

Beyond Theodicy: the Divine in Heidegger and Tragedy

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One of the many perplexing aspects of tragedy and tragic literature for our Western philosophical and religious traditions has been its implication of the gods (or, in more general terms, the divine) as the cause of human suffering and the source of evil (as well as good) in the world. Plato's famous criticism of the poets in *The Republic*, for instance, rests in part on this very issue of the nature of the divine. Given his understanding of God as good, Plato declares that we must devise an interpretation of the events in tragic literature that shows that the hero deserved his fate as the proper chastisement of his ways by a good and righteous God; otherwise such literature must be censured.¹ In other words, by Plato's account, divine justice must be vindicated in the face of the existence of evil; human suffering must be rendered as *theodicy*. Aristotle, though differing in his attitude toward tragedy, essentially follows Plato by interpreting tragedy in terms of the "tragic error" (*hamartia*) of the hero or heroine rather than the "divine blindness" (*ate*) that was emphasized by

"divine comedy" takes the place of tragedy.

These attitudes toward tragedy continue to hold sway in our philosophical and religious traditions down through the ages. Thus we find Hegel's influential theory of tragedy interpreting the action according to the dictates of Plato, insofar as Hegel transforms tragedy into a kind of secular theodicy. For Hegel, one-sided claims of absoluteness and the contradictions between ethical claims are annulled, reconciled and resolved in a vindication of "eternal justice" and "the rationality of destiny," i.e., in a vindication of the Absolute Idea.⁴ In our century, Karl Jaspers and Reinhold Niebuhr, though acknowledging a tragic element in our existence, proclaim that "tragedy is not enough" and tell us that we must in fact go "beyond tragedy" to "the encompassing" or the hope of salvation provided by that suffering servant, Jesus Christ. Even Paul Ricoeur, who has taken pains to study tragedy and the tragedy of evil and learn its lessons, finally looks to some sort of hope and reconciliation that surmounts tragedy.⁵

Yet it is also Paul Ricoeur who asks

... who does not see that theodicy never goes beyond the level of an argumentative and persuasive rhetoric? It is no accident that it has recourse to so many arguments, all the more abundant in proportion to their weakness. For how could thought raise itself to the point of view of the whole and be able to say: 'Because there is order, there is disorder?' And if it could, would it not reduce the sorrows of history to a farce, to the sinister farce of a play of light and shadows, or even to an esthetic of discord? ... Such is the *bad faith of theodicy*: it does not triumph over real evil but only over its esthetic phantom.⁶

In other words, an interpretation of tragedy and tragic literature in terms of the justice of God or the gods or the reconciliation of contradictions and suffering in a higher order (i.e., theodicy) does not fully account for the way that tragedy raises the problem of evil and the demonic character of the divine. Such an interpretation "fails to account for the portrayal of divine power as at least morally ambiguous and in some cases blatantly unjust and arbitrary."⁷

In tragedy, then, we have, on the one hand, the gods as responsible for goodness, justice and ideals; on the other hand, the gods are held responsible for evil and suffering in the world. How are we to understand these "twin masks of Zeus"?⁸ What sort of interpretation can we make of God or the gods as portrayed by tragedy that does justice to these two apparently contradictory characteristics of divinity, and thereby does justice to the reality of both the goodness and suffering in the world? How are we to understand both the guilt and innocence of both the gods and human beings that is shown to us by tragic literature? What is (are) the lesson(s) to be learned from so-called "tragic theology"?

It is in an attempt to answer these questions concerning "tragic theology" that I propose in this paper to turn to the thought of Martin Heidegger and his reflections on the divine and the Holy and apply it to tragic literature. Heidegger's talk of "the divine ones" — not unlike tragedy's depiction of the gods — has caused interpreters no little consternation. Some have dismissed it as paganism; others have dismissed it as a bit of poetic license with no bearing on theology and religion. Still others have voiced an uneasiness with such serious and pious talk, and suspect that Heidegger may be retreating back into the realm of metaphysics in speaking

of the gods.⁹ Yet, as I and others¹⁰ have sought to show, there is a coherence to this "post-Platonic, post-Christian" thinker's talk of the divine; and, though Heidegger never developed a "theory" of tragedy or discussed the meaning of tragedy, such talk seems to do much to illuminate the situation depicted in tragic literature.¹¹ If that is so, we will not only develop a better understanding of "tragic theology" by applying Heidegger's thinking to it, we will also strengthen the claim that there is a unique and challenging vision of what is divine in the thinking of Heidegger that clearly goes beyond the bounds of our Judeo-Christian tradition.

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From the beginning we need to note that, from the Greek prototype for the tragic literature of its Golden Age — i.e., Homer's *Iliad* — through the tragic literature of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides (no matter how "pious" or "impious" they may be), to the tragic literature of later centuries, the gods signify purity, light, holiness, perfection and the blessings and guidance that follow from such characteristics. Thus Apollo, for example, is often called Phoebus — the pure, the holy; he is a god of healing and purification, which is why he is consulted in *Oedipus Rex* and is the moving force behind Orestes' revenge in the *Orestia*. His music, in its beauty and moderation, educates, and his oracle at Delphi gives guidance, and reveals what is hidden. Artemis likewise is designated *hagne* ("pure"), her beauty renowned; she is known as a brilliant blaze and "goddess of the twofold torch" who cares for the wild beasts and presides over childbirth. Athena is designated "the bright-eyed" (*Glaukopsis*), born of Zeus and thus a counsellor of reasonable action,

practical understanding and practical thinking. Aphrodite, who guides men's hearts, bestows blessings of seed and fruit by giving love to heaven for earth; in addition, her daughter is none other than *Harmonia* — harmony. Even the earth gods and goddesses — who are not of the Olympian order — are noted as a source of wisdom and responsible for the blessings of the earth, providing what is valid and needful. And of course there is the epitome of the gods, Zeus, the perfect, omniscient, kindly and hospitable bearer of justice and restorer of rights who prevails by reason and persuasion and gathers together and sends the dispensations of fate in his lightning bolts.¹² This pattern continues in Shakespeare — for whom the oft-called-upon gods in *King Lear*, for example, are "blest" (II, iv, 69), "great" (III, ii, 49), "ever-gentle" (IV, vi, 218) and are looked to for shelter and protection (I, i, 782, V, iii, 257) — and in such modern tragedy as *Waiting for Godot*, in which the promise (of salvation?) of God[ot]'s coming is just one of many religious overtones in Beckett's play. Whether in the words of a tragic hero or heroine, the chorus, or a villian, the greatness and importance of the divine is always acknowledged.

Interpreting such occurrences of the divine in tragedy, we may say with Heidegger that the gods, in their dignity and splendor, open up a world in which we may live.¹³ World, for Heidegger, is not the sum of all things, nor some transcendental framework of categories, beliefs or hypotheses. Instead, world is a kind of "clearing" [*Lichtung*] which opens up, and is opened up by, our dealings with things, whereby things manifest themselves to us. World then is the disclosure of beings within-the-world that holds sway [*weltet*, i.e., "worlds" = *walten*] in all our activities; it is the relational whole

of signifying and meaning in which we already find ourselves and by which we are given possibilities that enable us to find ourselves and to be who we are. Non-objectifiable, because not some constant presence (i.e., no-thing), world is a "happening," a dynamic, creative, historical "action" of revealing and concealing that disposes and determines us in one way or another. World is an "event of meaning" [*Ereignis*] that lets us into our own [*eigen*] and therefore lets us be who we are authentically [*eigentlich*].¹⁴

Of old and of the future, an origin from which possibilities spring forth and come here [*Ursprung, Her-kunft*] from the future, the world is the whole [*das Heil*], the holy [*das Heilige*]. The holy is not a property borrowed from an established god, but is this open center [*Mittel*] in the midst [*Mittel*] of everything that arranges the relations between everything real and grants to everything the essential space in which it belongs according to its essence. Thus it is the holy that is announced by the dignity and splendor of the gods as they present us with possibilities and ways of being. Present in opening up and illuminating the beauty and serenity of the holy, the gods are, in fact, this lighting, clearing and opening up of the site, the place, in which we may dwell; they themselves are serenifiers, carriers of the light and brightness of the holy that thereby enable its highest shining, which brings joy and healing to mortals.¹⁵

Put another way, the god and gods provide a measure [*Mass*] for human dwelling. Man spans [*durchmisst*] the dimension of his dwelling, the dimension which measures out and metes out [*zumessen*] what and how he may be, by sighting himself by the upward glance to the sky and the divine. Since there is no measure on the earth, man

must look beyond, upward, to the sky, to the gods; only in this way is he able to be commensurate [*gemäss*] with his essence.¹⁶ In other words, human beings are who they are by living up to the measure that the divine provides. What makes the tragic hero or heroine noble and worthy of praise is defined by the extent to which they live up to the measure of a god. Prometheus is himself a god, peculiarly dedicated to the earth and its seed, humanity. Orestes and Oedipus both take their cue from Apollo, the purifier. Oedipus in particular, the solver of riddles and wise man of action who attempts to purge Thebes of its pollution, seems to aim at being a human Apollo. Antigone's character and actions follow the law of the gods; Hippolytus' character is modelled on that of Artemis. The love of Othello and Desdemona, to cite an example from later tragedy, is surely modelled on the ideal of Christian love that is the Christian god (love, and/or love and devotion to a Fatherly King seems to be at issue in many of Shakespeare's tragedies). Tragedy involves characters with an exemplary devotion to love, truth, justice, integrity or some other such virtue, signified by a god; as Hippolytus says, "one man honors one god/and one another" (104). He and other tragic heroes and heroines are all defined and determined in their measuring up to a god.

Yet enchanted by the enchanting gods, struck by the "holy beam" that is the guiding light and brightness of divinity — and thus blessed by divine fullness — the tragic hero suffers and, in many cases, is destroyed. Carried away and "presuming" [*vermessen*] to follow his success by losing himself in the sole ownership of the god (what the Greeks called *até*, "divine blindness"), the tragic hero misses himself [*missen sich*] in measuring himself [*missen*

stich by the god.¹⁷ Whether the hero is an Oedipus, Antigone or Othello — all of whom are actually quite pious in listening to the dictates of the god(s) (Othello *loves* Desdemona “too well”) and thus in many ways quite innocent — or a Prometheus, Lear (who is in the beginning a royal demigod not unlike Prometheus in his bearing), Hippolytus or Macbeth — all of whom are somewhat arrogant and overbearing in their devotion to the ideal or dictates of the divine ones — the tragic hero meets with trouble and disaster. Even when the hero escapes ultimate disaster, as in the case of Orestes in *The Eumenides*, he is sorely tried for his deeds, and the play’s conclusion is hardly comforting for those who would follow the dictates of a god (Orestes is, after all, only “acquitted” because of a hung jury, and not because of any inherent virtue or piety in following Apollo’s dictates). How is it, then, that man misses himself and is thereby destroyed in measuring up to the divine?

We have already noted that the gods disclose ways of being and thereby announce the holy. In order to answer our question we also need to note that the very essence of being — the way in which being is given as the world holds sway — is both a revealing and concealing of being. The historical nature of being — such that “there is” being *les gibt Sein*, i.e., being is given¹⁸ only in the withdrawal of and differing from what has been (the past) and the withholding and deferring of what is to come (the future) — indicates that concealing is essential to any revealing and unconcealing of being. This concealment is not a lack or privation in the sense of something present that could or would eventually be uncovered, for past and future are not things, i.e., they are nothing, though they belong to the giving of being and

are essential to it. The whole of the giving of being that is the play of the world, then, proves to be twofold; it is a holy abyss [*Abgrund*] of revealing and concealing that has its “unity” in this differing and strife, in the belonging together of revealing and concealing.¹⁹

Now insofar as the gods *are*, and however they are (present or absent), they are subject to the play of the world, i.e., they come to presence out of the worlding of the world, the clearing and opening region of being that is the holy. Coming to presence out of the holy, the god appears as a unique event of meaning by fulfilling the dispensations of fate [*Schickungen des Geschicks*], by sending [*schicken*] being, such that the god sometimes takes the name of that unconcealment of being for him or herself (e.g., Zeus or the gods are often “identified” with fate in Greek thought, just as God is seen as providing all in the Western religious traditions). But such naming is ambiguous and dangerous, for the highest *being* does not properly name the holy. The god — as immortal, “timeless”, unchanging, constant presence — threatens the holy with the loss of its essence, for the holy is not some *thing* but a revealing and concealing that makes the holy ever-emerging, inipient, dynamic.²⁰ The perfection of a god misleads us, blinds us, to the nature of being, even as it discloses being, resulting in a concern with theology (with the highest being) and a forgetfulness of (or “obliviousness” to; *Ver-gessenheit*) (the whole of) being.

With such “forgetfulness” we are guilty, as the situation in tragedy indicates and as Heidegger notes in *Being and Time* (327ff). In having a potentiality-for-being, human beings are and must be that which has been given to us, though we have *not* laid this basis and can *never* have power over this

basis. “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends, / Roughhew them how we will” (*Hamlet*, V. ii, 10-11), and we see this exhibited time and again in the case of tragedy: the hero or heroine is (at least to some extent) put in a situation he or she does not determine.²¹ Likewise, in being, we stand in one possibility and are thus constantly *not* other possibilities. The tragic hero or heroine’s attentiveness to a god or goddess and the greatness they reveal necessarily overlooks and neglects other values, other gods, other possibilities. The not, the nullity [*Nichtigkeit*], the nothing, determines us as the way in which we are, the way being presences and comes to be disclosed. This “Being-the-basis of a nullity” [*Grundsein einer Nichtigkeit*] Heidegger calls guilt, for the concept of guilt embraces both the sense of *responsibility* and *negativity* in play here. Who we are given to be is not something final, but an *ongoing project* of self-appropriation whereby we must bear the *responsibility* for who we are, though we have *not* fully determined who we may be, and are *not* all things in being who we are. Thus the way in which we are is guilty. Applied to the realm of tragedy, we may say that the tragic hero or heroine is guilty not because of some fault, some tragic error or *hubris* (though these may come into play on a secondary level), but because they have been given to follow, and have chosen to follow, one god rather than another, to be one possibility and *not* others. Their greatness depends on being that possibility, but so does their guilt.

Yet such an understanding of mortals’ guilt does not absolve the gods, for though the gods show themselves as the highest, they are not the whole. In revealing one possibility, they conceal others; they are one thing and *not*

another. Thus the gods, in their beckoning enchantment, are a null basis of measurement, a basis that proves uncertain because it is shot through with what it is not. Put another way, their perfection is a limitation when seen in the light of the whole of being; the gods — including Zeus (or the Christian god, for that matter) — are in fact limited (“finite”) and not the highest. We see this in tragedy in that the gods oppose one another, such that their influence often times does not cover another god (e.g., though she has power over both gods and men, Aphrodite’s power does not extend to chaste Artemis; and the power of love does not always get the best of the devil [Iago]). Even in the case of men the gods cannot do certain things (e.g., bring back the dead; cf. *Eumenides*, 646). Though it is sometimes indicated that Zeus is “the highest,” that naming is uncertain (e.g., *Agamemnon*, 160f), and it is clear in *Prometheus* that Zeus, as in the case of the other gods, must bow to fate and necessity.²² We also see their limitation in that, despite their importance in the play, the gods rarely (if ever really) are actors in the drama. Though central to the conflict, Zeus never appears in *Prometheus Bound* and *The Eumenides*; despite their importance, the gods in Sophocles’ plays likewise never appear (with the exception or the prologue-like appearance of Athena in *Ajax*) on stage. The oft-called upon gods in *King Lear* and a much talked about Godot who never arrives are two more striking examples of this strange absence of figures that are central to the play. Thus we find that, in fact, the gods almost always appear by virtue of the actions of human beings, such that the god seems a part of the man and man and god are almost as one. Thus Apollo is present in *The Libation Bearers* and *Oedipus Rex* through the

activities of Orestes and Oedipus; Zeus appears as he is through the naming done by Prometheus and the chorus. The gods appear through the questioning of the chorus (*Antigone*, 279), the chaste haughtiness of a man (Hippolytus), the uncontrolled passion of a woman (Phaedra), the love of a man and a woman (Othello and Desdemona) and the diabolical cynicism and conning of a man (Iago) (the devil is, after all, a bitter proof of the existence of God). The gods need mortals in order to appear, and in this show a limitation.²²

When a god or gods is a character in the play, this makes for a mirroring of the duplicity of being in another way. Through the gods are revealed in everything in the sky and on the earth, in everything that is familiar to man, these things are alien [*Fremde*] to the god. The god, in sending himself in these things that are alien to him, thereby remains a stranger [*ein Fremdes*] to man.²³ Thus we find that the gods in tragedy are often strange or unknown: they are demigods (e.g., Prometheus, Herakles, Dionysus), which masks their divinity and often makes them more revealing of humanity than divinity, or messengers (e.g., Hermes, whose very nature is to be tricky and deceitful, in *Prometheus* and *The Eumenides*), which accentuates the absence of another god, or they are "merely" marginal commentary that is unknown to the hero (e.g., Aphrodite in *Hippolytus* recites a prologue and epilogue, or Athena's appearance in *Ajax* which serves as a kind of prologue to the action). The god, in some important sense, is *unknown*, and thereby proves to be a strange sort of measure.

We find this strangeness revealed in other ways as well. From the queries made in *The Persians* as to why the gods "blinded" Xerxes, to the unrelent-

ing interrogative mood of such plays as *Hamlet* or *Godot* which is set in motion by otherworldly forces (i.e., the ghost, the awaited Godot), the participants almost constantly question the gods and ask why their justice and guidance are lacking, or has taken a certain turn. This interrogative mood again indicates that the gods remain strangers to men. It is often in conjunction with this questioning attitude that we find the gods withdrawing from a scene in which they were formerly present, and/or we find them appearing in some demonic, inhuman form. Thus in *The Iliad*, Patrokles is summoned to his death, blinded and destroyed, by Zeus and Apollo (16. 698, 845, 849-50), and Athena misleads as Apollo foresakes Hektor in his climactic battle with Achilles (22. 213, 227ff). Zeus proves a petty tyrant in *Prometheus*, Apollo obscene and/or inhuman in *The Eumenides* and Euripides' *Electra*, Aphrodite jealously vengeful in *Hippolytus*. "Heavenly" love (the very description of the Christian god) "strikes where it doth love" (*Othello* V. ii, 22), and the gods do not protect an honest Cordelia, as Albany wished (*Lear*, V. iii, 257-8). From Homer's bickering gods and the gods' mocking abandonment of Antigone (cf. 800, 923), to the sheer inhumanity and pettiness of the gods as portrayed by Euripides and the limitations of heavenly virtues shown by Shakespeare, the divine shows a cruel and savage Dionysian aspect that contrasts with its Apollonian perfection and clarity.²⁵ Again the gods appear as strange and unknown.

It is clear, then, that the gods are not a final repose and resting place, a constantly present "yardstick" of our being to which we measure up by imitating the god as if made in his or her image. The gods cannot be reckoned with in this way, for the god — as ideal,

as stranger, as unknown — proves an abysmal, daimonic measure. Yet such duplicity is in keeping with the gods' disclosure of being. Faced with the presence (or absence) of the god in all his or her aspects, man is directed to the groundless play of the world — the abyss of being, the nothingness of existence — in which the essence of human being is grounded. Cast down from a heavenly height in the presence or absence of the god — a heavenly height from which men are "almost too small for sight" and "cannot be heard so high" (*Lear*, IV. vi, 20, 22), such that we often find the tragic hero or heroine inhuman in their treatment of others, including those most dear — man is thrown back upon himself and his dwelling on the earth (where, as Hölderlin says, there is no measure) and called upon to become more radically man. To become more radically man is to be open to our ownmost possibility: death. Only in being-toward-death, being capable of death as death, is man able to stand out into the clearing of being and attain to what is his own, for death is the shrine of the nothing that harbors within itself the essence of being: the giving of being, wherein man is able to be. Ajax's words — "Darkness that is my light, / Murk of the underworld, my only brightness" (394-5) — are typical of the tragic insight shared by Heidegger: that death is a dark light, because facing our mortality and finitude shatters all illusions of security and constancy, opens us up to the gathered sending [*Ge-schick*, i.e., fate, destiny] of being that is the holy, and to the task of being: projecting a future by appropriating what has been.²⁶ An acknowledgment and "acceptance" of their doom (or at least personal emptiness, that there is no reward) as part of their acceptance of the god's call, whether that doom is known

beforehand or not, most often characterizes the tragic hero or heroine and makes for much of the moral of the story. Thus the duplicitous gods in tragedy show us that "men must endure / Their going hence even as their coming hither, / Ripeness is all" (*Lear*, V. ii, 9-11).

If the gods teach us who we are, telling us of our finitude and radical insecurity, we see that they do so as becoming [*winkenden*] messengers of the godhead, i.e., as heralds of the holy in its embrace of man and things. But note: the gods are only insofar as they hint [*winkeln*], a fact that is disclosed in tragedy from the oracle at Delphi to the riddlesome rhymes of the Weird Sisters. As hints the gods cannot be imitated and represented; the gods are not to be taken as definite assertions to be abided by, but as a hinting to be interpreted, considered and thought about.²⁷ Hinting thus calls for thinking (the essence of human being), and at the heart of thinking lies questioning. Questioning — to ask after being, to ask the meaning of being — is the way in which human beings are opened up to being and the play of the world. Questioning is likewise the way mortals encounter the divine, particularly in tragedy. The simple assertion of the god is always rebuked; the dialogues between Prometheus or Antigone and their respective choruses, or Kent's reply to Lear ("Thou swearst thy gods in vain!" I. i, 161) are just a few examples of this fact. On the other hand, we find that the gods are most significant in the many challenges and questions put to them. At the most decisive and significant moments, from Prometheus' challenges and Io's appearance ("Son of Kronos, what fault, what fault / did you find in me . . . ?" *Prometheus*, 577-8), Oedipus' cry ("What has Zeus done to me?" *Rex*, 1312) and Antigone's

indictment ("What divine justice have I disobeyed?" [1921]), to Hamlet ("Oh, God! God! / How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!" I. ii, 132-4), Lear upon the heath ("Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?" III. vi, 77-8) and Macbeth and Banquo ("Live you? or are you aught / That man may question? I. iii, 42-3), divinity is questioned, challenged, even indicted. Called for and questioned, the distance of the god from man is laid out, opening up the world (the holy) in which man dwells and the god appears. Such distance suggests an absence of the god whereby the god is present (shows him or herself) as possibility; the god and gods, as possibilities, are close-by and affect us, but only as still coming and arriving (cf. *Waiting for Godot*). As possibilities, the god and gods are thereby more powerful than any sort of reality of fact, for possibilities generate other possibilities, opening up a whole realm of significance — fullness. There then seems to be a recognition here that the divine is more godly in mortal questioning than in the self-secure certitude of onto-theology, for only in questioning is the world, in which the gods have their meaning, disclosed.²⁸

Thus we find that showing the presence and absence (the duplicity) of the gods in tragedy in correspondence with the necessary duplicity of the whole of being, as has been done here, does not justify the gods, does not transform the Heideggerian account of "tragic theology" into theodicy. Theodicy tries to still the question of the meaning of existence with a self-certain affirmation of a meaning above and beyond human being by e.g., invoking the mystery and unintelligibility of God to finite human minds. The account of the gods in Heidegger and tragedy, however, invokes the mysteriousness and duplicity

of the gods to initiate the question and abide with the question of what is divine and holy, suggesting that the divine and the holy only intimate themselves when we *think* about the mysterious and indeterminate events that befall us, i.e., when we ask about and question their significance. When simply told that such and such is god's will, men (and the gods) become small and insignificant; witness the flatness, the smallness, the triteness, of the statements made by the choruses, and by Oceanus and Ismene, to Prometheus and Antigone, or by Job's friends (or, for that matter, Job after God speaks to him out of the whirlwind). When questioned, however, the gods and the holy become significant; questionable, the gods are question-worthy [fragwürdig]. And we note the nobility of human being in the questioning, for not only is questioning the essence of human being, but the virtue that the hero brought forth in following the god is acknowledged even as it is questioned.²⁹

By raising the questionableness of existence, even to the extent of questioning the gods, Heidegger and tragedy situate us where we are — on the brink of the unknown and incomprehensible — and show us the utter truthfulness of the very questionable character of being that is our experience of the world.

We have taken account of the "twin masks of Zeus" in tragedy by looking to the thinking of Heidegger, and have situated the duplicity of the gods within the whole of being, which is itself duplicious. The duplicity of the gods is a function of the uncertainty and questionableness of being, which leads us back to our own selves and our questioning existence. Neither the goodness nor the suffering of human existence is done away with here; both are recognized in the question that is started by

the advent (or withdrawal) of the god. In Heidegger and tragedy we have the suggestion that religious consciousness is not destroyed by trying to think tragic "theology"; as Ricoeur suggests,³⁰ but only begins in trying to think that "theology" and abiding with

the question. The salvation offered by tragedy (and Heidegger) lies not in some aesthetic spectacle, but in the question, because we come to know who we are, and become who we are, in the question.

ENDNOTES

1. Plato, *The Republic*, 379c-380b. For just such interpretation, see Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 128 & *passim*.
2. Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapter 13 (especially 1453a, 14-15). Cf. John D. Barbour, *Tragedy as a Critique of Virtue* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), p. 11; Thomas Gould, "The Innocence of Oedipus and the Nature of Tragedy," *The Massachusetts Review* 10 (1969), pp. 288-289.
3. Walter Kaufmann, *The Faith of a Heretic* (1961; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1978), p. 333.
4. Hegel on *Tragedy*, ed. Anne and Henry Paolucci (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 49, 71, 152, 271. Cf. Barbour, pp. 22-27; Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: 'I' in *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 312-313.
5. Karl Jaspers, *Tragedy is Not Enough*, trans. Harold A. T. Reich, Harry T. Moore, and Karl W. Deutsch (1952; rpt. New York: Anchor Books, 1969); Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of Tragedy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), pp. x-xi and *passim*; Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 211-231, 310-326; "Hermeneutics of Symbols: I" in *Conflict*, pp. 331-333; Cf. "Freedom in the Light of Hope," *Ibid.*, pp. 402ff. and "The Critique of Religion" in Ricoeur, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 217, 219.
6. "Hermeneutics of Symbols: I," pp. 311-312 (my emphasis).
7. Barbour, pp. 12-13.
8. Anthony C. Yu, "New Gods and Old Order: Tragic Theology in the *Prometheus Bound*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (1971), pp. 30ff.
9. Hans Jonas, "Heidegger and Theology," *Review of Metaphysics* 18 (December 1964), p. 219, and
10. Martin Buber, *The Eclipse of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 21ff. sense a paganism in Heidegger's talk of gods and God. John R. Williams, *Martin Heidegger's Philosophy of Religion* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), p. 121, dismisses Heidegger's talk of the gods as merely references to the poetry of Hölderlin. David Farrell Krell, "Results," *The Monist* 64 (1981), p. 470, though sympathetic to Heidegger's thinking, has voiced his uneasiness with Heidegger's talk of the gods and the Holy, and Charles Fu, "Heidegger and Zen on Being and Nothingness: A Critical Essay in Transcendental-Dialectics" in *Buddhist and Western Philosophy: A Critical Comparative Study*, ed. Nathan Katz (New Delhi: Sterling, 1981), pp. 184-185, accuses Heidegger of being "quasi-onto-theological" because of his references to the gods and the Holy.
11. See my "Beyond Theism and Atheism: Heidegger's Significance for Religious Thinking" (Ph.D. dissertation: Temple University, 1984), Chapter 4; Vincent Vyntas, *Earth and Gods: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), pp. 174-237; Joseph J. Kockelmans, *The Truth of Being* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 122-141; Bernard Welte, "God in Heidegger's Thought," *Philosophy Today* 26 (1982), pp. 85-100. It will become clear, however, that my emphasis is very different from that of Kockelmans and Welte.
12. In dealing with tragedy in this essay, I will be referring, by and large, to Greek tragedy, since it, as Ricoeur notes, "has the advantage of revealing to us, without any attenuation, its connection with theodicy" (*Symbolism of Evil*, p. 212). Yet from time to time I will cite other forms of tragedy (e.g., Shakespearean tragedy) that have theological overtones.
13. Citations concerning the greatness and exemplary character of the gods could be made *ad infinitum*. For a summary of the characteristics of the most important Olympic gods, see Walter F. Otto, *Homeric Gods*, trans. Moses Hades (1954; rpt.

- New York: Thames and Hudson, 1979), pp. 49-124. See also Heidegger's talk of Zeus ("the god") in *Erläuterung zu Hölderlins Dichtung* Gesamtausgabe Band 4 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1981), pp. 18-19, 68 (hereafter EHD) and *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Krell and Frank Capuzio (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 72-74 (hereafter EGT).
13. *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 44. (hereafter PLJ).
14. For the phenomenon of world, see e.g., *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 292-300; *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 102, 115-117 (hereafter BT); and *The Essence of Reasons*, trans. Terence Malick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), pp. 51, 85. Note, however, that Heidegger uses a variety of other terms (e.g., "meaning of Being," "truth of Being," "essence of Being," "Sein, Being itself, aletheia, "reigning" [*Gegendeckel*] *Difference [Unter-Schied]*) throughout his writings to describe the phenomenon of world. For references to *Lichtung*, see e.g., PLT 53ff; EGT 103ff; and *Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 140, 228-229 (hereafter BW). For references to *Er-eignis*, see in particular *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 1-24 and *passim* (hereafter TB).
15. EHD 16, 18, 20, 53-54, 59-75, 147-8; EGT 119-21.
16. EGT 75; PLT 220-221, 226-227; *What is Called Thinking?* trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 191, 194.
17. EHD 69; PLT 223 (the latter contains the implicit play on words regarding *messen* and *missen*).
18. Heidegger often uses the German idiom *es gibt* ("there is") in talking about being in order 1) to avoid a subject-predicate sentence form which would misleadingly show being as some thing, and 2) to hint at the dynamic of giving (without a giver) at work in the disclosure of being. See, e.g., PLT 53-56, 60, 62-63, 84; EGT 112-114; BW 130ff; TB 7-8, 13-15, 71; "On the
- Being and Conception of *Physis* in Aristotle's *Physics* B 1," trans. Thomas Sheehan, *Man and World* 4 (1977), pp. 262-263, 269.
20. EHD 18ff. 73-4; EGT 72-74.
21. Apparent exceptions, such as *Macbeth* and *Ohello*, disappear on closer inspection, e.g., when one notes the second appearance of the *Ward Sisters* (IV. 1, 110ff) wherein *Macbeth* is shown a pre-figured lineage of kings, and the pre-existence of cynitism and committing evil (just as the serpent is *already there* in the Garden of Eden) in the opening act of *Ohello*.
22. See Yu, pp. 28, 34, concerning that matter at stake in *Pronetheus*. For a summation of the way in which the gods and fate interact in Greek religion, see Otto, pp. 263-286.
23. Cf. EHD 41, 68, 191 and *passim*; PLT 92-93, 150ff; concerning the part mortals (the "poets") play in letting the gods appear.
24. EHD 165f, 169f, 173, 189f; PLT 222-226.
25. Interestingly, Dionysus is mentioned by the chorus just prior to Oedipus' fateful self-recognition in *Oedipus Rex* (which is pervaded by the image of Apollo) (1105), and the chorus sings a hymn to Dionysus after hearing from *Teresias*, priest of Apollo the purifier, in *Antigone* (1118ff). BT 307-308, 378-379; PLT 150-151, 178-179, 200; EGT 101.
27. EHD 20; PLT 150, 178; *Hölderlins Hymen Germanen und Der Rhein*, Gesamtausgabe Band 39 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1980), p. 32 (hereafter GR); *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), p. 210.
28. EHD 184, 186-7; GR 97; *Nietzsche, Volume II: The Eternal Return of the Same*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 68, 130. Cf. "Nietzsche's Word 'God is Dead'" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 112.
29. Cf. John Barbour's definition of tragedy as "critique of virtue" that "assesses the implications of a particular form of virtue by affirming its value and significance while recognizing its inherent limitations and dangerous potential in certain circumstances" (p. ix).
30. *Symbolism of Evil*, p. 226.

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