
Reading Elements of the Later Heidegger as Myth

Dominic Griffiths

Department of Philosophy, University of Pretoria

Abstract

This paper reads themes in Martin Heidegger's later philosophy such as the fourfold as mythical, arguing that this approach is perhaps more tenable than a purely philosophical reading.

Briefly, Heidegger describes the fourfold of mortals, divinities, the sky and the earth. For mortals to dwell poetically (live a meaningful, holistic life) they must recognise and assume guardianship of Being. This guardianship is a natural extension of our existence, once we realise the sacredness of Being as such. Thus, the fourfold represents the possibility of existing in a harmonious, saving relationship with Being. In reality, Heidegger warns, this conception of holistic existence is hindered by rampant technological enframing.

Conceptually, Ricoeur's conception of myth provides a tenable reading of Heidegger's conception. For Ricoeur, myth has a symbolic function in its power to reveal; it discloses other unprecedented worlds which transcend the established limits of our actual world. Applying these characterisations of myth yields a coherent interpretation of the fourfold, and demonstrates the centrality of this concept in Heidegger's later thought, which a more strictly philosophical approach may undervalue.

Thus this paper suggests the usefulness of a mythological approach to the later Heidegger and demonstrates myth's vitality as a profoundly human paradigm which simultaneously complements and transcends more restricted rational endeavours.

'Modern man is threatened by a world created by himself'
(Ricoeur 1967: xi)

Familiarity with Martin Heidegger's later work lead to one of two conclusions: either one is incredulous, often from the beginning of the encounter with Heidegger and this incredulity reaches its zenith in his later writings. Or, from the start, one becomes seduced by the Heideggerian

vision and this seduction may result in the ardent defence and continual re-appropriation of his work in its entirety. For some Heidegger is a charlatan disguised as philosopher, a trickster of words that seduce but are empty. Others argue that Heidegger's position in the tradition of Philosophy occupies a place of the utmost importance, and that the question concerning the meaning of Being is *the* question.

Heidegger's philosophy is often divided into two distinct phases. The first phase is characterised by the exploration of the meaning of human existence – what it means to *be there* (*Dasein*) in the space that is Being. His earlier writings are more analytic in style and are epitomised in his masterpiece, *Being and Time*. His later writings are more poetic and deal with a variety of related themes such as *the fourfold*, *dwelling* and meditations on the nature of poetry and language. For this particular paper that superficial division will suffice, as the paper will deal with some elements of Heidegger's later thought alone. However, one must not assume that the earlier Heidegger and later Heidegger ask different questions – the same question is always present – only approached in different ways. There are numerous elements to his later thought, but the primary concern deals with what is termed '*dwelling within the fourfold*'. Heidegger's later thought describes a vision and meaning to human existence that is difficult to understand initially. It is imbued with poetic language and thus may appear to be without philosophic merit. Yet, this initial impression is misleading and given a hermeneutic approach, one can perceive a vision and meaning developed by his later work that opens up rich possibilities for the meaning and purpose of human existence.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how this vision can be comprehended in the context of myth, using a select number of ideas dealing with the meaning and purpose of myth. My initial intuition is that if one explores Heidegger's later writings from this position it will reveal an interesting approach to this later work that is certainly tenable. One of the key concepts in his later work is the fourfold (*das Geviert*), which deals with the interrelationship of mortals, the earth, sky and divinities. For Heidegger the possibility of dwelling emerges holistically through the interplay of these elements. Dwelling itself describes the relationship mortals have with their world, which is characterised by preservation and care. The passage that captures this interrelation in its essence is taken from his essay 'Building Dwelling Thinking':

Mortals dwell in that they save the earth... Saving does not only snatch something from danger. To save really means to set something free into its presencing. To save the earth is more that to exploit it and wear it out. Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from spoliation.

Mortals dwell in that they receive the sky as sky. They leave to the sun and the moon their journey, to the stars their course, to the seasons their blessing and their inclemency; they do not turn night into day nor day into a harassed unrest.

Mortals dwell in that they await the divinities as divinities. In hope they hold up to the divinities what is un hoped for. They wait for intimations of their coming and do not mistake the signs of their absence. They do not make their gods for themselves and do not worship idols. In the very depths of misfortune they wait for the weal that has been withdrawn.

Mortals dwell in that they initiate their own nature – their being capable of death as death – into the use and practice of this capacity, so that there may be a good death. To initiate mortals into the nature of death in no way means to make death, as empty Nothing, the goal. Nor does it mean to darken dwelling by blindly staring toward the end (Heidegger 2001: 148, 149).

This passage provides a harmonious and poetic description of the various aspects of the fourfold and how this dwelling within the fourfold gives purpose to mortals. There is a poetic quality to these ideas and to the writing itself; a rhythm of day and night, beginnings and endings, birth and death, all encompassed within a symbolic whole that is characterised by a relationship of care and preservation. This is an unceasing relationship within the fourfold and requires the continuity and dedication of generations of human beings. It is clear from the passage that Heidegger is using a poetic-philosophic language to discuss this holistic vision of human existence. Clearly, though, the passage is not speaking about a world many of us, as 21st century humans, may intuitively understand because of the urban, technologised nature of our lives. This factor I will address briefly at the end of the paper. The question then is: how do we make this writing meaningful?

Julian Young, for instance, who has written extensively on Heidegger, gives a coherent interpretation of the fourfold employing, as he himself states, 'prosaic words of astronomy, meteorology, biology and sociology [whereas] Heidegger employs the radiant, words of poetry'. And he does so, according to Young, to *show* something (2002: 99). What is key here, in Young's words, is the idea of *showing*. In Heidegger's later work his major undertaking is the attempt to allow the *showing* or revealing of Being to take place. This illumination is not possible through conventional description, which Young mentions, and this explains why Heidegger often resorts to poetic, metaphoric imagery in his later work. His recourse to poetry is what enables Heidegger to speak meaningfully about the *non-objectifiable* nature of Being (Pattison 2000: 200).

Heidegger is attempting to evoke the experience of *Ereignis*. This term

is an especially dense, difficult Heideggerian word, whose meaning develops throughout his philosophical writings. For the purposes of this piece, the word can be used in the context of the *happening* or *illumination* of Being. In terms of the fourfold the moment of *Ereignis* is an event of *appropriation* (*Ereignis*) or, perhaps *claiming*, whereby mortal Dasein is appropriated (*vereignet*) as one of the interdependent elements in the fourfold' (Wrathall and Malpas 2000: 137). This appropriation occurs through the recognition of our fundamental role of guardianship within the fourfold, and with this recognition emerges the responsibility we have towards the sustaining of Being itself. This sustaining of Being manifests itself in the form of care (*Sorge*). It is through this *happening* that we come to understand the meaning of dwelling.

The above account is not nearly as extensive as it could be, and these ideas could be expanded in greater detail. The basic point that underlies these writings from Heidegger is to *present* his idea of the fourfold, but not to explicate it – for that defeats the initial point of the piece and would destroy its philosophic-poetic quality. The supposed quasi-*mystical* quality of his writing, as certain commentators have asserted, encourages a supposed lapse from philosophy into the incomprehensibility of mysticism (Young 2002: 2). This position I disagree with and certain commentators on Heidegger have certainly given philosophically sound readings of his later work¹.

My intention is to determine whether it is feasible to use certain definitions of myth in a manner whereby they open up a different perspective on these elements in Heidegger's later work. We have the idea of the fourfold, which can, arguably, be made philosophically tenable. The question here is: what of the use of myth? Can a definition of myth be used in conjunction with Heidegger's later writings?

Csapo, in his *Theories of Mythology* begins by deconstructing what may be the more typical definitions of the term 'myth'. This is useful, in that his approach demonstrates, firstly, the problem and variation of definition itself and secondly, allows certain freedoms in how one may appropriate a workable definition of myth. This is especially important for what this piece will attempt to do, because my use of myth may be viewed as atypical. He writes, in his opening paragraph, the following:

Definition is never the innocent first step in a process of empirical discovery that it is sometimes made to seem: it is rather always the final precipitate of an already elaborate theory. To begin with a definition is therefore in an important sense to begin at the end, and to urge acceptance of a position before presenting the arguments of the evidence (Csapo 2005: 1).

This insight on beginnings and definitions aptly captures my intention to use certain elements from Ricoeur and other writings on myth and apply them to

Heidegger, with the intent that my conclusion will already be made in the definition. In his opening chapter Csapo proceeds to highlight numerous definitions of myth found in the work of anthropologists and highlights their problems and inconsistencies. He argues that though 'we speak of something being a myth... because it reminds us in some way of stories that our culture has canonized as typical of that genre... it is impossible to insist, for cultural products at least, on essential criteria' (2005: 8). This implies that, perhaps, instead of defining myth essentially or universally, it may work more constructively to define it in terms of its usefulness for a society. Thus he writes that 'myth might be usefully defined as a narrative which is considered socially important, and is told in such a way as to allow the entire social collective to share a sense of this importance' (2005: 9). However, again, this 'useful' definition is problematised as being too broad and vague by Csapo, although it does give recognition to the criterion that the social importance of something is determined through its use – 'if it is important a story will be repeated or alluded to frequently in social discourse' (2005: 9).

One could, given the amount of literature on myth that exists, pursue a definition endlessly, that much is sure. However, following Csapo's ideas regarding the repetition of mythical narratives, because of their social importance, one may wonder what the singular quality of this narrative may be that makes it mythical and gives it an important place in social discourse? The most ready answer to this question could be found in the sacred. Myths that are regarded as sacred 'report realities and events from the origin of the world that remain valid for the basis and purpose of all that there is' according to Bolle (Eliade 1987, 261). He writes that:

In communicating the sacred, a myth makes available in words what by no other means is available, and its words are different from other words... The language of myth does not induce discussion: it does not argue, but presents (Eliade 1987: 262).

Bolle uses the example of the opening lines of *Genesis* to provide an example of this communication of the sacred. This example is effective because it also links with Csapo's contention that a myth is a narrative within a social discourse that is repeated or alluded to often. The story of *Genesis* is one that any Christian or post-Christian society can relate to because it is presently the most common and widely known creation myth in the West. This creation myth is also clearly the manifestation of the sacred at the beginning of time. Using the temporal realm as a distinguishing factor can give a distinctive character to how myths are defined. Eliade uses the distinction between sacred and profane time – and this distinction is particularly useful in terms of Heidegger's passage on the *fourfold*. Eliade writes:

The sacred is qualitatively different from the profane, yet it may manifest itself no matter how or where in the profane world because of its power of turning any natural object into a paradox by means of hierophany [i.e. manifestation of the sacred] (1958: 30).

Following this Coupe writes:

Myth is the language within which archaic humanity narrates its awareness of the discrepancy between sacred time and profane time, and in which it projects their reconciliation. Ritual is the means by which it seeks to translate the mere chronology of profane time into the coincidence of sacred and profane (1997: 59).

It is evident that in Heidegger's description of the fourfold there is a distinctive sense of sacred time that emerges through mortals dwelling on earth, with the divinities and sky all part of this holistic depiction of Being. In this sense, Being is mythologized and manifest in the rituals carried out by mortals, the care and preservation of the earth, receiving the sky, awaiting the divinities and mortals initiating their nature in order to ensure a good death. This is sacred time, following Eliade, in the sense that natural objects can become manifest as sacred, through their *naming* in language. This language is embodied in ritual, and the ritual, in Heidegger's description of the fourfold, manifests itself in the poetic domain. Poetry or poetic language creates this hierophany; it is the *naming* of the sacred.

For Heidegger what happens in the naming is that things are gathered into the fourfold (2001: 197). Through this unifying gathering one encounters/ is appropriated by Being itself. His intention, in the context of the fourfold, is to highlight how naming brings things to the world. In naming a thing one calls it to presence, but in so doing one also calls the *world* of that thing to presence. For Heidegger there is a relationship between the thing and its world whereby each penetrates the other. They are intimate but not fused into one. Rather they remain separate and a division prevails, which he refers to as the 'dif-ference' (2001: 199). This deals with the way a thing is grounded in its world. The two are separate, in that they are *different* from one another but one cannot understand the being of a thing if one does not understand the world in which that thing is embedded. He writes that: 'The dif-ference for world and thing *disclosingly appropriates* things into bearing a world; it *disclosingly appropriates* world into the granting of things' (2001: 200). The 'dif-ference' is language, in that when language names a thing it 'discloses' it (reveals it, or 'frees' it) from its world because the thing itself is brought to presence. It is *differed* from its world - yet at the same time a thing cannot be a thing without recourse to the world which grants the thing its *thingliness*. This unifying yet *differed* tension of presence is created through the *dif-ference* of language.

Language is manifest and experienced through time, so one could argue that the *differing* nature of language is the reason it can manifest sacred time when it is used in a poetic manner. Through this naming, a thing is freed or disclosed from its world and brought to presence. It is the temporal nature of Being which allows this presencing. But there is more to this: The essence of language for Heidegger is that language is not the utterance of an organism, neither is it the expression of a living thing, nor does its essence reside in its symbolic character. Rather, '[!]language is the clearing-concealing advent of Being itself' (1993: 230). Heidegger argues that we are not the shapers of language; rather it is language that shapes us, and it is through this shaping/*differing* power of language that we come to experience the sacred - through the presencing of things called forth from their *world*, through language.

How does this relate to myth is the important question for this presentation? It seems that the underlying principle of all myth is its sacred nature. Following Eliade, it is through ritualised or, for my purposes and Heidegger's, poetic language that one can transform the natural into the sacred. It is also this way of using language that allows humanity to comprehend the difference between sacred time and profane time. The reason for this, following Heidegger, is through the *differing* quality of language. For the most part we use language as a form of communication, a tool and in this manner it forms part of the realm of the profane. But, when it is ritualised or transformed into poetic language it can manifest another realm, namely, the sacred. Poetic language illuminates the character of language's mythical (and in this sense, sacred) quality through its ability, in Heidegger's terms, to express the *non-objectifiability* of the nature of Being.

These ideas, I think, allow a tenable approach to the later Heidegger's writings concerning the *fourfold*, in terms of its mythical quality. But it raises the question that must be considered - to what extent is the secular Western conscience demythologised? Naively, I would initially have asserted that myths are fictional ancient narratives, generally considered non-rational, and that have no bearing on my particular frame of reference, living in the 21st century. But, Heidegger's later thinking clearly raises a very interesting position. Why would a 20th century philosopher describe reality in these *mythical* terms? Perhaps to evoke the sacred in a meaningful way without being overtly religious, and perhaps as a response to postmodern nihilism. One may also interpret it as a means of connecting with our historical, mythical consciousness.

Before Copernicus humanities' relationship with the world was largely mythical in nature. From Copernicus onwards gradually the Western world began to sever itself from its mythical consciousness. Radical Cartesian

doubt and Newtonian principles erode this conception of mortal mythical existence almost entirely. One could argue that all the West has done is replace one myth with another but I don't think, in this reading of myth, that position is tenable. Clearly, what was lost in all this was the conception of the world as sacred, a fundamental property of a mythical conscience.

Ricoeur has written extensively on the phenomenon of myth and his perspective is immensely rich. He writes that the

original potential of any genuine myth will always transcend the confines of a particular community or nation. The *mythos* of any community is the bearer of something which exceeds its frontiers; it is the bearer of other possible worlds. And I think it is in this horizon of the 'possible' that we discover the *universal* dimensions of symbolic and poetic language (1991 Valdés: 489).

Furthermore:

By the spirit of language we intend not just some decorative excess or effusion of subjectivity, but *the capacity of language to open up new worlds*. Poetry and myth are not just nostalgia for some forgotten world. They constitute a disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening on to other *possible* worlds which transcend the established limits of our actual world (1991 Valdés: 489, 490).

To a large extent these two passages are what this mythical reading of the later Heidegger hinges on. Basing a reading of Heidegger's fourfold on these ideas from Ricoeur can render a coherent mythical interpretation of them. Ricoeur highlights the universal dimensions of poetic language, clearly linked to the language describing the fourfold, he mentions the capacity of language to open up new worlds, which is what the description of Heidegger's fourfold does. He reaffirms the revealing of poetry and myth, not as just as a nostalgia but as the possibility to disclose unprecedented worlds and other possible worlds which transcend the limits of this world. Implicit in this is the role of the sacred that is manifest through the differing nature of language – which allows one access to sacred time. If myth is to be regarded as the bearer of other possible worlds which transcend the limits of this world then I think that a reading of Heidegger's depiction of Being, in terms of the *fourfold*, allows one to defend the notion that this idea can clearly be rendered intelligible in terms of myth.

For Ricoeur, one of the most important dimensions of myth is that it opens up the realm of possibility. In this regard Heidegger's *fourfold* can thus be read as a *myth of the future* – as deliverance from the present (Coupe 1997: 96). For the 'present exists as a tension between the way things have always been and the way things ought to be' (Coupe 1997:

97). Certainly Heidegger's fourfold depicts a time past – a utopia of peaceful, unhurried human dwelling. I think he certainly holds nostalgia for this agrarian, community centred life because it reminds him of the world he grew up and always held strong attachments to. But dwelling, as he depicts it in the fourfold, presents a vision of the *possibility* that mortal life may become, the possibility of being delivered from a technologically enframed world. Heidegger wrote an essay '*The Question concerning Technology*' which deals with the danger of technology, in that it enframes Being itself into a specific material, productive and technologised mould that we know so well. But in doing so, this technological enframing fundamentally limits the *possibilities* of human existence – to fit into the requirements of our technologised world. In this sense then, his later writings on the fourfold can be perceived as a response to technological enframing, and offer a conception and possibility of mortal existence which is not humans being shaped by their technological needs that they can no longer control – but rather being open to the possibilities offered to them as an interdependent element within the fourfold.

Following the discussion of myth and some of Ricoeur's ideas on myth, Heidegger's *fourfold* offers us a rich mythical interpretation of Being that opens up the possibility of deliverance from a technologically enframed world. It re-asserts the sacred power contained in language and gives us a more meaningful perspective to Being, as it should be experienced. It contains this regenerative quality because it opens up a rich, authentic possibility for mortal dwelling and re-asserts the importance of the sacred in temporal, human endeavours.

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1. Especially Julian Young's *Heidegger Later Philosophy* (2002).

Proclus on the Common Education of Men and Women in the Republic

Panagiota Xirogianni
School of Air Force, Athens

Abstract

In the fifth book of the Republic Plato introduces his proposal for the common education of the guardians of the ideal state by means of an analogy between dogs and humans. In the relevant section of his commentary on the Republic Proclus provides an argument for this proposed common education of men and women. I explore the deductive form of the argument and the supplementary support that Proclus provides for its main premiss.

The argument is basically an application of modus ponens for establishing the natural similarity of all humans irrespectively of sex; it is further supported by Proclus' claim that all members of a species share a common way of life.

At the beginning of Book V of the Republic, Socrates having just completed a first sketch of the good and right constitution and man, is about to discuss the degenerate types of political constitution and human character. He is, however, interrupted and asked to justify his earlier remark (423e6-424a), that the Guardians of the commonwealth will have all things in common, including wives and children (449c4-5).

As it turns out, this particular point requires in fact nothing less than a general discussion of the conditions required for the realization of the Ideal State under the continued metaphor of three waves of paradox. These are

- (i) the exercise of the same functions by men and women (454e3-4)
- (ii) the community of wives and children (457c10-d3)
- (iii) the postulate that either philosophers must become kings or kings philosophers (473c11-e2)

The overall discussion of these topics occupies virtually the whole of this book of the Republic.¹

In this essay I would like to discuss an aspect of the first wave of paradox, namely the way it is introduced by Plato, together with the way that