaning-ful existential possibilities. This is the role of the poets; the naming of the gods is writing poetry in the Heideggerian sense. It is not, therefore, any sort of 'cognitive' clarification of concepts, nor are ontic and present-at-hand divine entities mechanistically conjured in the process.[15]

This means that the assumption of absolute correspondence between language and Being and their utter accessibility undergirding the logic of magic is far-removed from Heidegger's view. Being – or as he often writes, Beyng [*Seyn*] - is always also concealed; it is an abyss that cannot be articulated exhaustively or conclusively. Only a shallow conception of the being of beings can think it can grasp beings conclusively. There is, moreover, no 'stepping outside' the hermeneutic mediation or getting 'behind' language into 'ultimate unconcealment'. The dialectic of presence and absence of language means that ambiguity is fundamental to it. "Words fail us", Heidegger writes in *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, which he composed at the same time as he was engrossed

on the theme of 'language'. On the Buber-Heidegger meetings around this conference, see Mendes-Flohr (2014). Cf. also Bieman (2003a); Pöggeler (1986, p. 149-151).

[14] On Heidegger's gods, see, among many, Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy* (2002, p. 94-99); Wrathall and Lambeth (2011); Polt (2006). On Heidegger's ties to religion and theology more generally, see, among many, Crowe (2006); Crowe (2008); McGrath and Wierciński, eds. (2010); Vedder (2007); Hemming (2002); Kovacs (1990); Fischer and von Hermann, eds. (2007); Coyne (2015); Wolfe (2014).

[15] See for example, Zagano (1989).

in Hölderlin (though published much later), "they do so originally and not merely occasionally" (2012, p. 30).[16]

The mis-attribution of Heidegger with magic is further ascertained when we see that in contrast to the main line of Buber's criticism – that Heidegger promotes coercive and functional interactions with being and with the divine – Heidegger is in fact hostile to these forms of interactions. Testifying to this is a passage from *Elucidations*, which is noteworthy in this context because Buber picks it out and attacks it in his 1952 essay.[17] In this passage Heidegger elucidates the poet's relation to the holy by contrasting it to two traditions: the Judeo-Christian and Roman traditions. Of the Judeo-Christian tradition, he writes (2000a, p. 136-137): "The 'prophets' of these religions do not only utter in advance the primordial word of the holy. At the same time they prophesy the God on whom they count for the security of their salvation in celestial blissfulness". The Judeo-Christian prophets operate in a framework wherein the human relation to the divine is characterized by stability, familiarity, and predictability. They serve a pragmatic religious function, namely, securing salvation. With regards to Roman tradition, Heidegger writes: "Let one not disfigure Hölderlin's poetry by 'the religious element' [*das Religiöse*] of a 'religion' which expresses the Roman interpretation of the relation between men and gods. Let one not overburden the essence of this poetic calling by making the poet into a 'seer' in the sense of soothsayer" (ibid). Heidegger believed that in the Roman culture all spheres of life, including human relations with the gods, were dominated by utility and pragmatics, covering up the mysterious, unpredictable, and unknown facets of being.[18] *Contra* to the Judeo-Christian and Roman traditions, the 'holy' that is proclaimed by the Heideggerian poet does not approach the gods instrumentally or aim to affect them: "The holy which is foretold poetically merely opens the time for an appearing of the gods, and points into the location of the dwelling of historical man upon this earth" (ibid). The gods are not conjured or controlled; they appear when they appear. All the poets can do is prepare, 'open the time', and wait.

Considering Heidegger's insistence on the independence and unpredictability of the gods as well as the mere preparatory role of the poet, another flaw in the reasoning that allows Buber to make the Heidegger-magic link is revealed. Buber claimed that Heidegger's assumptions lead him to the position of magic, namely, that humans conjure the gods to appear. But for this reasonably to

[16] On the failure of language, see Wolfson (2018, pp. 109-130).
[17] On this passage, see Bernasconi (2013). Buber writes (1965, p. 73): "I have never in our time encountered on a high philosophical plane such a far-reaching misunderstanding of the prophets of Israel".
[18] Heidegger's objection to the (modern) category of 'religion' as inappropriately capturing the relation between humans and gods, in particular as this relation was manifested in ancient Greece, can be found, for example, in Heidegger (2011, p. 18) and (2000b, p. 241, 260).

resemble the logic of magic, Heidegger must be interpreted as claiming that the poet can make a deliberate, purposeful decision to conjure the gods. Buber, as noted above, acknowledges that Heidegger upholds the view that the appearance of the gods takes place as part of the fate of being which is not "a function of human subjectivity" (Buber, 1965, p. 71), though he ultimately interprets Heidegger as holding the contrary view. Yet it is clear that the understanding of agency appropriate to the practice of magic, that is, the determinate and active resolved 'self' deliberately aiming to affect the world, is at odds with the characteristics of the Heideggerian poet. In his exposition on the poem "Wie Wenn am Feiertage" in *Elucidations*, Heidegger writes that the poets are "those who co-respond to the wonderfully, all-present, to the powerful, divinely beautiful" (2000a, p. 78). They do not set out to affect the divine, but rather are themselves affected by this joint happening: "The poet's being will be decided anew on the basis of this correspondence". It is not a means-end relationship but a responsive and transformative engagement. Moreover, the subjectivist agency in play in magic is foreign to Heidegger's more general effort, beginning in the 1930s, of advocating the cultivation of a comportment characterized by participatory reticence, openness, and co-respondence.[19] Take, for example, the reflections that Heidegger extracts from Hölderlin's words 'Yet here comes that which I will [*Doch kommt das, was ich will*]' from the poem "*Andenken*" (ibid, p. 111): "Here 'will' does not at all mean the egotistically driven compulsion of a selfishly calculated desire. Will is the knowing readiness for belonging to one's destiny. This will wills only what is coming, for what is coming has already addressed this will, summoning it to know and to stand in the wind of the promise".

But seemingly nowhere is Heidegger's disavowal of the idea of manipulation, utility, and control more evident than in his reflections on 'the essence of technology' which he began to develop around this time. 'Technology' denotes the dominant mode of disclosure by which beings reveal themselves to us in the modern world. In the technological mode of disclosure, beings show up to us as replaceable resources, as 'standing reserve' or 'stock', lacking inherent significance and awaiting our manipulation and exploitation. Heidegger often employs the verb *herausfordern* - challenging, demanding, imposing - to highlight the violence inherent to technology: "The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging, which puts to nature the defying demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such" (1993, p. 320). Provoking the human desire for control, technology is, at bottom, a manifestation of the "will to power" (2014a, p. 238). In its all-encompassing way, "the absolute, essential domination of modern

[19] As he said in his televised interview with Richard Wisser in 1969: "The fundamental thought of my thinking is precisely that being, or the manifestation of being, *needs* human being and that, vice versa, human beings are human beings only if they are standing in the manifestation of being". In Neske and Kettering, eds. (1990, p. 82).

technology" holds sway over us and enframes our relation to the world as 'machination' [*Machenschaft*], a coercive form of ordering (2000a, p. 203).[20] The deficiency of the technological configuration of truth is that it constitutes a forceful form of forgetfulness of being. In its challenging, it detaches and uproots beings from the excess of their being and deepens the forgetting of the questionability of the *Seinfrage*. It forces a monistic, impoverished, and objectifiable disclosure, absolutizing and hence limiting the richness of being's possible manifestations. "The men of this earth", Heidegger writes (ibid, p. 202) in "Hölderlin's Earth and Heaven",

> "are provoked by the absolute domination of the essence of modern technology, together with technology itself, into developing a final world-formula which would once and for all secure the totality of the world as a uniform sameness, and thus make it available to us as a calculable resource".

While humans play a role in its revealing, they do not control technology. The "domination" of technology amounts to a "self-blinding slavery" (2014b, p. 427) to its command. It controls them, and its controls runs so deep that any attempts to combat it or to regain control over it is done by technological means - through "the will to master it" (1993, p. 313), thereby perpetuating its hold. In contrast to this, Heidegger wishes to cultivate a gratuitous rather than controlling mode of human responsiveness to being.[21] He would later suggest that the way out of the present technological hold is *through* technology. The 'saving power' from its conditioning is to exercise a certain manner of 'letting go' of control and to develop an attitude of *Gelassenheit*, a "renouncing of willing" (1966, p. 59) that ponders and cultivates a receptivity to the mystery of revealing.[22] This releasement prepares for the future coming of another, non-technological, 'sending' of being.

This brief recap of Heidegger's reflections on technology allows us to see that insinuated in the aforementioned critique of the Judeo-Christian and Roman traditions' attitude toward the divine is a critique of what he took to be their technological character. In an entry in the *Black Notebooks* Heidegger attributes technology to the "*Roman-Romanic*-modern spirit" (2014c, p. 323), which he negates to what is German. Furthermore, not unlike Buber, who insisted that magic is an enduring spiritual tendency but also associated it more specifically with ancient Egyptian culture, for

[20] Cf. Joronen (2012).
[21] While in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) Heidegger does speak of the necessity of human 'violence' with respect to being, he quickly moves away from this way of thinking. Already in *Contributions* (1936-38), *Besinnung* (1938-39), the *Nietzsche* lectures, and basically all subsequent writings, Heidegger associates power and violence with metaphysics. In *Elucidations*, being is said to be 'powerful', but not in the sense of control: "The essence of power", he writes, "is determined from the all-presence of nature, which Hölderlin calls 'powerful, divinely beautiful'. Nature is powerful because she is god-like in beauty" (76). Cf. Dallmayr (2001); Polt (2006, p. 153-154).
[22] See B. W. Davis (2007).

Heidegger also Americanism, Bolshevism, and the English, among others, concretized the essence of technology. Notoriously, however, he associates it with "World Jewry" [*Weltjudentum*]. Some of Heidegger's most disturbing utterances with regard to the Jews pertain to his conception of the Jews as technology-incarnate. In his construal, the Jews, agents of machination, possess a unique skill for calculativity. Their lineage has been maintained by technological-racial means of intramarriage, and as an unrooted people, their "world-historical 'mission'" is that of "the uprooting of all beings from being" (2014, p. 243).[23] Heidegger also deems technological some biblical-theological concepts that were introduced to the West by the Jews. One such idea is 'creation', the notion that the world is produced and God is its manufacturer and cause.[24] 'Prophecy' is another theological concept interpreted in terms of technology. This was insinuated in the passage about the biblical prophets from *Elucidations* and stated explicitly in a 1942 entry from the *Black Notebooks*: "'prophecy' is a technology of defence against the destinality of history [*Geschicklichen der Geschichte*]", he submits. "It is an instrument of the will to power. That the great prophets are Jews is a fact whose secret has not yet been thought […] 'Prophecy' is forward-looking history and therefore the technological perfection of the essencing of history" (2015, p. 159). Heidegger, then, rejected the utilizing and power-laden contact with the world. A central aspect of Heidegger's philosophical efforts is to prepare for the overcoming or trans-ending of this metaphysical and technological enframing and to propose a poetic mode of dwelling in the world.

It thus becomes apparent that the logic of magic is congruent with the technological modality. One can see in Heidegger's account of technology an interesting inversion of Max Weber's link between technology and elimination of magic. In his famous lecture "Science as Vocation" (1917/1919) Weber writes (1991, p. 139) the following about the increasing rationalization of modern life:

> "[…] it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer to have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculation perform the service".

[23] Since the publication of Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* and the disturbing comments on Jews found in them, there has been an explosion of publications on the topic. See, for example, Nancy (2017); Di Cesare (2015); Wolfson (2018); Farin and Malpas, eds. (2016); Trawny (2014); Heinz and Kellerer, eds. (2016); Homolka and Heidegger (2016).
[24] See for example, Heidegger (2012, p. 88); Heidegger (2001, p. 207); Heidegger (2015, p. 358).

In contrast to Weber, who speaks here of technology ontically, for Heidegger technology is not opposed to magic, but rather shares its ontological enframing. Indeed, in his view the rise to prominence of modern natural sciences' way of representing, which "pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces [*Kräftezusammenhang*]" (1993, p. 326) and gains mastery over it, is an indication of the taking-over of the technological mode of revealing.

A comparison to a passage by William James can press home the misattribution of magic and attitudes of coercion and manipulation to Heidegger. In "What is Pragmatism", James writes (1907, p. 21):

> "Metaphysics has usually followed a very primitive kind of quest. You know how men have always hankered after unlawful magic, and you know what a great part in magic *words* have always played. If you have his name, or the formula of incantation that binds him, you can control the spirit, genie, afrite, or whatever the power may be. Solomon knew the names of all the spirits and having their names, he held them subject to his will. So the universe has always appeared to the natural mind as a kind of enigma, of which the key must be sought in the shape of some illuminating or power-bringing word or name. That word names the universe's *principle*, and to possess it is after a fashion to possess the universe itself. 'God', 'Matter', 'Reason', the 'Absolute', 'Energy', are so many solving names. You can rest when you have them. You are at the end of your metaphysical quest".

James equates here the metaphysical tendency to ground or reduce reality to a single unifying 'principle' to the practice of 'naming' in magic. He conceptualizes this tendency in terms of power and control, and also points to its effect of closing off questioning. Without overstating the extent to which Heidegger should be compared to pragmatism (which he criticized in "Letter on Humanism" for its "blindness and arbitrariness") I wish to suggest that this passage invites comparison to Heidegger's articulation of the problem of onto-theology.[25] Heidegger identifies in the philosophical tradition a tendency, beginning with Aristotle, to conflate ontology, the science of being, and theology, the science of the highest being. In the ontotheological tradition of metaphysics, the entire structure of reality is based on, participates in, and assumes meaning from, a single ultimate ground. James' list of 'solving names', including "'God', 'Matter', 'Reason', the 'Absolute', 'Energy'" recalls Heidegger's own list of the prominent capstone notions operating historically in different metaphysics as the *Causa sui*: "*Phusis*, *Logos*, *Hen*, *Idea*, *Energia*, Substantiality,

[25] For a comparison between pragmatism and Heidegger, see Rosenthal (1991). For pragmatistic readings of *Sein und Zeit*, see Brandom (1983); Okrent (1988); see also Rorty (2005).

Objectivity, Subjectivity, Will, Will to Power, Will to Will".[26] Other examples of *Urwesen* are *Ousia*, which Heidegger considers particularly important, and the theological-metaphysical God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Stripped of all mystery, the ontotheological god is a present-at-hand being, conceptualizable, objectifiable. The ontotheological god is thought of through a specific understanding of causation, that of efficient causality. This god, in other words, is a technological god. Of this god Heidegger writes (1993, p. 331):

> "Thus where everything that presences exhibits itself in the light of a cause-effect coherence, even God, for representational thinking, can lose all that is exalted and holy, the mysteriousness of his distance. In the light of causality, God can sink to the level of a cause, of *causa efficiens*. He then becomes even in theology the God of the philosophers, namely, of those who define the unconcealed and the concealed in terms of the causality of making, without ever considering the essential provenance of this causality".

The human relation to the ontotheological god is impoverished and limited, constituting a form of non-relation. "Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this God", Heidegger maintains. "Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before God" (1969, p. 72). The main problem with ontotheology, linked as it is to the technological disclosure of being, is that it perpetuates the oblivion of being, deeming the most question-worthy question, the *Seinsfrage*, un-question-worthy. "Theologians", Heidegger postulates, "talk of the beingmost of all beings [*das Seiendste alles Seienden*], without ever letting it occur to them to think about being itself" (2002b, p. 194). The juxtaposition to James's critique of metaphysics in terms of magic, I believe, illuminates the connection between metaphysics, magic, and power that applies to Heidegger's logic as well.

In contrast to what is indicated in Buber's critique, therefore, Heidegger's reflections on technology bespeak a strong impulse *against* attitudes of manipulation and exploitation towards being and towards God. Indeed, techniques of power, strict calculative formulas, conception of necessary causality, and demand for efficacy to which magic is associated exhibit exactly the technological attitude and machination that Heidegger contested. Instead of cultivating receptivity and gratitude to the mystery and undeterminancy of being, magic reduces it to the sameness of presence and is predicated on predictability, control, and power.

End

[26] Heidegger (1969, p. 66). Cf. Thomson (2005).

Heidegger and Buber diverge with respect to their core concerns and objectives. Buber is concerned with relationships between beings and hence deals with the ontic, while Heidegger's concern is ontological, dealing with the 'truth of being' and the Sein-Dasein correspondence. Buber worries about the threats to relationality and dialogue posed by magic, while Heidegger worries about the threat of oblivion of being posed by technology and metaphysics. Buber's opposition to relations of utility and objectification focuses on our approach toward the world and God, while Heidegger speaks of the technological conditioning of the way in which beings show up *to* us *as* objectifiable and manipulatable. These important differences are reflected in the variances between the conceptions of 'being' and 'language' that Buber attributes to Heidegger and Heidegger's actual views. But most importantly, the claim that Heidegger promotes attitudes of utility, coercion, and manipulation, as Buber suggests, cannot be defended. This is because Heidegger, like Buber himself, objects to these attitudes in the human encounter with the world and with God. Both thinkers share this fundamental sentiment, though the polemic of one is the mirror-image of the other. Buber characterizes his dialogical Judaism as beaconing a utility- and coercion-free relation with God and the world, *in contrast* to Heidegger's utility and coercion-laden magic. Heidegger employs an inverted version of this same model: his projected poetic mode of dwelling in being is contrasted to Judaism which embodies, in his view, the technological disclosure. Buber's attempt to map his disagreement with Heidegger on to the magic-religion distinction is therefore dubious. That Heidegger is in fact in agreement with Buber on this important issue suggests that the claim that Heidegger's later thinking is a contemporary instantiation of magic better reflects the theoretical framework through which Buber justifies his dialogical position than an apt assessment of Heidegger's thought.

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