

# Heidegger, Embodiment, And Disability<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Most interpretations of Heidegger's reflections on the body maintain that—whether early, middle, or late in the *Gesamtausgabe*—Dasein's or the mortal's openness to being/beyng is the ground of the fleshly or bodily (*das Leibliche*), but not the reverse. In this paper, I argue that there is evidence from Heidegger's own oeuvre demonstrating that this relationship is instead mutually reciprocal. That is to say, I contend that corporeal variability is constitutive of Dasein's openness to being just as Dasein's openness to being is constitutive of its corporeal variability. Understood in this way, Heidegger's thinking proffers what I call a *corpoeitic* understanding of the body and of the meaning of ability, and I show that such an understanding is grounded in the idea of *access*, a central concept in philosophy of disability and disability studies. After developing this idea of ability as access, I close by addressing the larger political stakes of using Heidegger's work to think about embodiment and disability given the Third Reich's mass slaughter of people with disabilities.

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“Heidegger tries to make the word *Dasein* (‘existence’) say:  
*Dasein* is being the there (*da*) [*la là*]. With the body, it’s  
only a question of this: how is it that *I* am the there...when  
a baby is born, there’s a new ‘there’...the body is the unity  
of a being outside itself [*le corps est l’unité d’un être hors  
de soi*].”  
—Nancy, *Corpus*<sup>2</sup>

As for the exposure and rearing of children [*ἀποθέσεως καὶ  
τροφῆς τῶν γιγνομένων*], let there be a law that no deformed  
[*πεπηρωμένον*] child shall live.  
—Aristotle, *Politics*<sup>3</sup>

Heidegger (in)famously says little about the body.<sup>4</sup> He even claims that “the  
bodily is the most difficult [problem] (*das Leibliche das Schwierigste ist*)” (GA  
89: 231/292).<sup>5</sup> One explanation is that Heidegger understood both the dyad *Leib-  
Körper* and also the triad *Leib-Seele-Geist* to be nearly beyond recuperation from  
a metaphysics of presence that paradigmatically divides matter from spirit, *σῶμα*  
from *ψυχή*. But in his later years, Heidegger developed a host of concepts and  
ways of speaking that he thought better approached a thinking of things outside of  
the metaphysics of presence. As he commented in a letter to Dieter Sinn, the  
language of the 1954 Bremen Lectures marked the first time he had published his  
thinking “on its own terms.”<sup>6</sup> Why, one must ask, did a rethinking of the body not  
appear there? Or did it? Or, most provocatively of all, had it been there all along?

While one would be hard-pressed to disagree that Heidegger—early, middle, and  
late—explicitly argues that *Dasein*’s or the mortal’s openness to being/beyng is  
the ground of the fleshly or bodily (*das Leibliche*) and not the reverse, I will argue  
that there is evidence from Heidegger’s own oeuvre demonstrating that this  
relationship is instead mutually reciprocal. That is to say, corporeal variability is  
*constitutive* of *Dasein*’s openness to being just as *Dasein*’s openness is  
constitutive of its “corporeal variability.” By drawing upon resources in  
philosophy of disability and disability studies, the aim of this paper is to explore  
this line of interpretation in the hope that it charts a new path for conceptualizing  
embodiment in and through Heidegger’s thought.

I defend this claim neither by focusing on Heidegger’s explicit reflections on the  
body, nor on his methodological concerns over the body as a problematic, the  
scholarship concerning both of which has already been well-established. I instead  
focus upon how the body shows (or does not show itself) through Heidegger’s  
analyses of mortality and the mortal. I further claim that this interpretative focus  
provides for a new understanding of the body and of the meaning of ability in  
Heidegger, which I call *corporetic*. I contend that this understanding is in fact  
defined by a central concept in philosophy of disability and disability studies:  
*access*. It is in both of these ways that I take a different path than past commenters  
on Heidegger and embodiment.

In section one, using the discussion of *Sein-zum-Tode* in §§51-53 of *Being and Time* and the role of *die Sterblichen* in the Bremen Lectures as my primary evidence, I contend that Heidegger's own accounts of the role of mortality in thinking *die Seinsfrage* demonstrate corporeal variability as *constitutive* of Dasein's openness to being. In short, such variability plays an equiprimordial role with mortality and natality. Through a discussion of Heidegger's neologism *leiben* (typically rendered 'bodying' or 'bodying-forth'), I then suggest in section two that Heidegger's thinking proffers what I call a *corpoietic* understanding of the body. In section three, I show that such an understanding of the body is grounded in the idea of *access*, a central concept in philosophy of disability and disability studies. In closing, I address the larger political stakes of using Heidegger's work to think about embodiment and disability given the Third Reich's mass slaughter of people with disabilities.

## 1. The Bodiliness of Dasein: Natality-Mortality-Variability

Kevin Aho contends—along with most commentators—that criticisms of Heidegger's neglect of the body misunderstand the fact that his analyses are “*prior to the emergence of the human body and its various capacities.*”<sup>7</sup> Such criticisms, in other words, misunderstand the fact that Heidegger does not engage the body because the body is not part of his project and not so for defensible and explicit reasons. The “material” and “corruptible” body does not disclose the being of the being for whom being is a question, much less the dispensation or sending of being to and for which the mortal is called. On the contrary, it obfuscates that being. Put simply, the body, scholars such as Aho and Ciocan claim, is not irrelevant to philosophy, but it is irrelevant to fundamental ontology and/or, depending upon how diachronically one reads such claims across Heidegger's oeuvre, to a thinking of being through things and the Fourfold (*das Geviert*).<sup>8</sup> But does the Heideggerian *corpus* in fact support this claim, however anchored it is in Heidegger's explicit reflections on embodiment?

Near the outset of the second division of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger argues against understanding death in terms of the death of the body. “The no-longer-being-in-the-world of the deceased (understood in an extreme sense) is still a being [*ein Sein*] in the sense of the mere objective presence [*Nur-noch-vorhandensein*] of a corporeal thing encountered” (GA 2: 238/229).<sup>9</sup> While Dasein cannot experience this loss, in death it “loses the being of the there” (237/229). Heidegger then defines, recasting Epicurus, this being-towards-death as a possibility whose actualization cannot, in principle, occur. That is to say, there is a not-yet (*nochnicht*) that is definitive of Dasein's character. In being towards death, Dasein is constitutively in *relation* to death.<sup>10</sup>

Heidegger further explains, “the problem is not a matter of our grasp of the not-yet of the character of Dasein, but rather the possible *being* or *nonbeing* of this not-yet. Dasein, as itself, has to *become*, that is, *be*, what it is not yet” (243/234). It is a being “to whose kind of being becoming [*Werden*] belongs” (*ibid*). But as

Jacques Derrida and Reiner Schürmann, among others, argue, both following Arendt, this is only half of the story. The singularization effected by mortality cannot be thought outside of the simultaneity of the singularization of natality.<sup>11</sup> To put it bluntly, as David Farrell Krell recently does, “a fundamental ontology of Dasein cannot ignore [birth].”<sup>12</sup> Heidegger himself notes this issue in §72 of *Sein und Zeit*, only to argue, quite unconvincingly, I think, against the claim that natality is given as a foundation by the *Zeitlichkeit* of Dasein (GA 2: 355-60/372-77). Whether one agrees with Arendt’s specific casting of natality as a question of innovation and creativity, it is the pair natality-mortality that explains the interconnection of life with death—life as a form of dying and dying as a form of life—that Heidegger himself otherwise acknowledges (248-49/239, fn. 6). Being-towards-death is only conceivable as one side of a Janus-head whose other side reads *becoming-towards-life*.

Of course, being born (becoming a being that can become) cannot be explained merely as “entering” into a body.<sup>13</sup> Neither natality, nor mortality is reducible to the body (even if heard in terms of *das Leib*, the lived body) and neither are, of course, *experienced* as such. As Irigaray explains the former, “there was a kind of subsistence already, prior to the constitution of Being-in-the-world...the subsistence of a living body that draws its life from fluid matter.”<sup>14</sup> Natality and mortality are two opposing poles, the pulls of which constantly and uniquely singularize Dasein. But there is a third singularization. This singularization acts *upon* the divergent, oppositionally taut structure of natality and mortality, and Heidegger failed to see it, arguably, due to his hesitance to engage *das Leibproblem* head on. The third singularization along with natality and mortality is *corporeal variability*. Let me explain what I mean by this term and why it holds this role.

At any given moment the relation of Dasein to the opposing poles of natality or mortality can shift. For example, after learning of her terminal diagnosis of Lymphangiomyomatosis, Havi Carel writes, “I had to overhaul all my plans, expectations, goals, projects and horizons. Most importantly, I had to rethink my idea of a good life.”<sup>15</sup> How could the state of one’s body fundamentally change one’s idea of a good life, goodness itself, and even life itself—change the very meaningfulness of her world? Carel is not claiming that this or that fact of her life changed. She is claiming that her total understanding of things, her “world” in the language of *SuZ*, fundamentally changed.<sup>16</sup> This is only possible if there is a *structural* variability constitutive to the being of Da-sein. Only if in addition to mortality and natality, there is a variability that harbors the possibility to transform one’s relation to each and to their interrelation. *The body always already calls into question and transforms Dasein’s relation to natality and mortality* and, thereby, to the disclosivity of Dasein—to the mortal as a clearing for being.<sup>17</sup>

Take the following examples. In phenomena ranging from injury to illness, from daily fluctuations in fatigue or mood to aging—and across the alterations in

attunement coextensive with these—the singularization of the opposing pulls of natality and mortality become salient.<sup>18</sup> In the euphoria during and after exercise to the euphoria during and after sex, from the use of certain psychoactive and psychotropic substances to the feeling of “getting something” intellectually—and through the shifts in attunement coextensive with these—the singularization effected through the tension between natality and mortality becomes salient. The saliences in question are a function of how the bodily, *das Leibliche*, gathers and is gathered through the singularizations such variability realizes. These examples each demonstrate that the constant singularization effected through natality-mortality (what we ordinarily, and even some of the existentialists, call human “life”) is *constitutively variable*. One’s relationship towards existence, towards one’s unchosen beginning and inevitable end, is ever refracted through the variations and variabilities of one’s embodiment. Corporeal variability *shapes the meaning* of natality and mortality for any given Dasein. So far from being some material thing, whether lived, ready-to-hand, present-to-hand, or what have you, the “body” just is the project of navigating between natality and mortality.

Or consider Heidegger’s comment that “we must disentangle the structural variations possible for them [what is outstanding, end, and wholeness] in different realms, that is, deformed variations which are related to beings with a defined content and which are structurally determined in terms of their being [Sein]” (241/232). That one would, in the methodological context of *Sein und Zeit*, ignore structural variations that are genuinely ontic, existentielle matters strikes me as defensible. But the *variability* of the structure is itself a constitutive and determinate factor, and one which Heidegger fails to see in its actual existential role. In other words, Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, at least during the time period surrounding *Sein und Zeit*, fails to think through the structural *variability* of Dasein. In light of the claims being made here, the question remains how to hear the term “body” and the “corporeal” in this context, viz., as a structure of variability that modulates the relationship between natality and mortality. That is to say, the question remains how to hear it in a manner that mitigates its historical entrenchment in a metaphysics of presence and in no way thinks the body in terms of a material-immaterial binary.<sup>19</sup> Before I address this explicitly, I will first turn to argue that the role of corporeal variability appears also in the discussion of *die Sterblichen* in the Bremen Lectures.

## 2. The Bodiliness of the Mortal: Corporetics

In the 1954 Bremen Lectures, Heidegger writes, “When we say: mortals, then we already think, in case we are thinking, the other three along with them from the single fold of the four” (GA 79: 18/17). The thinking of the mortal is thinking of interrelation. It is, in this sense, a differential thinking—a thinking that takes variation *between* and *of* things as definitive of their being.<sup>20</sup> Each of the four, in their own way, make present the being of beings. The thing things, to use the language of that lecture, only insofar as it is constituted through and singularized

in the fourfold. The singularity of the mortal—its specific fold, as it were—is central to the way in which the thing worlds, the way in which it can be met. But what is the primary determinate difference between each of the folds of the fourfold: earth, sky, gods, and mortals? It is the way in which they are singularized.

And what defines the singularity of the mortal for Heidegger? “The mortals are the humans. They are called the mortals because they are able to die (*sie sterben können*)” (GA 79: 17/17). To the mortal belongs the ability (*das Können*), the capability (*das Vermögen*) to die a death *as* a death.<sup>21</sup> The singularization of the mortal as a fold of the fourfold is in its ability to radically vary its relation to being, viz., through death as death: an ultimate variation of its relation to being. This is a variability the earth, sky, and gods presumably do not share. It is, to incorporate the discussion from above, the mortal’s *variable* relation to natality and mortality that defines the mortal. But what does it mean to *be able to die* qua death? It means to be the sort of being whose bodily existence shifts between the poles of natality and mortality, between an unchosen, non-experienceable point of entry into existence and a typically unchosen, non-experienceable point of future non-existence. Corporeal variability is constitutive of *die Sterblichen*. In other words, the “capability to die a death *as* a death” only has meaning insofar as it assumes corporeal variability as a third existential (to use the language of *Sein und Zeit*) or essential belonging (to use the language of the later works) alongside natality and mortality. Whether one looks to 1927 or to 1949 onward, the structures of natality, mortality, and corporeal variability appear determinate to understand beings for whom being is a question. However, the question still remains how to more precisely hear the “corporeal” in “corporeal variability.”

## 2.1 Corpoietic Bodying

On the May 11<sup>th</sup> meeting detailed in the Zollikon Seminars, Heidegger approaches the question of the bodily through the body’s relation to the here. While one is always one’s here, the body is not “here” or present in the same way as any other object. The body *makes present*.<sup>22</sup> The specific *leibhaft* of Dasein is then explored through phenomena such as blushing, crying, pain, and sadness. Heidegger works his way to the insight that the way in which the body is, the manner of the body, is through a gathering—a gathering that makes present. The “here” that I am, while always gathering and making present, is nevertheless always differentially determined. Heidegger writes,

“I am here at all times” means that I always abide in a ‘here.’ However, in each case, the ‘here’ is this one. I am always at some particular “here,” but I am not always at this specific place [*Ort*]. In each case the body always participates [*beteiligt*] in the being-here...The bodying forth of the body is determined by the way of my being [*Das Leiben des Leibes bestimmt sich aus der Weise meines Seins*]. The bodying forth of the body, therefore, is a way of Da-seins’ being [*eine Weise des Da-seins*]. But what kind of

being? If the body as body is always my body, then this is my own way of being. Thus, bodying forth is co-determined by my being human in the sense of the ecstatic sojourn [*ekstatischen Aufenthaltes*] amidst the beings in the clearing. The limit of bodying forth (the body is only as it bodies forth: lived body) is the horizon of being within which I abide. Therefore, the limit of my bodying forth *changes constantly through the transformation in the reach of my abiding* [*Deshalb wandelt sich die Grenze des Leibens ständig durch die Wandlung der Reichweite meines Aufenthaltes*] (GA 89: 85-87/112-13, my italics, translation modified).<sup>23</sup>

Here one finds the most explicit textual support for what I'm calling "corporeal variability." But it should now be clear that while "bodying forth is co-determined by my being human," the converse is also true: *being human is co-determined by my bodying forth*.<sup>24</sup> The way in which Da-sein *is* (in the sense of *west*) is always already shaped through not simply its bodying forth through the body of one's mother and the bodies of caretakers and all those around one; it is also always already shaped through the variability of one's singular body. The variation of a given bodying-forth, a bodying-forth that is in each case mine, equiprimordially determines the singularizations of natality and mortality, of the bodying forth that always already *has been given* through the life-giver and the bodying forth that always already *is coming* through death.

This is a conception of the body, then, that is neither σῶμα, *corpus*, *Leib*, *Körper*, *chair*, *corps*, flesh, body, nor corpse, but δέμας: that figuration which forms and fashions the being of a being. In a passage from book XI of Homer's *Iliad* describing Euryalos and Aias' rallying their companions, they are described as fighting on in "the figure of a blazing fire" (δέμας πυρὸς αἰθομένοιο).<sup>25</sup> The labors of these fighting bodies is self-shown in a figuration of flames—the flames gather and bind the meaning, the sense, of these bodies through a *demas*, a likeness or form. In Lattimore's translation, he variously renders δέμας as stature, form, and likeness. The δέμας of a being captures its essential presencing, the way a being bodies forth in its particular density.<sup>26</sup> Δέμας, as I'm reading it, names the generative gathering and always emergent constitution of a being as the being it is—its, in a word, *figuration*.<sup>27</sup> The binding of δέμας is in each case a figuration of the singularizations of natality, mortality, and corporeal variation. Because the phrase "dematic bodying" or variations on it are grating, I will call this understanding of the body *corpoietic*. A corpoietic understanding of the body or bodiliness, one which I find the analyses above to evince, understands that term as picking out the figuration of our being through the triune, constitutive structures of natality, mortality, and variability. To be a corpoietic being means to be structured by each of these, a structure which is always already poietic, a figuration of *poiesis* heard as becoming, generation, creation, emergence, and making.<sup>28</sup> A making that is always, in principle, anew because always, in principle, variable.<sup>29</sup>

A corpoietic thinking accounts for the singularizing poles of mortality and natality as well as the *constitutive* variability of Dasein's openness. That is to say, it accounts for the roles of corruptibility, growth, homeostasis, and ontogenesis in the emergence and maintenance of sense without reducing a "body" to the material or making it secondary or derivative. It also accounts for the binding of the body—the way in which I do not have a body, but *am* in each case *my bodying-forth*. If my account is correct, Heidegger did not neglect the body as much as he failed to thematize a structure at work in and continually developed through his thinking. A corpoietic thinking thinks the singularity of a gathering that discloses. And that thinking, I'd proffer, is precisely one *μέθοδος*, one way into, *die Seinsfrage*.

### 3 Corpoietics, Disability, and Access

I've argued that Heidegger can be read as offering a corpoietic account of the body, one in which the corporeal figuration of Dasein is determinate for its experience of the tension between the existential poles of natality and morality. I will now suggest that philosophy of disability and disability studies offers a promising hermeneutic route to better understand and appreciate the meaning of such an account through the concept of *access*. In short, although Heidegger doesn't make "accessibility" a leitmotif, a disability lens on his work suggests that the concept of access plays a larger role than one might otherwise assume. To make this argument, I will look to the opening section of Heidegger's first speaking engagement after the war, "The Thing" (*Das Ding*).<sup>30</sup> At the outset, Heidegger focuses on a pitcher in a way that seems similar to his focus on the hammer in the *Werkstatt* of *Sein und Zeit*: he questions how one establishes the being of the being—or, now, thing—in question.

Heidegger begins by focusing on how the pitcher "stands on its own," how it is *selbstständig*. At first blush, the pitcher appears autonomous or independent. As a self-standing (*Selbststand*), Heidegger argues the pitcher cannot be an object (*Gegenstand*). Its being or thinghood does not lie in being an object for us or, correlatively, being an object for itself and thus a question of pure "objectivity". Representational options—whether objectivist or subjectivist—set aside, Heidegger then pivots to the pitcher's production. It has come to stand on its own through a producing. This route too is misguided, he contends, for it assumes that by thinking the pitcher in its becoming, it has avoided objectifying it. To the contrary, Heidegger claims production is simply a different form of representational objectification.

These errors are not caused by the application of some mode of objectifying thinking to a given thing. Heidegger clarifies: "standing-on-its-own (Insichstehen) is therefore still thought, and *despite everything* is ever still thought, in terms of an objectivity (*und ist trotz allem immer noch von der Gegenstaendlichkeit her gedacht*) (GA 79: 6/6). The *trotz allem immer noch* does not indicate that the standing-on-its-own of the pitcher could be thought outside of objectivity. Instead,

he suggests that *the thinking of a thing in terms of autonomy and independence is a fundamental failure of thinking a thing.*

The reasons for this failure become clearer when Heidegger offers his first positive definition of the pitcher: “the thinghood of the pitcher lies in that it is as a vessel” (*Das Dinghafte des Kruges beruht darin, daß er als Gefäß ist*) (GA 79: 7/7). And by virtue of what does the pitcher as vessel thing? It things as nothing, as the nothing that it is. He continues, “the empty is what holds in the vessel. The empty, this nothing in the pitcher, is what the pitcher is as a holding vessel.” But Heidegger is careful not to claim that the pitcher *is* this empty (*Leere*) or this nothing (*Nichts*). The sides and base and the potter’s formation are determined by the nothing, but their support is still necessary and co-constitutive. It is through their support that the pitcher is *as* a holding vessel. The pitcher *is* only as a holding vessel, a holding which holds through a nothing, a nothing that has determined the sides and base in the shaping hands of the potter and, in turn, a nothing which is supported through its determination and constitution by sides and base, potter and earth, pourer and imbibor, fold of the fourfold.

Heidegger leads his reader to see that so far from being self-standing, autonomous, or *able* to be a pitcher on its own, the pitcher only “is” through simultaneously constant and historical supports, though *mediums* of support, to evoke one of Andrew Mitchell’s primary explanatory terms in *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*.<sup>31</sup> The things things, yes, but it things as the world worlds in and as fold of the fourfold. In thinking the singularity of the thing, we think the whole in and through which it is singularized. As Heidegger puts it, “the thing things the world...thinking in this way we are met by the thing as thing. We are, in the strict sense of the word, conditioned [*Be-Dingten*]. We have left the arrogance of everything unconditional behind us” (GA 79: 19/20). The ability of the thing to be what it is through its mediational, conditioned supports. Heidegger’s thinking of the pitcher is a thinking of ability as mediational support. I, for reasons that will soon become clear, call this *ability as access*.

My argument for this reading comprises two primary claims, claims which together articulate what I am calling a thinking of *ability as access*.

{1} Heidegger’s thinking of ability as mediational support provides normative content insofar as it, upon the advent of commemorative thinking, prescribes conditions for the support of a being to be, which is to say, the support a being needs to be able to be as it *is* or essences (in the sense of *wes*).

{2} Ability expectations, which are necessarily constituted in part by ontic conditions, frame ontological projection or, in his later language, the commemorative possibilities of the thinker.<sup>32</sup>

As regards claim {1}, in giving an account of what it is for a given thing to be as it is, this presumably descriptive procedure is prescriptive precisely insofar as the “as it is” is operative. However implicitly, commemorative thinking, in drawing near to things, prescribes the conditions for the nearness in which a thing can appear as it is, even if only by negation (one cannot draw near to a thing through *mere* representational thinking, etc.). To put it simply, to make a claim about what a thing is *as it shows itself to be* cannot but be normative; there is no ordinary or “true” showing without an injunction about *how* something *ought* to be understood or experienced, including *how* one *ought* to come to experience it.

As an example, the pitcher needs not only sides and base, pourer and imbibor, but also needs its pourer, at minimum, to have opposable thumbs. The thinghood of the pitcher is *different* for some humans born with phenotypically atypical limbs. It should be clear that Heidegger’s definition of the pitcher is not merely descriptive and prescriptive with respect to the pitcher, but also to the thing for which the pitcher can be as it is, viz., the mortal—bracketing the role of the sky and gods for the discussion at hand. At least with respect to the example I just gave, such a definition is decidedly ableist. Based on the definition Heidegger provides, it affords those with a standard body the privilege of the potential to access the pitcher as the thing it is. One threshold to draw near to the pitcher, at least as Heidegger describes it, is that of the standard body—but, of course, one could give a different account of the pitcher that avoids this error.

As regards claim {2}, although Heidegger later eschews much of the terminology of hermeneutical phenomenology, he still gives a role to the way in which the human comes to and is taken by phenomena, viz., as a mortal. The mortal—as mortal—is of course constituted in part by its mortality. That is to say, the fact of mortality shapes both that and how the mortal encounters other beings or things. As I would phrase it, the ability expectations of the mortal determine the way in which a thing things. This means that the fundamental ontology of the phenomenologist or the commemorative thinking of the mortal are shaped by the access their abilities afford and that considerations of the way that ability is accessed are requisite for phenomenological inquiry.<sup>33</sup> It is no wonder then that Heidegger’s account of the pitcher is ableist. Because Heidegger does not turn his attention to the access afforded by his abilities and ability expectations, the account of the pitcher reflects his access. He does not question the meaning or thinghood of the pitcher with respect to one who is blind, to one without arms, to one with ADHD, to one with cerebral palsy attendant with epilepsy, or to one recovering from alcoholism. Although Heidegger does not explicitly attend to these questions and to, more broadly, his own privilege, I am arguing that he nevertheless provides us a way of thinking about ability as access that is fruitful.

The hermeneutic path laid out up to this point runs as follows: if one is claimed by the question of the meaning of being, one *ought* to inquire into the meaning of being, an inquiry which cannot but open onto the meaning of ability as access, which, further, cannot but open onto reflection upon the abilities and ability

expectations of the thinker, etc. This questioning will certainly produce not just descriptions, but also prescriptions (e.g., don't treat beings *merely* as resources), even if they are in principle defeasible thanks to their grounding in a fundamentally interrogative comportment.

I've called this way of questioning, of thinking, "ability as access." Let me retrace the steps taken so far. The thinking of the thing as thing is a thinking of the abilities of that thing through its mediational supports and the access to being necessary for it to be. In the case of the pitcher, Heidegger argued its primary "ability" is as a nothing that holds. The pitcher has access to the ability to be as it is when supported in claiming other beings by and through its being in relation to its world. Its ability to make a claim on mortals requires a host of supports, including the diminishment of late capitalism, non-alcoholism, opposable thumbs, oxygen, etc. Whether or not the pitcher has access to these avenues or ways is a question of the abode and comportment in and through which it appears as a thing in relationship to other things/beings that take it to be as such. Its abilities articulate avenues and axes of access. The ability to be is a question of access. Access to what? Not just to being (however we hear that given our focus upon Heidegger's corpus: as *Sein*, *Ereignis*, or *Lichtung*, etc.), but also to beings or things of all sorts. Access, in turn, is always already a question of ethics (in the sense of ἠθικός), for the ability to be is a question of the access to be *so*. Thinking ability as access is a thinking of the meaning of being. The question of the meaning of being is a question of the access to being and beings, of access to meaning (*Sinn*). Thinking ability as access is, then, an ethical thinking.

I have suggested "access" as a name for the mediational supports necessary for a being to be what it is. Although not necessarily agonal in nature, to be supported is simultaneously to be pressured, to be oriented towards certain possibilities and not others, to have access *to* this and not *to* that. Ability as access simultaneously affords and singularizes the projects and praxis of a life. The pitcher is only *able* to be a pitcher if we are claimed by it in and through its abilities, which both require and offer support, which assume certain conditions and ability expectations for it, for ourselves, and for all that is. The mediational support of a given ability determines a range of possibilities and cannot be understood outside of other constitutive structures of the being in question. To speak of the "corporeal variability" of a being is to speak about its abilities as avenues of access; it is to speak of the abilities of a thing in relationship to its beginning(s) and ending(s), to its natality and mortality. Neither natality, nor mortality can be understood without corporeal variability, for it is the third which makes sense (*Sinn*, *sens*) of each.

#### 4 Heidegger, Nazism, and Eugenics

Even if, at this point, one is convinced by this reading of the problematic of embodiment in Heidegger and even if, at this point, one finds the concept of access helpful, the idea that reading Heidegger through a philosophy of

disability/disability studies lens should give one pause. To read Heidegger is already to be committed to many things. It is to engage with one of the more influential thinkers of the twentieth century. It is, if taken seriously, to deeply engage with the German language, much of German culture, and with the history of philosophy as prominent German intellectuals drew it up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for better or for worse.

It is further to ask the questions Heidegger asked, reflect upon the answers he proposed, and enter into the program—and it is a program—of philosophical inquiry he laid out on the heels of Aristotle, Scotus, Husserl, and others. But, and herein lies the rub, it is also to read and take seriously the single most famous human at the ignominious intersection of philosophy and Nazism. The Third Reich, as did Heidegger, not only failed to think the meaning of disability, but they treated people with disabilities as the *easy case* of plans for elimination through genocidal slaughter. That is to say, among the very first that the National Socialist Party went after were those with disabilities. Set up in 1939, *Aktion T4* (an abbreviation for Tiergartenstraße 4), was *the model* for the larger genocide of many millions that would follow.

By engaging in this study and by thinking Heidegger alongside questions of embodiment and disability, I hope to have used Heidegger's own work to work *against* the bulwarks in his thinking that leave no room for people with disabilities, that fail to see the profound import of the vast variability and import of concrete human bodies and minds, and that undermine projects that seek a more equitable world.<sup>34</sup> Heidegger's influence on continental philosophy cannot simply be written out of the tradition, and it is, I think, the task of historians of philosophy to find ways to read the past that can open us up to better, more just futures.

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 132-33; Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Éditions Métailié, 2006). [Personal acknowledgements removed for anonymized review.]

<sup>3</sup> 1335b20-21. Aristotle, *The Complete Works Of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols., Bollingen Series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> This does not mean that scholarship on Heidegger, embodiment, and related themes has been insubstantial; on the contrary, there has been a steady stream of scholarship on Heidegger on the body over the last two plus decades. Among numerous such studies, I would highlight: Kevin A. Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect Of The Body*, Suny Series In Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 3, my italics. Richard Askay, "Heidegger, The Body, And The French Philosophers," *Continental Philosophy Review* 32, no. 1 (1999); Brian E. Bowles, "Heidegger And The Absence Of Body: The Zollikon Seminar," *International Studies In Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (2001); Davidr Cerbone, "Heidegger and Dasein's 'Bodily Nature': What is the Hidden Problematic?," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8, no. 2 (2000); Diego D'angelo, "Die Schwelle des Lebe-Wesens: Überlegungen zur Leibinterpretation Heideggers in der Nietzsche-Abhandlung," *Studia Phaenomenologica*, no. XII (2012); Johnson Felipe, "Body and Method Heidegger's Treatment of the Issue of Corporeality in the Zollikon Seminars," *Ideas y Valores : Revista Colombiana de Filosofia* 63, no. 155 (2014); William McNeill, "A Wave In The Stream Of Chaos: Life Beyond The Body In Heidegger's Nietzsche," *Philosophy Today* 50 (2006); Frank Schalow, *The Incarnality Of Being: The Earth, Animals, And The Body In Heidegger's Thought* (Albany: Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Valentina Buló Vargas, "The Bodies Against Heidegger," *Pensamiento* 67, no. 252 (2011). Along with Kevin Aho, Cristian Ciocan has carried out a significant amount of work on Heidegger and the body. E.g., see his 'The Question of the Living Body in Heidegger's Analytic of Dasein'. Research in Phenomenology 38, no. 1 (2008): 72–89. doi: 10.1163/156916408X262811. Ciocan, Cristian. 'Heidegger's Phenomenology of Embodiment in the Zollikon Seminars'. *Continental Philosophy Review* 48, no. 4 (2015): 463–78. doi: 10.1007/s11007-015-9347. This is also true of Daniela Vallega-Neu. See her Daniela Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension In Thinking*, Suny Series In Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), chp. 5; Daniela Vallega-Neu, "Body and Time-Space in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty," *Research in Phenomenology* 49, no. 1 (2019): 31–48.

<sup>5</sup> References to the works of Martin Heidegger are provided parenthetically in the text by the volume number of Heidegger's complete works (Gesamtausgabe, abbreviated GA), with German pagination provided first and then the English.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Mitchell, "The Bremen Lectures" in François Raffoul, *The Bloomsbury Companion To Heidegger*, Bloomsbury Companions (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 248, fn 1.

<sup>7</sup> Kevin A. Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect Of The Body*, Suny Series In Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 3, my italics.

<sup>8</sup> Christian Ciocan, "The Question of the Living Body in Heidegger's Analytic of Dasein," *Research in Phenomenology*, no. 38 (2008).

<sup>9</sup> All references to the English version of GA 2 are to the revised edition. Martin Heidegger, *Being And Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, ed. Rev. Ed. w/ foreward by Dennis J. Schmidt, Suny Series In Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> See Françoise Dastur, *Death: An Essay On Finitude* (London; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. Reginald Lilly, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Jacques Derrida, *Heidegger: la question de l'Être et l'Histoire*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Marguerite Derrida (Paris: Galilé, 2013), 6<sup>th</sup> lecture session.

<sup>12</sup> David Farrell Krell, *Ecstasy, Catastrophe: Heidegger's Being And Time And The Black Notebooks*, Suny Series In Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 62.

<sup>13</sup> On this point, Irigaray is extremely incisive. Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting Of Air In Martin Heidegger*, 1st ed., Constructs Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999). See also Iris Marion Young's "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation" in Iris Marion Young, *Throwing Like A Girl And Other Essays In Feminist Philosophy And Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air*, 83.

<sup>15</sup> Havi Carel, *Illness*, Revised ed. (UK: Acumen, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> An even clearer description of the effects of corporeal variability I am here discussing can be found in Toombs' account of degenerative muscular sclerosis. See S. Kay Toombs, *The Meaning of Illness: A Phenomenological Account of the Different Perspectives of Physician and Patient*, Philosophy and Medicine (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> In one sense, corporeal variation has *always already* transformed the singularizations of natality and mortality insofar as the "body" is always, here and now, our "situation...our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects"? In another sense, corporeal variation names possibilities for discrete transformations of *varying ranges* or scope in one's relation to mortality-natality (from, as I explain below, relatively small changes through everything from fatigue to focus to fundamental changes through injury, illness, aging, etc.). Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 46. One might wonder, as an anonymous reviewer helpfully pointed out, whether the role of corporeal variability for which I am arguing amounts to a transcendental claim, namely, that the condition of the possibility of Dasein is its embodiment or, to use Heidegger's language from the Zollikon Seminars, its bodying-forth. Even if, as that reviewer further notes, it is, to be sure, not a "traditional transcendental argument." In short, my argument does not go that far. Corporeal variability, as I am construing it here, is no more "transcendental" than the role Heidegger gives to being-towards-death. Is being-towards-death constitutive of Dasein? Certainly. To call that relationship "transcendental" calls forth the lamentably labyrinthian baggage of the term 'transcendental' in the history of philosophy, and it is not clear to me that it helps us get any clearer on the phenomena at hand or the particular philosophical stakes under discussion.

<sup>18</sup> Whether or not this salience is taken up reflexively in such a manner that Dasein is brought to an authentic being-towards-death is another question. But the authenticity or inauthenticity does not change the fact of the variation in the structure of singularization; it only speaks to the relation of Dasein to that variation.

<sup>19</sup> I say "mitigates" because I do not want to assume that it is possible to develop a language entirely "outside" of such the metaphysics of presence so much of Heidegger's work castigates.

<sup>20</sup> See GA 79: 19/20. One's comportment to phenomena, in Heidegger's thinking of things, is a comportment to a radically differential thinking. It is a thinking that continually and insistently approaches the singularity of things whilst knowing that the very thinking of singularity is not simply impossible, but a way of *not* letting beings be. This, I would argue, is one of the central tensions in the *Beiträge*. See, e.g., GA 65: 74/93 and 108-09/137-38. A different way to put this, to follow Daniela Vallega-Neu, is that only a poietic approach to beings and, a fortiori, beyng is that which will allow the truth of beyng to essentially occur. A poietic thinking would not adhere to the triune universal-particular-singular (scholastic) distinction, nor to variations on it. See her "Poietic Saying" in Charles E. Scott et al., *Companion to Heidegger's Contributions to* Joel Michael Reynolds

*Philosophy*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). It is only through a certain reticence, an unanticipated preparation that the letting of the essencing or essential occurring of the thing can itself *west*.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Mitchell notes, speaking of the *Beiträge*, that a “rethinking of the body and soul distinction is undertaken in a consideration of the Greek κωρισμός, which names a ‘separation’ ... Da-Sein is released from the oppositions of metaphysics and ultimately forms the space of relation between beings, being, and beyng, a space of encounter and response (*Ent-gegnung*, GA 65: 454/320). Andrew J. Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Later Heidegger* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 224. Although I am not as optimistic about the *Beiträge*’s success in thinking this split, I indeed agree this Greek theticism—κωρισμός, a splitting and separation that *posits* the thesis of a difference between and across the σῶμα—appears to ground Heidegger’s hesitance over *das Leibproblem*.

<sup>22</sup> He writes, “we are not corporeally present [*körperhaft*] at the station while making it present. But perhaps [we are present] in a ‘bodily’ manner [*leibhaft*]” (GA 89: 84/110, tm).

<sup>23</sup> “›Ich bin jederzeit hier‹ heißt also: ich halte mich stets in einem ›Hier‹ auf; das ›Hier‹ ist jedoch jeweilen *dieses*. Ich bin jederzeit hiesig, bin aber nicht jederzeit hier an diesem bestimmten Ort. An dem jeweiligen Hier-sein ist der Leib immer beteiligt... Das *Leiben des Leibes* bestimmt sich aus der Weise meines Seins. Das Leiben des Leibes ist somit eine Weise des Da-seins. Aber welche? Wenn der Leib als Leib je mein Leib ist, dann ist diese Seinsweise die ineinige, so ist das Leiben mit bestimmt durch mein Menschsein im Sinne des ekstatischen Aufenthaltes inmitten des gelichteten Seienden. Grenze des Leibens (der Leib ist nur insofern er leibt: Leib) ist der Seins-horizont, in dem ich mich aufhalte. Deshalb wandelt sich die Grenze des Leibens ständig durch die Wandlung der Reichweite meines Aufenthaltes.”

<sup>24</sup> Irigaray asks quasi-rhetorically, “what conclusion should be drawn about the nothing that inhabits Being from the fact that the thinker, whose care it is to recollect the initial loss in our history, perpetuates the unthought in mans’ relation to his body?” Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air*, 102.

<sup>25</sup> Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 11:595. See also Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. A. T. Murray, 2 vols., The Loeb Classical Library (London; New York: W. Heinemann; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1924). I modified the translation, giving ‘figure’ instead of ‘likeness’ for δέμας.

<sup>26</sup> For example, see 1:115, 5:801, 8:305, 13:45, and 17:366.

<sup>27</sup> See δέμας, τό, in *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, (Irvine, CA: University of California, Irvine, 2014), <stephanus.tlg.uci.edu>.

<sup>28</sup> See “φύσις [ῥ], ἦ,” esp. definitions IV: 1-3 and VI in *ibid*. See also “ποιέω,” esp. definitions I: 2 and IV in *ibid*. To clarify, I do not mean to deploy *poiesis* in its distinction from *physis*, as is usually the case; I instead here mean to invoke that etymological link one way to say and think *physis*.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Foucault’s comment that “life...is at the same time the nucleus of being and of non-being...but this ontology discloses not so much what gives beings their foundation as what bears them for an instant towards a precarious form.” Michel Foucault, *The Order Of Things: An Archaeology Of The Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 278.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Bremen And Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is, and Basic Principles Of Thinking*, trans. Andrew J. Mitchell, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Martin Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, Gesamtausgabe III Abteilung, Unveröffentlichte Abhandlungen, Joel Michael Reynolds

Vorträge, Gedachtes / Martin Heidegger (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994). Citations will appear in-text hereafter. I will translate “der Krug” as “pitcher” instead of “jug,” as Andrew Mitchell does. A reviewer wondered why I focus on an “inanimate” object here given my dedicated focus on Dasein/the mortal above. While there are certainly resources to focus on the latter in the later Heidegger, I find his account of the pitcher the clearest account he gives from the 1950s onward of what one could gloss as his relational ontology. This article was always conceived as the first of two pieces on Heidegger, Embodiment, and Disability, and I plan in the second to delve into far more detail concerning the way in which what I’m calling “corporeal variability” and “ability as access” play out at the level of the social and political. Readers will note that I, perhaps unexpectedly, do not engage disability theory and disability studies more generally in this piece. My goal is not to bridge Heidegger scholarship and disability studies here—it is instead to create a new foundation for such a bridge. The second piece mentioned above will take on that task.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015). As an example: “to be finite is to exist beyond oneself and this manner of existing requires a medium capable of supporting it. This notion of ‘medium,’ which I endeavor to unfold in what follows, is endemic to a Heideggerian thought of finitude, and for Heidegger, this beyond, this medium, is the world. Simply put, to think the finitude of things is to think the mediacy of the world” (4). Among other places where Mitchell discusses mediational support, I would highlight: 13, 33, 36, 146, 178, 205, 347, 449, 490, 535-6, 539. One of the more provocative formulations comes near the end of this work: “identity lies in the relations that support a thing in its essencing” (571).

<sup>32</sup> In the language of late Heidegger, the thinging of things is constituted in part by the abiding of the mortal as mortal. I am indebted to Gregor Wolbring for impressing upon me the import of the language of “ability expectations.” E.g., see his piece “Confined to Your Legs” in Alan P. Lightman, Daniel R. Sarewitz, and Christina Desser, *Living With The Genie: Essays On Technology And The Quest For Human Mastery* (Washington: Island Press, 2003); Wolbring Gregor, “Expanding Ableism: Taking Down the Ghettoization of Impact of Disability Studies Scholars,” *Societies* 2, no. 3 (2012).

<sup>33</sup> Joel Michael Reynolds, “Merleau-Ponty, World-Creating Blindness, & the Phenomenology of Non-Normate Bodies,” *Chiasmi International* 19 (2017): 419–34, <https://doi.org/10/gdh9gs>.

<sup>34</sup> An anonymous reviewer wondered why I do not engage the vast literature in disability studies in this piece, despite my attempts to lay out a new path between Heidegger and that very literature. I do not do so here purposefully. This paper is an attempt to demonstrate a new path in Heidegger’s own works that would allow for such an engagement, and, by my lights, that attempt takes a paper of its own. As I mention in footnote thirty above, I hope to make good on the attempt here and carry out such an engagement based upon it in future studies.