

TRADITION AS GELOTOPOESIS: AN ESSAY ON THE HERMENEUTICS OF LAUGHTER IN MARTIN HEIDEGGER

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ABSTRACT: In this essay, I argue that laughter stands as the tricky possibility of the question of the meaning of Being, which ridiculously limits and gets limited by tradition beyond limitation. I introduce a hermeneutics of laughter and contend that the event of Ereignis receives its meaning from Gelotopoesis—the poetic act of laughter. Moreover, I claim that the echo of Gelotopoesis becomes the possibility of the transmission of tradition and is attested by a hypertonic boastfulness and a hypotonic irony. These two echoing tonalities question an unquestionable presence, which tradition never questions, in the most excessive manner so that it becomes the proper question of tradition once again.

KEYWORDS: Philosophy; Hermeneutics; Phenomenology; Heidegger; Laughter

INTRODUCTION: THE QUESTION OF LAUGHTER

Philosophers have often been thought as thinkers bereft of laughter and cheerfulness. The idea that a lot of people, including a good numbers of philosophers, have is that philosophers represent an ascetic class of people who advance a serious discipline of the most difficult and profound issues. One might assume that Martin Heidegger is such a grave figure. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Heidegger's closest and most trusted student, testifies the following:

Heidegger was a person beset by great questions and final things, a person who was shaken down to the last fibers of his existence, who was concerned with God and death, with Being and 'nothing,' and who had been called to thinking as the mission of his life. These were the burning questions of an aroused generation whose pride in their cultural and educational tradition had been shaken, the

questions that plagued a generation crippled by the horrors of the materialistic slaughter of World War I, and these questions were also Heidegger's questions.¹

Gadamer's remark seems to be confirmed by the undoubted observation that Heidegger had nothing to say about the effect of laughter in philosophical tradition. As a result, there is almost no direct engagement with the question of laughter in particular and that of the comic in general among Heidegger's scholars.²

In what follows, I beg to differ and point out that the question of laughter sanctions the question of the meaning of Being as envisioned and rehearsed by Heidegger. By raising the question of laughter, I inverse the question 'What is the meaning of laughter?' into the question 'Why is it laughter that brings forth meaning?' Rephrased in a Heideggerian way, I put forth the question, 'Why is it laughter that reveals an understanding of Being as well as the preconceived prejudices of tradition that conceal such an understanding?' However, it is most important to note that I embark on the question of laughter comically and ridiculously since I follow Heidegger's text closely in order to find something that is not explicitly stated in the text. Indeed, what really matters in this essay is not what Heidegger explicitly says but rather what Heidegger could never possibly say. The underlying trick here is that what Heidegger could never possibly say is the laughable, which authorizes Heidegger's saying.

In the essay, I hope to initiate a propaedeutic of a hermeneutics of laughter. I introduce the question of laughter as the tricky question that advances both an understanding of Being and the assumed prejudices that distort such an understanding. I identify laughter in an inextricable connection with trickery since the interpretive method at hand is fashioned from the mythological figure of Hermes who incurs laughter as he deceives. I argue, hence, in favour of a hermeneutics of laughter

¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 18-19.

² Bernard Freyberg stands as the one and only notable exception. He identifies a rare instance where Heidegger mentions to the word 'komisch' and argues that this exceptional reference opens up a new vista onto Heideggerian thought. Indeed, in Heidegger's 1943 summer Freiburg lecture course entitled 'Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens. Heraklit,' the word 'komisch' appears in reference to the famous Heraclitean Fragment 123, 'φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ'. See Martin Heidegger, *Heraklit*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1979, p. 138. Freyberg considers the context of the reference to the comic within Heidegger's overall interpretation of the fragment and examines Heidegger's idiosyncratic translation in terms of his direct interpretation. He then digresses to Plato's *Timaeus* and investigates the insightful attention the Platonic notion of 'χώρα' receives in Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, and he concludes that Heidegger's Heraclitean comedy consists in the most powerful thought that is neither the boldest nor the most effective but, rather, the most modest and useless, a thought that lets the gift of 'φύσις κρύπτεσθαι' to be received with appropriate reticence. See Bernard Freyberg, 'Heidegger's Heraclitean Comedy', *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 37, 2007, pp. 254-268.

that dispenses meaning in the form of poetic composition. The hermeneut is initiated in the hermeneutic circle by a poetic act of laughter, called ‘γελωτοποιία’ by the Greeks, so I playfully name the poetic echo of Hermes’ laughter as ‘Gelotopoesis.’ I then turn to Plato and Aristotle and discover a hypertonic boastfulness and a hypotonic irony as the two modalities that set the tone for the meaningful echoing of laughter. These two modalities of surplus simultaneously authorize and transgress what is really at stake in the essay: the possibility of a pure and simple Self-understanding of Dasein. Through Dasein’s Self-understanding, the notion of presence is fully attested as the one and only prejudice of philosophical tradition that exceeds, surpasses, and overcomes itself in such an extreme hypertonic pitch that conceals itself most hypotonically. I end the essay by noting that Heidegger’s laughter forces us to laugh back at Heidegger, thus relegating him to the philosophical heritage to which he essentially belongs. By doing so, we show a genuine concern for his thinking, albeit through a discourse of understanding that jestingly converts the site of concern into a null site that defeats any expectations of shared presuppositions and predictable interpretations.

TRADITION AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF GELOTOPOESIS

I. The Deceit of Tradition

Heidegger’s *Being and Time* starts with a trick. It quotes a line from Plato’s *The Sophist* in which an Elean stranger admits that what they formerly thought they knew, the designation ‘Being,’ has now perplexed them.³ The expression ‘Being,’ which was once taken to be certain knowledge, has now turned into something discreditable and baffling. However, there is an underlying double ploy of perplexity at play here. The fundamental complexity is not only the fact that Being itself has now become a perplexity and a deception. It is also the fact that the initiation into the interrogation of the question of Being is itself a deception and a trick. In a strange way, *Being and Time* begins with a double deception in which the original possibility of the question of the expression ‘Being’ is a trick that cunningly conceals another trick.

Indeed, in the second page of *Being of Time*, Heidegger declares that the question of the meaning of Being ‘has today been forgotten’ (SZ 2). This assertion, I claim, sets the interrogative limit of the work itself as a prank. Indeed, on the basis of an initial contribution to the question of Being by the early Greek philosophers such as Plato

³ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 11th ed., Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967, p. 1. Hereafter cited as SZ, followed by page number. For the reference in *The Sophist*, see Plato, *The Sophist*, in trans. Harold North Fowler, *Theaetetus, The Sophist*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1987, 244a5-8.

and Aristotle, Heidegger argues, a ‘dogma’ has been developed that sanctions the forgetfulness of the question and conceals its proper remembrance. The limit of the philosophical task at hand—that is to say, the encircling horizon that collects all the different elements that compose the specific task at hand and decides its unifying direction and orientation—is presented as a philosophical dogma, an obtrusive site of neglect, forgetfulness, and deception. To philosophically interrogate Being means, then, that we penetrate this deceitful site and give an account, as Heidegger states, ‘of the presuppositions and prejudices [Vorurteile], which are constantly re-implanting and fostering the belief that an inquiry into Being is unnecessary’ (SZ 2). The tradition of blind dogmatism constitutes the limit of philosophical questioning and hinders the interrogative effectiveness of the question of Being as something completely superfluous and unnecessary.

Nevertheless, it is the same tradition of blind dogmatism that reawakens the question of Being and reignites its remembrance. In an essay entitled ‘Hegel and the Greeks,’ written in 1958, almost thirty years after *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that a close examination of the tradition reveals that which tradition cannot think. But that which tradition cannot think is, tricky enough, that which cannot be thought by anyone: the Unthought or the Unthinkable. He writes:

It is simply a matter of listening to this tradition in return, and thereby examining the prejudices and pre-judgments [Vor-Urteile] in which every thinking, in its own way, must dwell. Of course, such examination, too, can never conduct itself as the court of justice that ultimately decides upon the essence of history and our possible relation to it. For this examination has its limit [Grenze], which can be circumscribed as follows: the more thoughtful a thinking is, that is, the more is claimed by language, the more authoritative what is Unthought [Ungedachte] becomes for it, and even what is Unthinkable [Udenkbare] for it.⁴

The prank played here is the following: (a) the prejudices of the philosophical tradition—firstly inscribed by the Greeks and then reaffirmed by every other philosopher, including Hegel—speak to us and say that every case of dogmatic thinking is openly disposed to an examination which itself has a limit; nonetheless, (b) the limiting case of all traditional presuppositions is that which no language and no thought can account for, the Unthought or the Unthinkable, which is, funnily, the matter proper to philosophy.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, ‘Hegel und die Griechen’ in *Wegmarken*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1976, p. 440.

In a bizarre and cunning way, then, Heidegger promotes a phenomenological project that turns inwards and towards the deepest and most central assumptions of tradition in order to interrogate something that is entirely outwards and outside the tradition. Philosophical tradition, as the tradition that makes proper questioning possible, is engaged in a duplicitous play of deception by which the possibilities of questioning are simultaneously distorted and disposed, concealed and revealed, forgotten and remembered, albeit outside and beyond any limiting horizon of disposition, revelation, and remembrance. In other words, tradition makes possible, predetermines, and delimits questioning, but, by doing so, it simultaneously orients and delineates questioning outside and beyond any orientation and delineation. The limit of philosophical question is the possibility of philosophical questioning itself, and it advances a double trick, a prank par excellence, since it at once limits and gets limited beyond any range of limitation.

In *Being and Time*, this tricky movement of phenomenological examination is described as ‘ontico-ontological’ (SZ 13). It is ontical because it examines regions of beings by blindly leaving unquestioned their presuppositions, thus concealing and distorting the problematic of their foundation. It is ontological because it penetrates the Being of all regions of beings by asserting it as that which is outside and beyond any prejudices and presuppositions, thus remembering and revealing it as the Unthought and Unthinkable. Heidegger describes the limiting and limited movement of the question of the meaning of Being as ‘a relatedness backward or forward [Rück- oder Vorbezogenheit]’ (SZ 8). The question of the meaning of Being moves from the limited ontical way of questioning back to the limiting ontological one since it is by and through an orientation towards Being that all beings receive their meaning. But, at the same time, the question of Being moves from the limiting ontological questioning forward towards the limited ontical one because it is only by and through the ontical regions which cannot think that Being receives its proper meaning as the Unthought and Unthinkable.

The only entity that moves in this tricky fashion is Dasein since ‘Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological’ (SZ 12). However, it is deceiving to name Dasein an ‘entity’ since its essential characteristic is the ‘*understanding of Being* [Seinsverständnis]’ (SZ 12). It is also deceiving to state that Dasein has ‘essentials characteristics’ since its only characteristic is an existential ontico-ontological double movement: (a) a way through which limiting Being makes possible limited beings and (b) a way through which limited beings make possible limiting Being. Indeed, Heidegger argues that Dasein’s essence is not a ‘what’ that pertains to a subject matter; rather, it is ‘*existence* [Existenz],’ which is defined as ‘that kind of Being towards

which Dasein can comport [verhalten] itself in one way or another, and always comports itself somehow' (SZ 12). The kind of Being of Dasein's comportment is the way in which a deceiving limiting/limited Dasein pendulates between Being and beings. In a later work entitled *Contributions to Philosophy (from Ereignis)*, Heidegger specifically states that 'Da-sein [is] the Between [das Zwischen] between Being and beings.'⁵ But as I wish to stress here, this pendular in-between comportment is a prank that situates the funny play of the question of the meaning of Being. It is exactly this funny play that reveals Dasein's way of Being as the way of the question of the meaning of Being. It is, at the same time, the funny play of hermeneutic interpretation that gives a meaningful understanding of beings as such, as they are in their Being. Indeed, Heidegger states that 'the meaning of phenomenological description lies in interpretation [Auslegung]' and that 'the phenomenology of Dasein has the character of a ἔρμηνεύειν, through which the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which Dasein itself possesses, are made known [kundgegeben] to Dasein's understanding of Being' (SZ 37). Hence, the deceitful movement of phenomenological questioning is 'ontico-ontological' insofar as it is hermeneutical.

II. The Laughter of Hermes

In the epics and myths of the Greeks, the figure of Hermes is inextricably connected with deception, trickery, and laughter. In *Odyssey*, Hermes tells Apollo—amidst the gods' general amusement at the sight of adulterous Ares and Aphrodite entrapped by the betrayed Hephaestus—that it is worth paying the heavy price of public humiliation if he gets the chance to sleep by the side of the goddess of love. His remark 'aroused laughter [γέλως] among the immortal gods.'⁶ In *Homeric Hymns*, Hermes is described as a 'child of many shifts, blandly cunning, a robber, a cattle driver, a bringer of dreams, a watcher by night, a thief at the gates.' He turns a tortoise into a singer, which made Apollo 'laugh [ἔγέλασσε]' in delight.⁷ In addition, Hermes steals away Apollo's cattle but 'Zeus laughed out loud [μέγ' ἔξεγέλασσεν] to see his evil-plotting child well and cunningly denying guilt about the cattle.'⁸ Theft, mendacity, and trickery are ways of the messenger of the gods, and they elicit laughter and pleasure among gods and humans alike.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1989, p. 343.

⁶ Homer, *Odyssey, Books 1-12*, trans. A. T. Murray, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002, VIII, 343.

⁷ *Homeric Hymns*, in trans. Hugh G. Evelyn White, *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homeric*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002, IV, 13-29.

⁸ *Homeric Hymns*, IV, 389-90.

In another instance in *Homeric Hymns*, Hermes constructs a lyre and attempts to entice from the instrument a suitable accompaniment for his beautiful singing: ‘At the touch of his hand, it sounded marvellously; and, as he tried it, the god sang sweet random snatches, just as youths swap matching insults with one another at festivals.’⁹ Beautiful singing and the trading of insults are juxtaposed here. Each insult is uttered in the form of song and invites a response. Young men convert insults by means of musical activity, thus engaged in a dialogue composed by comico-lyrical rules of contact. Lyrical insults constitute a principle of exchange which reflects the wider practices of mutuality and reciprocity among attendees of festival and symposia.¹⁰ In ancient Greece, this comico-lyrical poetic exchange is associated with revellers. In *Homeric Hymns*, Hermes associates his lyre ‘to the rich feast and lovely dance and glorious revel.’¹¹ It is important to note Aristotle’s observation that term comedy [κωμῳδία] was probably proposed by the Dorians in the fourth century. Aristotle remarks that Dorians content that ‘comic performers [κωμῳδοῖ] got their names not from revelling [κωμάζειν] but from wandering through villages [κῶμας] when banned from the city.’¹² In any case, the early comedians were engaged in a lyrical dialogue and were custodians of the messenger god Hermes.

In a work written in the early 1950s entitled *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger composes a dialogue between a Japanese person and an inquirer and stresses the importance of hermeneutics in his quest for the question of Being. He writes:

Japanese: Why do you stress the original sense of ἔρμηνεῦειν?

Inquirer: Because it was this original sense which prompted me to use it in defining the phenomenological thinking that opened the way to *Being and Time* for me. What mattered then, and still does, is to bring out the Being of beings—though no longer in the manner of metaphysics, but such that Being itself will shine out, Being itself—that is to say: the presence of present beings, the twofold of the two in virtue of their simple oneness. This is what makes its claim on man, calling him to its essential being.¹³

⁹ *Homeric Hymns*, IV, 53-56.

¹⁰ Stephen Halliwell notes that much of the archaic Greek poetry was not only designed for performance at actual drinking-parties but was also preoccupied with the dramatisation of imaginary symposia, a literary practice subsequently adapted by many prose writers from the classical to imperial periods. Stephen Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 100-154.

¹¹ *Homeric Hymns*, IV, 480-481.

¹² Aristotle, *Poetics*, in trans. Stephen Halliwell, *Poetics, Longinus, On the Sublime, Demetrius, On Style*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1995, 1448a29-b1.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 14th ed., Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 2007, p. 122.

The question of human essence is examined by and through the greater question of the meaning of Being. What matters diachronically in Heidegger's phenomenological thinking before, during, and after Being and Time is an engagement with hermeneutics that renders possible the twofold of Being and beings in its simple presence. This difference between Being and beings is traced back to the divine sojourn of the messenger god Hermes. Heidegger notes:

The expression 'hermeneutic' derives from the Greek verb ἑρμηνεύειν. That verb is related to the noun ἑρμηνεύς, which is referable to the name of the god Ἑρμῆς by a playful thinking that is more compelling than the rigor of science. Hermes is the divine messenger. He brings the message [die Botschaft] of destiny; ἑρμηνεύειν is that exposition which brings news [Kunde] because it can listen to a message. Such an exposition becomes an interpretation of what has been said earlier by the poets who, according to Socrates in Plato's *Ion* (534e), ἑρμηνῆς εἰσὶ τῶν θεῶν—'are interpreters [Botschafter] of the Gods.'¹⁴

In this passage, Heidegger refers directly to the Platonic dialogue called *Ion*, in which Socrates and Ion argue whether the art of rhapsody is a matter of personal performance on account of the artist's skill. Socrates maintains that the daughter of Mnemosyne, the Muse, 'inspires people herself, and then, by means of these inspired persons, the inspiration spreads to others and holds them in a connected chain.'¹⁵ For Plato, it is not by individual craft that the rhapsodes 'compose and say all fine things about the matters of Gods and humans' but by a 'divine dispensation [θεῖα μοῖρα],' which enables 'each to compose only that to which the Muse has thrown to him.'¹⁶ The art of rhapsody, like any other poetic composition, is endowed to the poet by divine dispensation. The poet is initiated in the hermeneutic circle by a movement that maintains and shelters the poetic word as it is allotted by the goddess of Memory and her daughters.

Indeed, Heidegger, like Plato, sees the poetic vocation as a matter not only of hermeneutic initiation and circulation but also of memorial recitation and dispensation. Heidegger notes in the early 1950s in a lecture entitled *What is Called Thinking?*:

Memory [Gedächtnis], mother of muses—the recollection [Andenken] to what is to be thought [zu-Denkende] is the source and ground [Quellgrund] of poetry. This is why poetry is the water that, at times, flows backwards towards

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, pp. 121-122.

¹⁵ Plato, *Ion*, in trans. Harold North Fowler and W. R. M. Lamb, *The Statesman, Philebus, Ion*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001, 533e57.

¹⁶ Plato, *Ion*, 534b9-c3.

the source, towards thinking as recollection [Andenken]. Poetry wells up only from recollective meditation recollecting [aus der An-dacht des Andenkens].¹⁷

In this passage, Heidegger refers to the tradition of Greek mythological poetry and asserts two important points. Firstly, it is the flow of dispensing memory that reveals the source of thinking. Remembrance gathers together present beings as such, as they are in their source or their Being. Secondly, analogous to the tricky existential onto-ontological movement of Dasein, remembrance aims the most backward, Being, in order to bring forth the most forward, i.e., beings as such in their unity, in their Being. The movement of remembrance runs the distance between the most backward and the most forward and recalls Being ‘in’ beings and beings ‘in’ Being—that is to say, their ‘in-between’ unique difference, the simple oneness of the twofold that stands in their middle.

But again, the dispensing voice of memory is resounded through laughter, trickery, and distortion. In *Theogony*, Hesiod names Thaleia [Θάλεια], sometimes spelled as Thalia [Θαλία], as one of the nine muses and daughters of Mnemosyne.¹⁸ He also reports that Zeus’ palace ‘laughs [γελάει]’—that is to say, resounds joyfully—‘with the lily-like voices of the singing muses.’¹⁹ Indeed, Thaleia is described as a delicate and educated muse who is drawn to leisure and country festivals. She is also associated with comedies and comic theatre masks.²⁰ Likewise, Cicero records that Mnemosyne is the mother of the following four muses: Aoide [Ἄοιδή], Melete [Μελέτη], Arche [Ἄρχή], and Thelxinoe [Θελξινόη].²¹ Even though Thaleia is not mentioned in Cicero, the last daughter of mythical memory, Thelxinoe, is the muse of seduction and distortion. The word for the Goddess of seduction, ‘Θελξινόη,’ comes from the verb ‘θέλω,’ which is synonymous to the Latin ‘fallo’ and means to distort, to seduce, and to cheat. The noun ‘θέλητρον’ is a soother, sedative agent, philtre, potion, or drug [μέσον καταπραΰνον, φάρμακον]. It is usually translated both as a remedy and poison.²² Marcel Detienne observes that in the Greek Pantheon, Peitho [Πειθώ], the goddess of persuasion, wears the masks of Thelxinoe and becomes one

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?*, 5th ed., Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997, p. 7.

¹⁸ Hesiod, *Theogony*, in trans. Hugh G. Evelyn White, *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homeric*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002, 77.

¹⁹ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 40.

²⁰ See *Brill's New Pauly Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World, Volume 14*, Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (eds.), Leiden, Brill, 2009, pp. 362-363.

²¹ See Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, in trans. H. Rackham, *On the Nature of the Gods, Academics*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993, III, 54.

²² Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, p.788. See also Π. Χ. Δορμπάρη, *Επίτομον Λεξικόν Της Αρχαίας Ελληνικής Γλώσσης*, Αθήνα, Κολλάρου & Σία, 1992, p. 378.

of the muses. She stands for the power of speech over others, and she mythically represents the charm of the voice, the seduction of speech, and the magic of words. She is distinguished by the verb ‘*thelgein* [θέλγειν]’ and ‘*terpein* [τέρπειν]’ and the nouns ‘*thelkterion* [θελκτήριον],’ ‘*philtrion* [φίλτρον],’ and ‘*pharmakon* [φάρμακον].’ She is fundamentally ambiguous, both beneficent and harmful.²³ Like Hermes and the lyrical muses, she ambivalently dispenses the poetic word through seduction and trickery.

III. The Event of Gelotopoesis

As it is apparent both in Greek mythology and Heidegger, the art of poetic vocation does not simply refer to the lyrical recitation of poems. Rather, it is the divine dispensation that initiates the poet into the art of remembrance and the movement of the hermeneutic circle. In *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger names the poetic vocation as a ‘site,’ an extremity in which everything comes together. He explains:

The site [Ort] gathers unto itself, supremely and in the extreme. Its gathering power penetrates and pervades everything. The site, the gathering power, gathers in and preserves all it has gathered, not like an encapsulating shell but rather by penetrating with its light all it has gathered, and only thus releasing it into its own nature.²⁴

The poetic site is the realm, horizon, or encircling limit where everything is gathered together in accordance to its supreme extremity. Poetry stands as the empowering limit that collects all beings and lights them up in line with their lighting source. Hence, as Heidegger states, ‘the individual poems derive their light and sound from the poetic site’.²⁵ It is within the gathering limit of poetry that phenomena are recollected, revealed and, thus, endowed with colour and melody.

Similarly, the poet, the proper artisan and hermeneut of poetic recollection, enunciates the lustre and accent of things as they appear and resonate from their original source. However, equally significant, Heidegger describes the poetic source the poet calls forth as an appearance of concealment and deception. He remarks in a lecture delivered in 1951 entitled ‘. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .’:

But the poet calls all the brightness of the spectacles [Anblicke] of the sky and every sound of its courses and breezes into the singing word and there makes them shine and ring. Yet, the poet, if he is a poet, does not describe the mere

²³ Marcel Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd, New York, Zone Books, 1999, p. 77.

²⁴ Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 37.

²⁵ Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p 38.

appearance of sky and earth. The poet calls, in the spectacles of the sky, that which in its very self-disclosure [Sichenthüllen] causes the appearance of that which conceals itself, and indeed *as* that which conceals itself [Sichverbergende]. In the familiar appearances, the poet calls the alien [Fremde] as that to which the invisible [Unsichtbare] imparts itself in order to remain what it is: unknown [unbekannt].²⁶

The poet does not announce the ‘mere’ appearance of beings but the appearance of beings as it ‘is’—that is to say, as an appearance that springs from a self-disclosing source. But the appearance of beings on earth and sky ‘is’ what it ‘seems’ since beings are tricky appearances of an appearing source that does not appear. A familiar play of trickery is announced here: appearances are announced as such but there is nothing to appear since that which allows appearing does not give itself to appearance. The joke announced is that only the poet calls for the appearance as it ‘is’; nonetheless, this appearance ‘is’ the ‘unknown,’ a tricky possibility that renders the appearance impossible. In a way, then, the appearance of beings is nothing other than the self-concealing and self-deceiving hermeneutic power of the poet, transmitted unknowingly by the ways of laughter.

I would propose at this point that what Heidegger calls ‘das Ereignis’—usually translated as ‘appropriating event’ or ‘appropriation’ in English—could be just another name for the echoing laughter of Hermes. Heidegger notes in *Contributions to Philosophy (from Ereignis)*:

The echo [Anklang] of Beyng as refusal in the abandonment of beings by Being—this already says that here something present-at-hand is not to be described or explained—or to be arranged. The burden of thinking in the other beginning of philosophy is different: it is en-thinking that which is appropriated as the appropriating event itself [das Er-denken dessen, was sich ereignet als das Ereignis selbst].²⁷

The echo of Being refuses to abandon beings, so it revoices and recollects them as they are in their Being. The burden of this echoing restoration is uniquely different: a difference that is deceptively different insofar as it refuses to either differentiate beings or get differentiated by beings. Indeed, Heidegger has already claimed in another work that ‘*Being is no being*, no thing and no thingly property, nothing present-at-hand [Das Sein ist kein Seiendes, kein Ding und keine dingliche Eigenschaft, nichts

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, ‘. . . dichterisch wohnet der Mensch . . .’, in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 10th ed., Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 2004, p. 194.

²⁷ Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, p. 108.

Vorhandenes].²⁸ Ereignis, then, as the laughing event of Being, does not get recognized and differentiated among beings. It is a resounding echo, a ‘ha ha ha’ sound that makes thinking possible as proper thinking, albeit through a bouncing sound that itself returns a sound which is so ridiculously different that doesn’t make a difference. The event of the echo of Being is a proper event of laughter, a resounding that is so spasmodic and inarticulate that resists regulation and articulation in the trickiest and silliest way.

It is perhaps important to note here the English verb ‘to laugh’ and the German verbs ‘lachen’ and ‘klagen,’ as well as the nouns ‘die Klage,’ ‘der Klang,’ and ‘der Anklang,’ come from the Greek ‘κλώσσειν,’ which denotes an irregular, spasmodic, and epanaleptic clucking, rattling, or turning of the tongue [κλαγγή, κροτάλισμα τῆς γλώσσης].²⁹ It is immediately related to the verb ‘κλώθω,’ which means to knit or twist by spinning. Clotho [Κλωθώ] is a daughter of Mnemosyne and one of the three Moirai, and she is the one who spins the thread of life.³⁰ Again, the poetic event of the divine dispensation that gives meaning, sound, and colour to all things on earth and sky comes to be a dispensation of laughter. A closer examination of the hidden ontological and etymological associations of the event of laughter reveals that the question of Being receives its meaning from what the Greeks call ‘γελωτοποιία,’ the ‘poesis of laughter,’ which I playfully call Gelotopoesis.³¹ Thus, one can talk about the event of Gelotopoesis as an echoing event that transmits spasmodic and epanaleptic

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1983, p. 470.

²⁹ Eric Partridge, *Origins: An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, London, Routledge, 1991, p. 340. Joseph Shipley similarly reports that ‘laugh’ and ‘laughter’ are derivatives of the Indo-European root ‘kleg.’ See Joseph T. Shipley, *The Origin of English Words: A Discursive Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1984, p. 186. It is also reported that the Greek verb ‘γελω,’ the German ‘lachen,’ and the English ‘to laugh’ share the same Indo-European root ‘gelh,’ which has an etymological connection with the verb ‘to shine’ and the notions of brightness and light. It is also important to note that the Greek word ‘γλήνη,’ which designates the pupil of the eye, stems from the same root. See Robert S. P. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek, Volume One*, Leiden, Brill, 2010, pp. 264–265. The etymological connection between laughter, light, and the eye is important since Heidegger insists that one can retrieve the word ‘das Auge,’ which means ‘eye,’ from the notion of Ereignis. He writes: ‘Appropriation, in Be-eye-ing human nature, makes mortals appropriate for that which avows itself from everywhere to man in Saying, which points toward the concealed [Das Ereignis ereignet in seinem Er-äugen des Menschenwesens die Sterblichen dadurch, daß es sie dem vereignet, was sich dem Menschen in der Sage von überall her auf Verborgenes hin zu-sagt].’ See Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 260.

³⁰ See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 963.

³¹ The Greek word ‘γέλοισος,’ sometimes spelled as ‘γέλοος,’ is rich in its multivocality and designates the laughable, comic, amusing, jesting, mirth-provoking, facetious, ludicrous, absurd, and paradoxical. See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 342.

rattlings, which, as it turns out to be, remain that which tradition could only transmit. In the next section, we will examine some of the complex hermeneutic structures of Being in *Being and Time* and indicate the echo of Gelotopoesis as the way in which the possibility of the transmission of tradition becomes a laughing matter of a puzzling, deceiving, and tricky tonality.

THE ECHO OF GELOTOPOESIS: ON BOASTFULNESS AND IRONY

I. A Greek Laughing Tone

To capture the pitch of the laughing echo, I suggest we briefly turn to the thought of Plato and Aristotle. In *Philebus*, Plato defines the ‘laughable [γελοῖον]’ as ‘the opposite of the condition mentioned in the inscription ‘Know oneself [γνῶθι σαυτὸν]’ at Delphi,’ which apparently says ‘not to know oneself at all [μηδαμῆ γινώσκειν αὐτὸν].’³² Socrates illustrates this lack of Self-knowledge with the character of a man who supposes to be more affluent, more beautiful, or more virtuous than he actually is. The laughable, then, is a kind of a Self-understanding that assumes conditions of Self-knowledge, although in an arrogant way that discloses signs of Self-ignorance. The laughable man interprets himself as something that he is, but his interpretation is just an exercise of selfish overindulgence that reveals that which the laughable man is not. Plato’s fool assumes he possesses Self-knowledge, but the assumption of Self-knowledge is only an indication of a deceitful pomposity that undermines and overturns the assumption itself.

Undoubtedly, one can find parallels of Plato’s laughable man with Aristotle’s character of a ‘boaster [ἀλαζών]’ who, in his pretension to promote himself more than he deserves, ‘he appears to be more foolish [μάταιος] than vicious.’ Yet, Aristotle opposes the figure of the boaster with that of the ‘ironist [εἴρων]’ who pretends to be less than he is. An ironic man sometimes depreciates himself for the pure dislike of ostentation and self-promotion, as Socrates used to do, and this kind of irony is held in high esteem. But at other times, an ironic man depreciates himself in the most ostentatious manner, and such mock humility becomes ridiculous. Aristotle gives the example of the Spartan dress, which, in its ‘excessiveness [ὑπερβολή]’ and ‘extreme deficiency [λίαν ἔλλειψις],’ exhibits a touch of ostentation.³³ The point here is that both the boaster and the ironist induce laughter in an exactly opposite

³² Plato, *Philebus*, in trans. Harold North Fowler and W. R. M. Lamb, *The Statesman, Philebus, Ion*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001, 48c5-d3.

³³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999, 1127b9-29.

way: the boaster invites laughter by a way of excess and the ironist by a way of deficiency. But again, there is a double ploy at play here. The boaster says ‘too much’ and the ironist ‘too little,’ but what they truly say is that which they share in their saying, which is the word ‘too,’ an expression of surplus. In other words, the laughable is an expression of a duplicitous surplus—both a ‘too much’ and a ‘too little.’ Not surprisingly, then, Aristotle describes the ‘buffoons [βωμολόχοι]’ as people who exhibit ‘excess or deficiency of the mean [ὑπερβολὴ τε καὶ ἔλλειψις τοῦ μέσου].’³⁴

Therefore, buffoonery, as I wish to claim, is the hidden trick itself since it is exactly the modality of surplus that simultaneously authorizes and transgresses the mean or limit of the inscription at Delphi and the conditions for absolute Self-knowledge and Self-ignorance. On the one hand, buffoonery authorizes the search for Self-understanding since it pompously assumes, enables, facilitates, and makes possible its conditions. Indeed, the loud declaration ‘I know myself’ invites the responding question ‘What does it mean for one to know oneself?’ so that an enquiry on the possibility of Self-knowledge presents itself and becomes worthwhile. On the other hand, the mere magnitude of the declaration ridicules and belittles the conditions of the declaration itself in such a way that the statement ‘I know myself’ is so insignificant, irrelevant, and unreliable that does not merit the response ‘What does it mean for one to know oneself?’ In an ironic way, the loud declaration ‘I know myself’ is so excessively loud that it numbs all ears and transgresses any possible response; it falls on deaf ears as if itself has no strength and no potency. It resounds and echoes around silently since it so extremely demeaned and debased that says nothing and is heard by no one.

This duplicitous comportment of laughter, as I will argue in what follows, does not lie outside the question of the meaning of Being; on the contrary, it is its radical possibility as that which simultaneously authorizes and transgresses its discursive unfolding. Boastfulness and irony are the two modalities that set the tone for the meaningful echoing ‘ha ha ha’ of Dasein.

II. Hypertonic Boastfulness

In the first section of *Being and Time*, Heidegger boasts he has singularly identified the following three presuppositions that undermine the entire tradition of thinking: (a) Being is the ‘most universal [allgemeinste]’ concept, (b) Being is an ‘indefinable [undefinierbar]’ concept, and (c) Being is a ‘self-evident [selbstverständliche]’ concept. These three assumptions hamper the path of the question of the meaning of Being—

³⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1128a3-4.

the only question that merits interrogation since it is the only the question that penetrates the essence of all beings. By considering them, Heidegger claims, one could make plain ‘not only that the question of Being lacks an *answer* but that the question itself is obscure and without a direction’ (SZ, 3-4). Nonetheless, in the sixth section of the work, Heidegger makes the even more audacious claim that the task of interpreting the basis of ancient ontology demonstrates that ‘beings are grasped in their Being as “presence [Anwesenheit]”; this means that they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time—the “*present* [Gegenwart]”’ (SZ 25). The notion of presence is highlighted here as the one and only interpretative limit of philosophical thinking that hinders the possibility of obtaining a meaningful view of beings in their unity. One can recognize here a movement of a double self-overindulgence and pomposity in which the ridiculous statement ‘all thinking is limited by three presuppositions’ is surpassed by the even more ridiculous statement, ‘all thinking is limited by one and only presupposition.’

In an essay entitled ‘The Anaximander Fragment,’ Heidegger traces the one and only presupposition of thinking back to epic poetry of Homer and notes the following:

Thus τὰ ἔόντα designates beings in the sense of the present [Gegenwärtigen]. When we moderns speak of the ‘present [gegenwärtig],’ we either mean what is ‘now’—which we represent as something within time, the ‘now [Jetzt]’ serving as a phase in the stream of time—or we bring the ‘present’ into relation with the ‘objective [Gegenständigen].’³⁵

Heidegger here interprets the archaic word ‘τὰ ἔόντα’ as it appears in Homer and observes that (a) all beings are designated as things that are objectively capable to be presented now and at this moment and that (b) Being is thought as the constantly objective and present stream of time that situates all temporal beings as presentable objects. Being is defined with regards to beings as just another present being, and it is presupposed as a present being that grounds and relates all other present beings in and through its presence. As a result, Being is considered as the constant, objective, and presenting stream of presence, thus becoming another present object, i.e., another presentable being. Correspondingly, replicating Homer’s attempt to relate beings with Being, all consequent poets and philosophers have reduced Being to an objective and present being just like any other being. The entire tradition of thinkers has concealed the fact that Being is purely transcendental—outside, beyond, and before any particular ontical regions of beings. Indeed, when Heidegger claims that ‘*Being is the transcendens pure and simple* [Sein ist das transcendens schlechthin]’ (SZ 38), he

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, ‘Der Spruch des Anaximander’, in *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1977, p. 346.

makes a fool of the Greek and Scholastic philosophical traditions, which, in their effort to define Being as transcendence, have instead concealed and distorted the pure and simple transcendental essence of Being. By repeating the above traditional doctrine of Being, Heidegger boasts he has exceptionally managed to surpass all traditional thinkers by recollecting that which they have persistently forgotten.

At this point, I wish to claim that the whole of *Being and Time* promotes and parades the above charade of extreme boastfulness. Indeed, Heidegger claims that there is one and only entity which determines itself as an entity, thus comprehending itself fully and thoroughly as an entity that is undermined and distorted by the notion of the present. But this 'entity' is not an entity as such but rather an existential Dasein who is exceedingly arrogant since it determines itself 'in light of a possibility which it *is* itself and which, in its very Being, it somehow understands' (SZ 43). Dasein is the most preposterous boaster because it claims Self-understanding only through and within itself since it interprets itself as 'an understanding potentiality-for Being [Seinkönnen], which in its Being, makes an issue of that Being itself' (SZ 231). In other words, Dasein claims pure and simple Self-understanding since it predestines, defines, and directs its comprehension in accordance to the unique potentiality of its own Selfhood. The phenomenological stratagem devised by Heidegger at this point is the following: through Dasein's Self-understanding, the notion of presence is fully revealed as the one and only presupposition that exceeds and surpasses itself in such an extreme way that utterly conceals itself. Dasein's orientation towards that which exactly describes a clear understanding of tradition is Dasein's exceeding Self-orientation and Self-understanding.

In this sense, Dasein interprets itself as the movement that does not take presence for granted, thus allowing a proper problematization of the question of the origin and destiny of tradition. Again, in the most overblown manner, Heidegger names Dasein as 'what is primarily historical' (SZ 381). As the one and only history that 'is,' Dasein understands what obstructs the origin and destiny of tradition in such a superlative way that it absolutely identifies itself with that very movement of the origin and destiny of tradition. That is to say, Dasein is so overconfident in its hermeneutic deployment that it becomes the unquestionable origin and destiny of tradition. As the unquestionable question of the meaning of historical tradition, Dasein disentangles the hurdles of the notion of presence and brings tradition back to a resolution. When Dasein 'brings itself back [Sichzurückholen],' it 'becomes *authentic* Being-one's-Self [Selbstsein]' (SZ 268). By this act of stepping back, which is a nothing other than the aforementioned back-and-forth movement of poetic recollection, Dasein recollects the complete and outstanding history of its own Self- understanding, thus becoming the

resolute potentiality that clears up the question of the meaning of Being as the question of an unquestionable presence.

As a historical destiny of the most magnified proportion, Dasein's Selfhood is formally defined 'as a *way of existing* [eine *Weise zu existieren*].' Then, as an immediate result, 'the question of the "who" of Dasein has been answered with the expression "Self [Selbst]"' (SZ 267). Again, Heidegger poses Dasein as a moment of paroxysmal understanding, an episode of a most increased acuteness by which Dasein identifies itself with its Selfhood and becomes the exceptional knowledge that 'is,' which is nothing other than the pure and simple understanding of its own potentiality. This 'authentic *potentiality-for-Being-one's-Self* [*Selbstseinkönnen*]' is attested by Dasein's '*voice of conscience* [*Stimme des Gewissens*]' (SZ 267-268). The horizon of Dasein's self-comprehension, its own understanding of what its Selfhood could only be, is evidenced by its voice of conscience. Heidegger is quick to dismiss any traditional interpretations of this voice and suggests that one should view this phenomenon as one that '*discloses* [*erschließt*]' and 'gives us "something" to understand' (SZ 269). I suggest here that we follow Heidegger's clue and explicate the notion of the voice of conscience as 'the gathering together [*σύν*] of knowledge [*εἶδησις*].' In Greek, the noun 'das Gewissen' is exactly expressed by the compound word 'συνεἶδησις.' The word 'εἶδησις' is a direct derivative of the verb 'to see [*εἶδω*],' and it means idea, sight, novelty, evidence, and knowledge.³⁶

Indeed, what conscience brings forth is the disclosing event of Dasein's unprecedented Self-understanding. Heidegger here interprets Dasein's modality of understanding in terms of a '*call* [*Ruf*],' which unfolds itself in 'a mode of *speech* [*ein Modus der Rede*]' (SZ 269). But again, most selfishly, Dasein only talks about its supreme exceptionality. Heidegger writes: 'In the call of conscience, what is it that is talked about [das *Beredete*]*—*in other words, to what is the appeal [*Angerufene*] made? Manifestly, Dasein itself' (SZ 272). That which Dasein only talks about is that which Dasein asks, and that is the question of its extraordinary Self-understanding. But Dasein's question only appeals to Dasein itself and does not receive a response by anyone else. It thus appeals unquestionably in the most uncontested manner. Dasein's call is the most unchallenged reverberation that 'is.' It reigns with the highest pitch of

³⁶ See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 482. It is also interesting to note that the German 'das Gewissen' is a derivative of the Indo-European root 'weid,' which also gave rise to the Latin word 'vidēre [to see]' and the Greek word 'εἶδος.' See Calvert Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Root*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000, p. 96. Even in English, the word conscience is a derivative of the Latin compound noun *con-scientia*, which means inward knowledge, inmost thought, or internal acknowledgment of something. See *Oxford Dictionary of English*. 2nd ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 368.

boastfulness, and it echoes in the most excessive case of hypertonicity. But in the most oddly way, this supreme case of hypertonic boastfulness calls into question the limit of Dasein's Self-understanding. This funny game of asking an unanswerable question becomes an occasion for Dasein to pay attention to the question itself since it questions that which is not supposed to be questioned. Therefore, what is constantly questioned in the most hypertonic manner is the event of the question of the unquestionable, an event that tradition never questions.

III. Hypotonic Irony

In *Being and Time*, the echo of hypertonic boastfulness is complemented by that of hypotonic irony. Indeed, the work is engaged in a fitful air of playfulness by which the arrogant possibility of Dasein's pure and simple Self-comprehension is levelled down to pure and simple indifference. For example, Heidegger states that the formal meaning of Dasein's existential constitution 'should be uncovered in the undifferentiated character [indifferenten Zunächst] in which it [Dasein] is initially and for the most part' and that this is 'not nothing [nicht nichts] but a positive phenomenal characteristic of this entity' (SZ 43). The supremely egotistical 'entity' of Dasein, which through and within its Selfhood struts towards its Self-knowledge, is depreciated in the most ridiculous manner. The pure and simple completion of Dasein's Self-knowledge is described as indifference, thus failing to differentiate that which has always been supposed to differentiate: a resolute understanding of the unitary, isolated, and exceptional Selfhood of Dasein. In its overconfident hermeneutic deployment, Dasein interprets itself as that which could possibly be, which is, ironically, that which could never possibly be, an indication of its own Self-ignorance.

As Self-ignorant, Dasein cannot give an account of the horizon of its own limitation and cannot differentiate presence as the neglected limitation of tradition. Dasein admits failure and comes face to face with the notion of presence as the unknowable limit that necessitates its exceptional Selfhood. But this admittance of defeat is ironic in the most extreme way since Dasein remains so blindly defeated towards its necessary limit so that it does not consider it necessary any more. That is to say, the admittance of presence is taken for granted so extremely that there is no urgent necessity for presence to be taken for granted. Since presence is not taken for granted any more, the question of its necessity inevitably becomes an issue again. This ironic ploy is exhibited in *Being and Time* in the way in which the proper consideration of the notion of presence does not bring forth a presupposition-less notion of absence that is empty of temporality. On the contrary, the authentic recollection of presence

affirms presence as a temporal phenomenon. Hence, the question of the meaning of Being, as the question of the unquestioned assumption of presence, is interrogated in and through the horizontal limit of temporality. In the very first page of the work, Heidegger states his intentions and notes that the provisional aim of the whole work is ‘the interpretation of *time* [*Zeit*] as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being’ (SZ 1). The ontico-ontological ‘ha ha ha’ echo of Dasein that gives meaning to beings is fully temporal.

In addition, the temporal way of Dasein is regarded as care since, as Heidegger states, ‘Dasein’s Being reveals itself as *care*’ (SZ 182). The disclosing call of conscience, then, is a solicitous call that meaningfully expresses the way in which Dasein depreciates itself, albeit in a concerning way. Heidegger explains:

The call reaches Dasein in this understanding of itself which it always has, and which is concerning in an everyday-average [*alltäglich-durchschnittlich*] manner. The call reaches the they-Self of concerning Being with Others [*Das Man-selbst des besorgenden Mitseins mit Anderen wird vom Ruf getroffen*]. (SZ 272)

These short but compact sentences call attention to three important points. Firstly, in an everyday-average manner, Dasein brings itself to its own Self-ignorance. Elsewhere, Heidegger notes that ‘the everyday undifferentiated character of Dasein’ is named as ‘*averageness* [*Durchschnittlichkeit*’] (SZ 43) and that ‘this care of averageness reveals in turn an essential tendency of Dasein which we call the levelling down [*Einebnung*] of all possibilities of Dasein’ (SZ 127). Secondly, as Self-ignorant, Dasein loses its distinctiveness and becomes the neuter they-Self: an indistinctive and anonymous ‘*nobody* [*Niemand*’] to whom Dasein has surrendered itself and from whom Dasein does not distinguish itself (SZ 127). Thirdly, Dasein is essentially ‘Being-with [*Mitsein*’] as Being with the indistinctive Others. As a result, the Others is ‘a duplicate [*eine Dublette*’] of Dasein’s isolated Selfhood (SZ 124). In other words, Dasein ‘is’ the indistinctive and anonymous Others.

At this point, I wish to argue that the solicitous call of care between Dasein and Others revoices Dasein’s echoing laughter, which is so excessively impotent and hypotonic that destroys the notion of presence in a duplicitous manner. As it is engaged in a caring dialogue with its ‘*Doppelgänger*,’ Dasein converses through and within its Selfhood and produces a duplicitous voice. In a way, Dasein becomes a figure of ridiculous proportions: one Self with two mouths and four ears. But again, Dasein’s solicitous call is described as a ‘backward [*Rück*’] and ‘forward [*Nach*’] movement. Heidegger writes: ‘Just as *circumspection* belongs to concern as a way of discovering what is ready-to-hand, solicitude [*Fürsorge*] is guided by re-spect

[*Rücksicht*] and for-bearance [*Nachsicht*]’ (SZ 123). This backward and forward movement is explicated in terms of a loss. Heidegger notes:

The appeal calls back by calling forth [Der Anruf ist vorrufender Rückruf]: it calls Dasein *forth* [*vor*] to the possibility of taking over, in existing, even that thrown entity which it is; it calls Dasein *back* [*zurück*] to its thrownness [Geworfenheit] as the null ground [nichtiger Grund] which it has to take up existence. This calling back in which conscience calls forth gives Dasein to understand that Dasein itself—the null ground for its null projection, standing in the possibility of its Being—is to bring itself back to itself from its lostness in the they; and this means that it *is loss* [*schuldig ist*]. (SZ 287)

Heidegger here plays with the multivocality of the noun ‘schuldig.’ In addition to ‘guilty’ and ‘blameworthy,’ it also means ‘due’ in the sense of a ‘lack.’³⁷ Heidegger insists that one understands the idea of ‘schuldig’ existentially, i.e., as ‘Being-the-ground for a Being which has been defined by a “not”’ (SZ 283). Hence, by going back and forth, Dasein recalls itself as lack.

By arguing that Dasein is a thrown entity, Heidegger insists that Dasein is dispensed necessarily within a movement that pendulates in a ‘null’ way. Dasein’s explicit thrownness suggests ‘*the facticity of its being delivered over* [*Faktizität der Überantwortung andeuten*]’ (SZ 135). The ‘matter of fact’ here is that Dasein is thrown in a null movement that ‘over-responds’; Dasein delivers a response [Antwort] in the manner of an excess, and it does so loudly that it deafens and disorients. Heidegger writes:

Dasein’s facticity is such that *as long as* it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw, and is sucked into the curl [Wirbel] of the they’s inauthenticity. Thrownness, in which facticity lets itself be seen phenomenally, belongs to Dasein, for which, in its Being, that very Being is an issue. Dasein exists factically [Dasein existiert faktisch]. (SZ 179)

Dasein’s thrownness is described as a movement of ‘curl’ which, through and within the force of its own movement, Dasein loses itself. The statement ‘Dasein exists factically’ means that Dasein is lost in the movement of its own echoing. Dasein’s calling back and forth is a null projection that produces a null echo. This hypotonic tonality of the echo of the call of conscience attests Dasein’s self-projection, self-thrownness, or self-dispensation.

Nonetheless, it is only within an interpretative and hermeneutic understanding that Dasein projects itself. This hermeneutic movement of understanding is again enabled by tonality. Heidegger writes:

³⁷ *Oxford-Duden German Dictionary*, 3rd ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 638.

Understanding is never free-floating but always attuned. The ‘Da’ gets equiprimordially disclosed by tune [Stimmung] or else closed off. Attunement [Befindlichkeit] brings Dasein *face to face* with its thrownness in such a way that the latter is not known as such, but is disclosed far more primordially in ‘how one is [wie einem ist].’ Existentially, *Being-thrown* [Geworfensein] means finding oneself either way [so oder so] in such attunement. (SZ 340-341)

Dasein understands itself as its own possibility and as it really ‘is’ in the way the call of conscience is attuned. But as noted earlier, this attunement is ridiculous because it demands a single saying by two mouths and a unique hearing by four ears—the deceptive banter between Dasein and Others. Attunement, then, is the consonance of the uncanny call of conscience. Heidegger insists that ‘Dasein-with is already essentially manifest in a co-attunement and a co-understanding [Mitdasein ist wesentlich schon offenbar in der Mitbefindlichkeit und im Mitverstehen]’ (SZ 162). Therefore, the tune of the call of conscience is the dispensed echo by which Dasein finds its unique Selfhood as Being-with. It is a concordant tune, a proper diapason, a symphonic echo that discovers itself exactly both ‘at’ and ‘through’ the interval of all chords.³⁸ This symphony is duplicitous because it is characterized by a double accent and a double tempo. This puzzling character of the dual tonality of the call’s tune is exhibited by the phenomena of ‘apprehensibility [die Furcht]’ and ‘disquiet [die Angst].’³⁹

As Heidegger notes, apprehensibility is ‘an inauthentic attunement’ and ‘harmful [abträglich] to Dasein’s factual potentiality-for-Being’ (SZ 341). In apprehensibility, there is a diachronic consonance of the call. This means that, at any time, (a) Dasein laughs and Others listen or alternatively (b) Others laugh and Dasein listens. However, the exchange of laughter between Dasein and Others is just a sign of a distorting revelling. Heidegger notes that that in the face of this potential consonance, one backs way in ‘perplexity [Verwirrung]’ and ‘depression [Gedrücktheit].’ He also notes that this ‘perplexity is grounded upon a forgetting’ (SZ 342). Since the concordant tune is a sign of a distorted exchange, the apprehensibility of an oppositional laughing and hearing occurs elliptically and is itself a sign of a lack. Indeed, Heidegger states that speech is characterized by ‘idle talk [das Gerede]’ because ‘we have *the same thing* in view, because it is in *the same* averageness that we have a common understanding of what is said’ (SZ 168). Thus, the apprehensible

³⁸ The Greek ‘διαπασσν’ designates the concord of all the notes ranging from the first to the last. It is a symphony echoed ‘through’ and ‘at’ the interval of all the notes of the scale [δι πασ ν τ ν χορδ ν συμφωνία]. See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 406.

³⁹ I purposely choose to translate ‘die Befindlichkeit,’ ‘die Stimmung,’ ‘die Furcht,’ and ‘die Angst’ respectively as ‘attunement,’ ‘tune,’ ‘apprehensibility,’ and ‘disquiet.’

oppositional laughter between Dasein and Others articulates nothing in particular because it says the same over and over again. The same laughing echo is repeated in infinity without in fact communicating anything distinctively and apprehensibly. In other words, the laughing echo is distinctively delivered only insofar as it is delivered indistinctively as the same at all times. Heidegger states that apprehension forgets itself because 'leaps from next to next' (SZ 342). The repetition of the echo is so extremely repetitive that it is unrepeatable. It is similar to the effect of a riotous or a noisy mirth where the laughing sound is so rowdy and unruly that gives the impression that it carries equal intensities at all frequencies of its range. This boisterous laughter is nowhere and anywhere, never and all the time. Heidegger calls this 'nowhere/anywhere' and 'never/all the time' effect of speech as 'curiosity [Neugier].' He notes that curiosity 'seeks disquiet [Unruhe] and the excitement of continual novelty and alternating encounters' (SZ 172) and that it is characterized by a 'never dwelling anywhere [Aufenthaltslosigkeit]' (SZ 173). Finally, because the laughter's noise signal is so tranquilizing, mesmerizing, random, and heterogeneous, the echo's ability to generate a moment of finite tone is impossible. In this way, as Heidegger notes, 'it soon becomes impossible to decide what is disclosed in a genuine understanding and what is not.' Heidegger calls this ambivalent understanding as 'ambiguity [Die Zweideutigkeit]' (SZ 173). In its ambiguous rattling, the laughing echo brings understanding to an excessive ruination that does not leave behind any signs of visible remains.

It is this overly devastating ruination that the laughing echo of Dasein reverberates in its deafening revelry with Others. In this monotonous repetition of an average and everyday laughter, what is diachronically echoed is an indiscernible presence that cannot be taken for granted. The erratic spasm of Dasein's laughter converges and converses a distorted presence that could never be possibly understood as something present. The 'ha ha ha' sound of Dasein ridicules and demeans the quest for Self-knowledge in the most excessive way, and it eventually laughs at nothing in particular. In this way, the question of the meaning of Being, which Dasein brings into a hermeneutic understanding through its clattering laughter, transmits and delivers a destructive laughter that undermines the notion of presence so ridiculously that it cancels it as an issue of proper inquiry. But again, it is done so in the most duplicitous manner. And here exactly lies the ironic joke: only as a non-issue the issue of presence could be inquired in a proper way.

CONCLUSION: LAUGHING AT HEIDEGGER'S LAUGHTER

The task at hand resists a concluding note because it requires that we keep laughing. By doing so, we are forcibly engaged in a funny game by which we appreciate the full extent of Heidegger's laughter by demeaning its boisterous magnitude. The laughter of Hermes entertains Heidegger as a thinker who bears no extraordinary status among other thinkers. Heidegger becomes a diachronic thinker if and only if he is thought from within a tradition of other thinkers and poets. Heidegger becomes presenting and presentable only from within a long discourse of thinking that presupposes the notion of presence as something objectively present.

But the relegating laughter that delivers Heidegger to the philosophical heritage he essentially belongs resounds ambivalently. On the one hand, the possibility of presenting Heidegger as just another presentable philosopher retrieves the essential ground of presence as something excessively transcendental, impossible, and null. On the other hand, the ruinous dissimulation of the essence of Heidegger's philosophical presentation delivers Heidegger not as an impossible thinker but rather as a truly possible one. In the trickiest fashion, the task of laughing at Heidegger levels Heidegger down to that which he truly 'is.' Laughing at Heidegger and other thinkers only shows a genuine concern for them because it leads to their positive confirmation as significant, albeit through the annihilation of the site of concern itself and its conversion into an Unthought and Unthinkable site that bears no positive significations and limitations.

Therefore, by laughing at Heidegger and other philosophers, we only show our true concern for what they want to say. We pay heed to their speech and sound, but only through a discourse of understanding that exhibits a sense of laughter and jesting. Indeed, the comic echo of laughter becomes the subversive effect that orients understanding against objectification, formalization, and standardization. It defies the attempt to break tradition into fixed camps, dogmas, or orthodoxies. It defeats any expectations of shared presuppositions and predictable interpretations by producing an echo of unexpected inversions, contortions, and explosions, thus opening our ears to the incalculable transmutations of traditional thinking. The echo of laughter defamiliarizes us from tradition so that we, at every time, unlearn and overcome what we have been taught. It releases us from our previous assumptions and teaches us how to question the unquestioned and unquestionable. By laughing at Heidegger's laughter, we remain careful to Heidegger's task of thinking which forces to remain attuned to the overwhelming plethora of questions that stay obfuscated in philosophical thinking. But we do so ironically, since remaining attuned to the neglected questions of tradition requires that we remain attuned to the accent and

measurement of a possible hermeneutics of laughter, which Heidegger so carelessly disregarded.

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