

THE ETERNAL (RE)TURN

HEIDEGGER AND THE “ABSOLUTES GETRAGENSEIN” OF MYTH

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Abstract

This article aims to initiate the retrieval of Martin Heidegger’s thinking on myth. Beginning with a reflection on the dilemmas and precedents of approaching myth, this paper turns to an extensive review of Heidegger’s major, explicit treatments of mythology, the philosophy of myth, and *mythos*, ranging from the “mythical Dasein” of *Being and Time* and his review of Ernst Cassirer’s *Mythical Thought* to the implicated hermeneutics of *mythos* in Heidegger’s later ancient Greek lectures. On the basis of such

a panoramic excavation with interspersed commentary, it is argued that Heidegger not only increasingly intimated a particular significance for the (re)consideration of myth, but ultimately approached myth in no less than the light of the disclosure of Being. Thus, this article lays the preliminary groundwork to serve further inquiry into myth per/in Heidegger.

Keywords: E. Cassirer, M. Heidegger, hermeneutics, myth, mythology.

Večno (pre)obračanje. Heidegger in »absolutes Getragensein« mita

Povzetek

94 Pričujoči članek želi spodbuditi ponovno obravnavo mišljenja Martina Heideggra o mitu. Izhajajoč iz razmisleka o dilemah in predhodnih načinih pristopanja k mitu, se prispevek posveti obširnemu pregledu Heideggrovih poglobitnih, izrecnih razpravljanj o mitologiji, filozofiji mita in *mythosu*, ki segajo od »mitične tubiti« v *Biti in času* in recenzije knjige Ernsta Cassirerja *Mitično mišljenje* do zapletene hermenevtike *mythosa* v Heideggrovih kasnejših predavanjih o starih Grkih. Na temelju takšne panoramske razgrnitve s pridruženim komentarjem avtor zagovarja misel, da je Heidegger ne samo vedno bolj naznanjal poseben pomen vnovičnemu (raz)motrenju mita, temveč se je nazadnje mitu približal nič manj kot v luči razkrivanja biti. Članek potemtakem priskrbi pripravljajno osnovo za nadaljnje raziskovanje glede mita po/pri Heideggru.

Ključne besede: E. Cassirer, M. Heidegger, hermenevtika, mit, mitologija.

Introduction

In 1928, less than one year before the two would engage in their historic debate at Davos, Martin Heidegger published a review of Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume II: Mythical Thought*. Heidegger commended Cassirer's work for "having placed myth as a systematic problem, for the first time since Schelling, once again within the sphere of philosophical inquiry," but diagnosed that "the fundamental philosophical problem of myth is not yet reached" (Heidegger 1997, 190). For Heidegger, Cassirer's Neo-Kantian analysis did not, or rather could not, reach the ontological ground of "mythical Dasein," a curious designation which Heidegger had coined in a footnote in *Being and Time*, and briefly articulated in passing in his summer semester lectures contemporaneous with the review (Heidegger 2010a, 50, fn. 11; Heidegger 1992a). While this "mythical Dasein" was the subject of no more than a few lines in the latter, in his Cassirer review Heidegger issued a series of considerations suggesting his incubation of thoughtful engagement of this "fundamental philosophical problem of myth." Heidegger seems to promise no less when he advertises "our approach to the philosophy of myth" (Heidegger 1997, 186). Such preliminary orientations did not culminate in any fully-fledged treatment of the philosophy of myth. Sixty years following Heidegger's pronouncement of "mythical Dasein" and "the fundamental philosophical problem of myth," Richard Capobianco suggested in a brief paper that Heidegger "had little to say about myth, and, perhaps even more surprisingly, virtually no scholarly attention has been paid to the few places in his work where he does, directly or indirectly, address this issue" (Capobianco 1988, 183).

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That Heidegger "had little to say about myth" is a perception, which, as this article seeks to illustrate, does not accord with a review of Heidegger's since increasingly accessible oeuvre, including some of its most pivotal points. That comparatively little scholarship (and at that rather incongruous) has been devoted to Heidegger's pronouncements on myth does indeed seem to remain the case.¹ Both of the latter points, however, are bound up with the larger

¹ See de Beistegui 1991; Gordon and Gordon 2006; Hatab 1991; Hyland 1997; Schalow 2001.

dilemmas and problematizations adjoined to any contemporary approach not only to “Heidegger and myth,” but to “myth” in general. Heidegger’s decades of activity did not lack diverse, prolific approaches to the conceptualization and study of myth, such as the works of Walter Otto (1874–1958), Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), Károly Kerényi (1897–1973), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), Mircea Eliade (1907–1986),² and Joseph Campbell (1904–1987), to name but an iconic few.³ Since the turn of the 1980s/90s, however, a decisive trend in the literature on myth has been to adopt an exclusively deconstructive “critical historiography” toward this scholarly legacy and to the study of myth in general.⁴ Within this paradigm, not only the very notions of “myth” and “mythology,” but also any scholarship and philosophical deliberations on such face deconstruction as mere “ideologies in narrative form” (Lincoln 1999) deemed hopelessly entangled in and wholly reducible to political, sociological, and biographic-historiographical planes. Most notably, the ancient Greek *mythos* has not been spared from being written off as a purely “gendered-political” polemical term (Lincoln 1999) or modern fabrication (Detienne 1986). In the context of such an aversion to any “philosophy of myth” beyond interest in only the “political biographies” of mythographers or the concept of “modern political myth,” it should hardly come as a surprise that any retrieval of Heidegger’s (both explicit and implicit) thinking on myth is somewhat of a precarious endeavor. On the other hand, the retrieval of Heidegger’s expressions on myth might ultimately offer a much-needed refreshing and deepening of perspectives, presenting an overlooked contribution to what Omid Tofighian envisions as “polymythic hermeneutics” (Tofighian 2016). As this study aims to show in preliminary outline, Heidegger himself contended for and recurrently inched toward a hermeneutics of myth.

2 On the influence of Heidegger’s thought on Eliade’s ontology of myth and Eliade’s role in Heidegger’s publication in the United States, see Wasserstrom 1999, 135–139.

3 For an overview, see Dundes 1984; Segal 2016; Thompson and Schrempf 2020; Tofighian 2016.

4 Particularly representative of this trend are Ellwood 1999; Lincoln 1999; Strenski 1987, yet the initial line of deconstruction belongs to the debate between Detienne 1986 (1981) and Brisson 1998 (1982/94).

It bears preliminarily highlighting the relevance of retrieving Heidegger's attention to myth in terms of the "stakes" of such within Heidegger's project as a whole, as the latter encompassed a radical critique of the whole philosophical tradition, within which myth has been determined as such. The "classical" Modern Western (Enlightenment) narrative holds, as Cassirer representatively put it, that "the history of philosophy as a scientific discipline may be regarded as a single continuous struggle to effect a separation and liberation from myth" (Cassirer 1955, xiii). In the ancient Hellenic context, to which Western philosophy traces its origins, philosophers and historians have identified and debated such a "separation and liberation" in the relation between *mythos* and *logos*, the development of philosophy from Plato onward seen as entailing the prevalence of *logos* as the "logical" and "rational" of philosophical pursuit over the "irrational" and "illogical" of the sacred and folkloric tales and legends of *mythos*. In recent decades, much ink has been spilled on reconsidering the terms and significations of this arrangement and narrative, calling into question the very delimitation and fate of "canonical" Hellenic-cum-Western philosophy vis-à-vis *logos* and *mythos*.⁵ For Heidegger, who endeavored to question the whole legacy of Western philosophy as such, the "*logos*" (mis)represented in this narrative is the unfolding of the history of philosophy as "metaphysics" or "onto-theo-logy," a legacy, which must be overcome through (and for the sake of) reopening the question and possibility of Being.⁶ In his lectures and writings starting from the 1930s onward, Heidegger articulated that an "other beginning" (*anderer Anfang*) of thinking upon the "end of philosophy" has crucial orientations to be drawn from re-viewing the "history of Being" (*Seynsgeschichte*) back to its "first beginning" in ancient Greek thought, through excavating the primordial ("originary" or "inceptual"—*ursprüngliche*) "pre-metaphysical" disclosures of Being in pre-Socratic sources.⁷ Heidegger's lectures on Heraclitus (Heidegger 2018) attempted such a reappraisal of *logos*, and one does not need to look far beyond the more familiar canon to recall Heidegger's insistences (paralleled by more than a few studies in the

5 See, for instance, Buxton (ed.) 1999; Collobert et al. 2012; Morgan 2004; Hatab 1999; Tofghian 2016.

6 Cf. Wierciński 2003.

7 See Heidegger 1972; 1973; Dugin 2014.

history of ideas from recent decades) that *logos* and *mythos*, restored to their original significations, were not intrinsically conflictual or diachronically (dis)placable as the Enlightenment-derived narrative would have them; rather, in Heidegger's words, they "belong together essentially" (Heidegger 1992b, 70; Heidegger 2008b, 375–376). Heidegger's (re)considerations of *mythos* have remained less regarded. Nonetheless, Lawrence Hatab has already posed the question, would it not be myth and *mythos* that "express a kind of openness that philosophy closed off": "Was Greek myth in any sense a prefiguration of Heidegger's alternative to philosophy, namely [mytho-]poetical thinking, that which seeks an openness to what is concealed in the disclosure of Being?" (Hatab 1991, 45.) Ultimately, Hatab argues that the much-commented-upon, so-called "post-philosophical" language and thinking of Heidegger's later works approaches such a "mythical" or "mytho-poetic" form, which, far from being merely "stylistic," points toward a (re-)thinking of Being through a positive (re-)appropriation of mythical disclosure. Following this line, Heidegger's later works can be read in the vein of an implicit re-treatment and re-employment of myth. The implications of such are immense. The *Seynsgeschichte* as "mirrored" in Heidegger's own works would assume the shape of a loop, from myth to philosophy to a kind "mytho-philosophical" thinking (for naming which the words are historically lacking), a "non-conceptual openness to the meaningful mystery of Being [...] which retrieves something archaic but which is also historically mediated by philosophy's liberation of thinking from total immersion in mythical forms" (Hatab 1991, 62).⁸

That Heidegger's treatment of myth is an overlooked dimension of his thought, which at once harbors considerable significance to the Heideggerian vision of the course of philosophy and Being since antiquity, seems to us to be a fruitful preliminary interpretation. Nevertheless, the original research groundwork remains lacking. It is vital to offer a (working) comprehensive retrieval and "coordination" of Heidegger's explicit considerations of myth. In this light, the present study commits to an inventory of Heidegger's major, explicit expressions on myth, following such chronologically over the course of Heidegger's works with interspersed yet necessarily restrained commentary on

8 See further Hatab 1990.

the *Wege* contouring these engagements.⁹ The scope of such a developmental outline entails the risk of a definite superficiality of treatment of one or another attestation, to which indeed whole separate studies need to be dedicated, or runs the danger of counter-holistic “extractions,” not to mention simply “missing” certain keys, which still stand to be discovered in Heidegger’s writings. Such an initial mapping of the terrain of Heidegger’s mythical deliberations, necessitating as a preliminary step excavating the mythical attestations that remain otherwise scattered and “buried” throughout Heidegger’s immense *Gesamtausgabe*, promises to be productive in, to “play” with Heidegger’s methodological meditations in *Being and Time*, first discerning the “thatness” and “whatness” of myth in Heidegger’s horizons. With this in mind, we leap onto the *Wege* of Heidegger’s evocations of myth.

From “mythical Dasein” to the truth of *mythos*

Perhaps the most immediately striking feature of Heidegger’s engagement of myth as a whole, i.e., as viewed panoramically over the course of his writings and lectures, is a certain “lopsidedness”: for the early Heidegger, myth did not pose a “fundamental question” as he would come to appreciate in 1928. Only thereafter does myth emerge in Heidegger’s works in seemingly sudden, interspersed spotlights implying a meditation whose background is undocumented, but whose “irruption” is highly charged. Therefore, contrary to merely producing a “stale” bibliographical procedure vested only in outlining “change” or “development” in some unilinear manner, beginning

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9 It bears recalling Heidegger’s own “guideline” for approaching his works, which he formulated shortly before his death with the remark “Ways, not works (*Wege – nicht Werke*).” Wierciński (2019, 256, fn. 87) notes: “He chose ‘collected edition’ over ‘collected works’ (*Gesamtausgabe versus Gesammelte Werke*) explaining: ‘The collected edition should indicate various ways: it is underway in the field of paths of the self-transforming asking of the many-sided question of Being... The point is to awaken the confrontation about the question concerning the topic of thinking... and not to communicate the opinion of the author, and not to characterize the standpoint of the writer, and not to fit it into the series of other historically determinable philosophical standpoints. Of course, such a thing is always possible, especially in the information age, but for preparing the questioning access to the topic of thinking, it is completely useless.’ Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften*: 1912–16, GA1: 437–438.”

with the early Heidegger vis-à-vis myth brings into relief the significance of Heidegger's later engagements and their thoughtful context. That "Heidegger in the mid-1920s only considers myth as an afterthought" (Schalow 2001, 93) is transparent: "myth," "mythology," and "*mythos*" hardly entered the vocabulary of Heidegger's early lectures, and if so, then without any original deliberation. This is evident in those courses, for which myth would have otherwise been a fitting and relevant topic. In *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (1921), "myth," "mythology," "mythical," and "*mythos*" appear only in citations of Ernst Troeltsch's "subordination" of such as "peripheral" to the "religious *a priori*" of mystical experience (Heidegger 2010c, 17, 249). In his 1925 *History of the Concept of Time*, Heidegger even routinely employs the terms "mythical" and "mythological" throughout in the vulgar modern sense as adjectives connoting "erroneous," "unsound," or "fantastical" (Heidegger 1985).

100 The first hints at a philosophical consideration of myth emerge in Heidegger's 1926/27 lectures, *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, and yet in a treatment, which, on the surface, hardly differs from the conventional framing of *logos* vs. *mythos*. Although the handful of attestations therein belong to that category of incomplete notes and partial student transcriptions, which do not lend easily to reconstruction and deciphering, the impression to be had is that Heidegger accentuates the contrast between philosophy as *logos-physis* and *mythos* as mere stories, tales which, as Schalow interprets, confine "the abysmal disclosure of being to something specific and fixed" (Schalow 2001, 93). In this case, Heidegger approaches *mythos* as fixed storying about beings and world-structuring by "divine involvement," of which Hesiod's *Theogony* is taken as the archetype (Heidegger 2008a, 28). In the "mythological explanation of the world" and in "mythical genealogies and cosmologies," Heidegger writes, "the coming to be of the world was narrated in a story: the lineage of the stages the cosmos has traversed" (Heidegger 2008a, 174). That *mythos* as "storying" of world-structuring is "inferior" or comparatively un insightful to the inquiry into Being is clearly suggested in a topical remark, which, it cannot be understated, is to differ acutely from Heidegger's later treatment of the topic: on Plato's cave, Heidegger remarks that "Plato did not clearly expound these levels [of truth]. He availed himself of [*hilft sich mit*] a μῦθος" (Heidegger 2008a, 199; 2004, GA 22, 258).

In the *Ancient Philosophy* lectures, myth clearly falls out of the purview of Being into a compensatory structuring of beings through fixed narration. In this first substantive engagement of thinking *mythos*, however, a certain ambiguity, upheld by but not limited to the manuscript condition, leaves open a further pathway: myths of beings are not necessarily (and perhaps not at all) equated with just any ontic statements about beings; instead, myths or “mythological explanations” are related to a particular “way of disclosure,” which is not strictly separable from the interplay of the “ever-constant versus the becoming” of *physis* (Heidegger 2008a, 174). However subtly, Heidegger therefore does not “dispense” with the mythical, but lets it stay somewhere in parallel to *logos-physis*, and resolves in a footnote to refer his interested listeners to Cassirer’s *Mythical Thought* (Heidegger 2008a, 28, fn. 40). Both of the latter points resonate in Heidegger’s only mention of myth in his *Basic Problems of Phenomenology Course* (1927): “All mythology has its basis in specific experiences and is anything but pure fiction or invention. It cannot be accidental and arbitrary that in this mythical view time is identified with the motion of the universe.” (Heidegger 1982, 234.)

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Without venturing to pin any “logically ensuing framing” onto these first mentions of myth, it is not difficult to anticipate that Heidegger’s first treatment of myth as a particular form of discourse on beings in/and the world, as well as his appreciation of a definite sense of time proper to mythology (as “anything but pure fiction or invention”), will in turn receive a hint of direction in *Being and Time*. Indeed, myth is therein referenced as pertinent to Dasein’s factual self-understanding and self-interpretation:

No matter how far removed from an ontological concept the distinction between existence and reality may be, even if Dasein initially understands existence as reality, Dasein is not just objectively present, but has always already *understood itself*, however mythical or magical its interpretations may be. For otherwise, Dasein would not “live” in a myth and would not take heed of its magic in rites and cults. (Heidegger 2010a, 300.)

Two crucial intimations are borne out in this passage. Firstly, myth and “mythical-self-understanding” are not to be discounted from the ontological

extrapolation of the ontic prefigurations intrinsic to Dasein's being-in-the-world. On the contrary, the "mythical" is recognized to be a particular "situation" or "mode" that is no exception to Dasein's interpreting of its being-in-the-world: "For otherwise, Dasein would not 'live' in a myth." In light of Heidegger's earlier passage and footnote on "primitive," "mythical Dasein," this mythical being-in-the-world is of particular significance insofar as:

"Primitive phenomena" are often less hidden and complicated by extensive self-interpretation on the part of the Dasein in question. Primitive Dasein often speaks out of a more primordial [*ursprünglich*] absorption in "phenomena" (in the pre-phenomenological sense). The conceptuality which perhaps appears to be clumsy and crude to us can be of use positively for a genuine elaboration of the ontological structures of phenomena. (Heidegger 2010a, 50.)

102 According to the footnote appended to these preliminary remarks, this "conceptuality" is that which is expressed in myth, and the theme of philosophical interpretation to be sought in "primitive Dasein" is therefore "mythical Dasein" (Heidegger 2010a, 50, fn. 11). This "mythical Dasein" thus harbors some primordial and "less hidden" indications pertinent to the Being of Dasein in general.

Secondly, the basic understandings of myth and "mythical conceptuality," with which Heidegger was already in dialogue, are suggested in the former passage's speaking of "living" in myth. That "myth" is "not merely a story told but a reality lived," as Bronisław Malinowski famously put it in his *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (Malinowski 1926), expressed a fundamental trajectory in the philosophy of mythology whose milestone was laid in Schelling's 1842 *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (Schelling 2007). Perhaps the most iconic expression of the latter's theses, one which Heidegger would approvingly cite in his Cassirer review, was Schelling's pronouncement that "everything in it [mythology] is thus to be understood as mythology expresses it, not as if something else were thought, something else said" (Schelling 2007, 136). These words signaled that mythologies, the essence of which Schelling saw in theogonic and theologic plots, are not invented

euhemeristic tales, which are to be “explained” in natural or historical terms, but instead constitute a unified, distinctive reality of human consciousness entailing its own “mode of reality,” its own necessities and “truth,” its own logic and processes, its own “reason” or “rationality,” its own “form of life,” which philosophy must not “discard” but elucidate in terms of its integrality. Schelling thus proclaimed that the “systematization” of mythology “in its own truth,” i.e., understanding mythology in terms of the “life” and “process” proper to it, constituted the “true science of mythology” and therefore “the philosophy of mythology” (Schelling 2007, 151). By unifying mythologies into a universal category of consciousness, by identifying mythology as a particular form of “life-reality,” which cannot be reduced to one or another explanatory “primitivism,” and by ascribing to the “process” of mythological consciousness a world-historical trajectory, Schelling set the stage not only for much of subsequent scholarship and philosophizing on myth, but for Heidegger in particular to speak of myth in terms of existence and reality, to conceptualize a “mythical Dasein,” and, later, to ponder the “role” of myth in the “History of Being.”¹⁰

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Cassirer’s philosophy of myth, which Heidegger cited in the *Being and Time* footnote on “primitive-mythical Dasein” and would now turn to intensively review, took Schelling’s “distinguishing” of mythology as a point of departure for the sake of “transferring it from the sphere of a philosophy of the absolute to that of critical philosophy” (Cassirer 1955, 10). For Cassirer, it was thanks to Schelling that “the relative truth of myth is no longer in question” (Cassirer 1955, 14). The unity of the “logic of the illogical” of myth could be harvested not through an idealist absolute, but through a Kantian epistemological model of inquiring into the symbolic forms, by which mythological consciousness structures and “objectifies” the world into/as a mythical whole. For Cassirer, moreover, there remained the problem (or, rather, the Kantian-Enlightenment imperative) of substantiating the paradigmatic difference between the “completeness” of “mythical logic” from that of (superior) scientific logic and the landscape separating them. Cassirer’s neo-Kantian approach identified this distinction in a strictly dialectical-evolutionary consciousness. In mythical

10 See Beach 1994; Schalow 2002.

thinking, the subject objectifies the experience of the world in complete, absorbed immersion, without realizing its subjectivity or the objectivity it is creating, no matter how structurally consistent the latter may be: “the whole existence of things and the activity of mankind seem to be embedded, so to speak, in a mythical ‘field of force,’ an atmosphere of potency which permeates everything” (Cassirer 1953, 63). Through or rather amidst this complete absorption in the “mythical field of force,” human consciousness “does not recognize its role in the creation of mythic phenomena, it ascribes autonomous and non-human authority to its own linguistic creations” (Gordon 2005, 140–141). No matter how principled or “logical” mythical worlding may be, thus, myth’s extreme “immersion” represents a form of alienation, which reveals itself as unfolding at a distance just as much in the development of language as in the history of religious conceptions. For all of its abundant illustrations of the rich, “independent” principles of mythical consciousness and mythical worlds attested across an immense span of materials, Cassirer’s account thus ultimately sought to articulate the inferiority of myth and how “with the first dawn of scientific insight the mythical world of dream and enchantment seems to sink into nothingness” (Cassirer 1955, 14).

While the fundamental philosophical problems, which Heidegger had with Cassirer’s underlying approach, are not difficult to recall, it bears reemphasizing that Heidegger to a definite extent was inspired by and celebrated Cassirer’s mythological scholarship, deeming it a “fruitful success” (Heidegger 1997, 186) in terms, which shed light on his own emergent thinking on myth. Heidegger expressed solidarity with Cassirer’s “thoroughly unambiguous” and “devastating” critique of the study of myth from “naturalistic, totemistic, animistic, and sociological attempts at explanation,” and appraised that Cassirer’s *Mythical Thought* “brings the problematic of the positive research into myth to a fundamentally higher level by carrying out in a variety of ways the demonstration that myth can never be ‘explained’ by having recourse to determinate spheres of Objects within the mythical world” (Heidegger 1997, 186). Heidegger thus takes Cassirer’s *Mythical Thought* as the occasion for his first and most sustained articulation of what he straightforwardly announces as “our approach to the philosophy of myth” (Heidegger 1997, 186).

Heidegger framed his Cassirer review, and hence his “own approach to the philosophy of myth,” with three questions: (1) “What does this interpretation achieve for the grounding and guiding of the positive sciences of mythical Dasein (ethnology and the history of religion)?”; (2) What are the “foundations and methodological principles that support the philosophical analysis of the essence of myth”?; and (3) What is the “constitutive function of myth in human Dasein and in the all of beings as such?” (Heidegger 1997, 186.) As for the first point, Heidegger’s assessment, partially quoted above, was positive: Cassirer had demonstrated the “uncovering of ‘myth’ as an original possibility of human Dasein, which has its own proper truth” and “its own laws” (Heidegger 1997, 180, 186). Among these possibilities and laws, Heidegger highlighted the “basic division between the sacred and profane” as the “articulation of the actual, to which mythical Dasein ‘comports’ itself,” and the “actualizing that takes on the form of *cult* and *rite*,” in which Heidegger saw being expressed “the most general character of Being, the ‘how’ whereby what is actual suddenly comes over the entirety of human Dasein” (Heidegger 1997, 182, 185). The latter expression is connected to perhaps one of the most explicit aspects of Heidegger’s appropriation of Cassirer’s account of myth: Heidegger repeatedly centralizes the “*mana*-representation” (*Mana-Vorstellung*) as the horizon of overpowering actuality, within which Dasein exists and has any understanding of self and world. The Melanesian “spiritual-force-field” of *mana* is taken to be the “original way of Being of mythical Dasein” (Heidegger 1997, 184). With *mana* and several comparable mythological concepts, Heidegger thus takes myth not as a designation of objects, but as a “particular configuration of ‘being-in-the-world’” (Crowe 2008, 108–109).

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It is precisely on the latter point that Heidegger draws the line between Cassirer’s “representational-*mana*” as a “form of thought” and *mana* as constitutive of the fundamental-ontology of mythical Dasein. “In the *mana*-representation,” Heidegger writes, “what becomes evident is nothing other than the *understanding of Being* that belongs to every Dasein as such.” (Heidegger 1997, 186.) The condition of being-with(/)(-)in-*mana* defines the “thrownness” underlying the ontological structure of mythical Dasein, wherein Dasein is “overwhelmed,” “dazed,” and “delivered over” to the “Being-character-of-overpoweringness (*mana*),” whereby the temporality of this

thrownness is manifest in the “instantaneousness” of *mana* (Heidegger 1997, 181, 188). Mythical Dasein ontically understands itself as “bound to mana” (Heidegger 1997, 189). For Heidegger, these considerations emergent from Cassirer’s study “remain a valuable starting point for a renewed philosophy of myth,” but “the interpretation of the essence of myth as a possibility of human Dasein remains random and directionless as long as it cannot be grounded in a radical ontology of Dasein in light of the problem of Being in general” (Heidegger 1997, 187, 190). The “fundamental philosophical problem of myth,” proceeding from such a fundamental ontology, would have to answer “in what way does myth in general belong to Dasein as such? In what respect is myth an essential phenomenon within a universal interpretation of Being as such and its modifications?” (Heidegger 1997, 190.) Thus, Heidegger is not interested in any delineation of the “insufficiency of mythical ‘thinking’” (Heidegger 1997, 180), but in an ontology and hermeneutics of myth. It bears noting that Heidegger comes close to exhibiting an affinity with “myth-ritual theory”¹¹ when he suggests that “mythical narration is always only a derivative report of sacred dealings” wherein “mythical Dasein presents itself immediately” (Heidegger 1997, 185).

Heidegger’s review of Cassirer’s *Mythical Thought* leaves much to be anticipated, indeed, no less than the evoked “renewed philosophy of myth” based on a fundamental ontological analysis of “mythical Dasein” in the dimensions of the sacred and the profane, cult and rite, and the all-surrounding “mythical force” (*mana*). In his contemporaneous lecture on the very same Kantian problematic, which he saw as misguiding *Mythical Thought*, Heidegger would broach this “mythical Dasein” once more in a particularly rich passage:

This thrown dissemination [*Zerstreuung*] into a multiplicity is to be understood metaphysically. It is the presupposition, for example, for Dasein to let itself in each case factually be governed by beings which it is not; Dasein, however, identifies with those beings on account of its dissemination. Dasein can be governed [*tragen*], for example, by what we call “nature” in the broadest sense. Only what is essentially thrown

11 See Segal 1998.

and entangled [*befangen*] in something can be governed [*tragen*] and surrounded [*umfängen*] by it. This also holds true for the emergence in nature of primitive, mythic Dasein. In being governed [*in seiner Getragenheit*] by nature, mythic Dasein has the peculiarity of not being conscious of itself with regard to its mode of being (which is not to say that mythic Dasein lacks self-awareness). But it also belongs essentially to factual dissemination that thrownness and captivation remain deeply hidden from it, and in this way the simplicity and “care-lessness [*Sorglosigkeit*]” of an absolute sustenance [*Getragenseins*] from nature arise in Dasein. (Heidegger 1992a, 138; 1978, GA 26, 174.)

We have inserted the original German in several points here to draw attention to the sensitivity, and indeed centrality, of *tragen* (translated in the established English edition as “governed”) to this “mythic Dasein.” If, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger referenced myth as at once no exception to Dasein’s factual self-understanding, and yet pertaining to a particularly primordial, “primitive” experience of self-understanding in “absorption,” and if, in his Cassirer review, Heidegger argued for the need for a fundamental-ontological, existential analytic for “mythical Dasein,” then here Heidegger accounts for the mode of “mythical Dasein” as essentially one of being “carried” (*tragen*), “being-carriedness” (*Getragenheit*), and “absolute carried-being” (*absolutes Getragensein*). Mythical Dasein is, like Dasein in general, thrown into dispersion in the world and among beings. In myth, however, Dasein is completely absorbed in this matrix to the point that it is “absolutely carried,” absolutely “given unto” the whole matrix, e.g., of *mana*, of which it is an indelible part and therefore within which its existence is essentially characterized by “simplicity” (*Einfachheit*) and “*Sorglosigkeit*.” The latter designation is particularly curious and challenging. The essential structure of Dasein’s relation to the world as “care” elaborated in *Being and Time* seems to be “-less,” “lost” on mythical Dasein. Instead of “being-ahead-of-itself” in concern for its relations to and involvement in and with all other beings and the world, mythical Dasein in its thrownness and dispersion is “simply,” “effortlessly,” and “absolutely carried” by that which is already present to it, perhaps the mythical force of *mana* or the “givenness” of the beings of the cosmos presented in myth. The being

of the Dasein of myth is “being-carried” (*Getragensein*). Without a doubt, more questions than answers seem to beg themselves from this formulation. Heidegger’s Cassirer review excludes the possibility that this “being carried by nature” would be reduced to any kind of “naturalistic” reading of myth—does this then mean that mythical Dasein is “carried” by *physis* as the Being of beings, as “nature” in the sense of some “manifestationist” paradigm associated with pagan mythology and religion?¹² Is mythical Dasein “carried” by other beings, i.e., the gods? If we turn to *Being and Time*, then we find *tragen* as “to bear: to take over something from out of belonging to being itself” (Heidegger 2010, 131). Alternatively—and perhaps supported by Heidegger’s later expressions on myth—, this “being carried” of myth is not “by” something other than Dasein, implying some kind of alienation, but refers to a mode of disclosure of Being itself.

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The challenge of interpreting this *Getragensein* of “mythical Dasein” is rendered perhaps even more significant by the very fact that Heidegger will not return to this concept. Although in a subsequent passage Heidegger emphasizes the significance of “beginning to approach with greater clarity the region of the mythic” (Heidegger 1992a, 209), this is the last place, in which Heidegger speaks of “mythical Dasein.” This, however, should not be seen as a discontinuation, but as, in some light, a disclosure in connection with no less than the “trajectory” of Heidegger’s thinking following *Being and Time*. It is at this point in Heidegger’s *Wege* and *Werke* that the question of the much-debated *Kehre*, the “turn” following *Being and Time*, unavoidably faces us with relevance. At the risk of recapitulating a cliché, it bears repeating that any definition or delimitation of the “turn” is necessarily bound to be met with controversy from virtually any perspective of Heidegger historiography.¹³ Nonetheless, the course of Heidegger’s understanding and interpreting of myth clearly aligns with two major discernments of “turning” in Heidegger’s thinking following *Being and Time* and assuming prominence in Heidegger’s writings by the mid-1930s: (1) the “turn” “from the problematic of the existential analytic of Dasein to the thinking of [B]eing as such [...] in the direction of the question of the

12 See Travers 2018.

13 See the positions on the *Kehre* presented in Magrini and Schwieler 2018, 21–38.

truth of [B]eing” (Risser 1999, 2, 4), and (2) the intimation of Being in the essence of language. These dimensions of the “turn” are distinctly pronounced in Heidegger’s subsequent treatment of myth. Having set forth a certain pathway for conceptualizing “mythical Dasein,” having expressed a preliminary approach to a grounding for the philosophy of myth, and having spoken of “beginning to approach with greater clarity the region of the mythic,” Heidegger will henceforth be concerned primarily and essentially with the word *mythos* as a “primordial saying” and its significance to the truth of Being in concealment and unconcealment. This opens up new horizons for understanding the seeming “abandonment” of “mythical Dasein” rather as a “turning” toward *mythos* in relation to Being, as well as part and parcel of Heidegger’s “turning” between the analytical “hermeneutic phenomenology” of *Being and Time* and the “enacted” hermeneutics of Heidegger’s turn to re-reading thinkers and poets in the “Historic-Happening of Being” (*Seynsgeschichte*).¹⁴ That there is, indeed, such a fundamental relation constitutes perhaps the essential point of all of Heidegger’s subsequent expressions on this subject, and might very well be the “new and more primordial beginning,” which Heidegger beckoned toward myth in the footnote of *Being and Time* (Heidegger 2010a, 50, fn. 11).

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It might then be no coincidence that Heidegger’s 1933/34 rectorial edition of his 1931/32 lecture *On the Essence of Truth* already approaches myth as *mythos* in such a way. In contrast to his earlier remark that Plato’s articulation of truth “helped itself to a *mythos*” in the sense of compensating for a lack of clarity or as a mere “storytelling about beings,” Heidegger now emphasizes Plato’s cave as *mythos* as its defining and profound character: this “single center [*Mitte*] of Platonic philosophizing” (Heidegger’s emphasis) is an instance of how “[Plato] speaks in $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$ when his philosophizing wants to say something essential with the greatest intensity” (Heidegger 2010b, 97, 98). This *mythos* means a story, which “we actually go through ourselves,” on which point Heidegger emphasized to his listeners that the “authentic understanding of the $\mu\upsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$ ” means experiencing its speaking, its resonance as “something unavoidable” (Heidegger 2010b, 98). That *mythos* is such an experiential telling, a saying of something already given and structured (cf. *Basic Concepts of Ancient*

14 See Palmer 1969; Wierciński 2002; 2005.

Philosophy) whose hearing is to be experienced for “authentic understanding,” is underscored by Heidegger’s differentiation between *logos* and *mythos* in the lecture’s preliminary deliberation on the essence of language. “Because and *only* because human beings are of this essence [the ‘bond to the superior power of Being’], they exist *in language*,” and this ontological essencing of language is to be sought, Heidegger pursues, in the “coining of the word [that] arises from the prior and originary minting of the disclosure of beings” in the inceptual ancient Greek *logos* and *mythos* (Heidegger 2010b, 80, 89). *Logos*, Heidegger extrapolates from his reading of Heraclitus, “*is the law-giving gathering and therefore the openness of the structure of beings*”; in other words, “word” as *logos* expresses that “the human being, as a discursive being, stands by that very fact in confrontation with beings, and wills to become powerful in the face of multiplicity and obscurity and boundlessness through the simplicity, clarity, and stamping force of *saying*” (Heidegger 2010b, 90, 91). Therefore, language as *logos* culminates (or, perhaps, “originates”) with philosophy, as human beings address beings in a juxtaposing, structuring, gathering, and reckoning discourse (Heidegger 2010b, 91–92). “But,” Heidegger recalls, “the originary λόγος of philosophy remains bound to μῦθος; only with the language of science is the bond dissolved,” and *logos* remains “only a very particular experience and conception of the essence of language,” whereas “[t]he Greeks also know a second and older one: language and word as μῦθος” (Heidegger 2010b, 91, 92). *Mythos* as the more primordial word does not “brace itself against beings” for addressing and reckoning them, but instead “indicates this and that about the entirety of human Dasein. It is not the word in which human beings give their account of things [like *logos*], but rather the word that gives them a directive”; “The word as μῦθος gives clues and indicates” (Heidegger 2010b, 91, 92). That Plato’s cave is not so much—or not at all—a mere “allegory,” which Heidegger refers to it being most widely deemed only in scare quotes, but a *mythos*, suggests a more primordial telling, which is to be experienced and not strictly “logolized.” Without too much of a stretch, one can sense here a definite sense of giving over to being “carried” by *mythos*, as opposed to the “carrying-forth against” of *logos*. It is precisely *mythos* in Heidegger’s “word-essencing” that bears a definite pertinence to the truth of Being as the interplay of concealment and unconcealment revealed in Plato’s

myth of the cave. Interpreting Heidegger's reading of the *mythos* of Plato's cave goes beyond the scope of this preliminary study, and just what hermeneutic is implied in this experiencing-hearing of *mythos* cannot be extracted out of the *Essence of Truth* lectures without such an extensive study. Nonetheless, nearly a decade later Heidegger would elaborate on precisely this question of the relation of *mythos* to Being and truth in his lectures on Parmenides.

Heidegger's 1942/43 Parmenides lectures are among the most densely "mythically-populated" sites of his works, wherein the mythical is central to Heidegger's whole reading, constantly returned to throughout the lectures. Like in his "foreword" to Plato's cave, Heidegger takes as the point of departure of definitive significance that Parmenides' poem is to be read (or rather heard and experienced) as a *mythos*. This, Heidegger explains, is warranted first and foremost by Parmenides' truth, ἀλήθεια, assuming the form of a goddess. Instead of accepting the modern prejudice that it be left "entirely understandable that in the first 'primitive' attempts at such thinking there might still be preserved remnants of 'mythical' representation" (Heidegger 1992b, 6), Heidegger insists that the retrieval of Parmenides's truth is to be approached primordially and essentially, which entails embracing precisely its mythical presentation. Heidegger recalls Plato's cave on this occasion as well, emphasizing its mythical character and urging that its interpretation requires "an experience of the basic character of myth in general" (Heidegger 1992b, 92). In *Parmenides*, Heidegger goes furthest of all in articulating what *mythos*, this "basic character of myth," and the grounds of approaching it mean. This comes in no less than the context of the *Parmenides* lectures' aim of retrieving primordial thinking for the sake of an "other beginning" of Western philosophy.

"*Mυθος* is legend [*die Sage*]," Heidegger writes, "this word literally taken in the sense of essential primordial speech." (Heidegger 1992b, 61.) *Mythos* is "the Greek word that expresses what is to be said before all else. [...] It is *μῦθος* that reveals, discloses, and lets be seen; specifically, it lets be seen what shows itself in advance and in everything as that which presences in all 'presence.'" (Heidegger 1992b, 60.) This primordial legend-saying, which reveals and discloses everything in advance, presenting everything all at once as presencing, is not a mere storying of beings as Heidegger had previously interpreted myth to be, and is never invented, but is "a response to the word

of an appeal in which Being itself dispenses itself to man and therewith first indicates the paths a seeking might take within the sphere of what is disclosed in advance” (Heidegger 1992b, 128). Myth is the “preserving word,” preserving not mere “‘images’ which a pre-philosophical thinking does not transcend,” but the very fact of concealment and unconcealment “experienced in such an essential way that just the simple change of night and day suffices to enhance the emergence of all essence into the preserving word, *μῦθος*” (Heidegger 1992b, 61). It is this that Heidegger “enshrines” as his sighting of the mythical, coming closer than ever and elsewhere to a “description”: “When we use the expression ‘mythical,’” Heidegger says, “we shall think it in the sense just delimited: the ‘mythical’—the *μῦθος*-ical—is the disclosure and concealment contained in the disclosing-concealing word, which is the primordial appearance of the fundamental essence of Being itself.” (Heidegger 1992b, 70.)

112 In *Parmenides*, thus, Heidegger explicitly underscores the primordial relationship of *mythos*, *aletheia*, and Being. Myth conceals and discloses “in advance and everywhere and always and for every being and in all Being” (Heidegger 1992b, 67). The primordial “legend-saying” of *mythos* presents such “essential modes of disclosure and concealment” as “death, night, day, the earth, and the span of the sky” (Heidegger 1992b, 70). At the same time, Heidegger recognizes, “‘myth’ does of course have to do with the gods. ‘Mythology’ is about ‘the gods.’” (Heidegger 1992b, 70, 60.) Here, however, Heidegger introduces the highly significant qualification that it is not by virtue of telling of the (Greek) divinities¹⁵ that myth is “mythical,” but rather the very disclosure of the divine is mythical, hence:

The word as the naming of Being, the *μῦθος*, names Being in its primordial looking-into and shining—names τὸ θεῖον, i.e., the gods. Since τὸ θεῖον and τὸ δαίμόνιον (the divine) are the uncanny that look into the unconcealed and present themselves in the ordinary, therefore *μῦθος* is the only appropriate mode of the relation to appearing Being, since the essence of *μῦθος* is determined, just as essentially as *θεῖον* and *δαίμόνιον*, on the basis of disclosedness. It is therefore that the divine,

15 On “Heidegger’s gods,” see Crowe 2007.

as the appearing and as what is perceived in the appearing, is that which is to be said, and is what is said in legend. And it is therefore that the divine is the “mythical.” And it is therefore that the legend of the gods is “myth.” (Heidegger 1992b, 112.)

This articulation of the relation between myth and the divine and Heidegger’s ontological casting of the Greek gods is ripe for consideration in the context of the theological and religious dimensions of Heidegger’s thinking. Essential here for our study is that Heidegger directly connects mythical concealing and disclosing with Being, an ontological affirmation, which starkly contrasts Heidegger’s earliest remarks. In *Parmenides*, Heidegger seems to put forth that Being itself is revealed in *mythos*, that myth and mythical disclosure itself therefore pertain to Being in some primordial, essential way. Myth presents and preserves the original “setting forth” of Being and beings in the legendary word, as the telling, which immediately discloses everything as given and conceals this given. Being is concealed and unconcealed in the appearances and disappearances of the gods, of the essential facets of the cosmos (death, night, day, the earth, sky), and it is therefore mythical disclosure that is the “first” wording, the “first” essencing of the truth of Being, the “first” experience, which has been lost over the course of philosophy, on which Heidegger remarks: “The legendary word is not weaker; but man’s perception is more variegated and dispersed and hence too volatile to experience as present the simple, which comes into presence originarily and therefore constantly.” (Heidegger 1992b, 128.)

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The propositions and insinuations of the *Parmenides* lectures seem to represent Heidegger’s furthest reaching thinking on myth. A decade later, in *Was heißt Denken?* (1951/52; 1954), Heidegger echoed these mythical intimations in remarking: “*Mythos* is what has its essence in its telling—what appears in the unconcealment of its appeal. The *mythos* is that appeal of foremost and radical concern to all human beings which lets man think of what appears, what unfolds.” (Heidegger 2008b, 375.) In the context of the *Parmenides* lectures’ endeavor to recover the place and function of *mythos* in the onto-history of philosophy for a “new beginning,” and in the light of *Was heißt Denken?*’s radical “re-thinking of thinking,” the impression presents

itself that Heidegger's thinking on myth culminated in an appreciation of the necessity of a "new and more primordial beginning" to myth as part and parcel of a "new beginning" of thinking Being, i.e., of going beyond the whole legacy of philosophy since the "schism" of *mythos* and *logos*.

In lieu of a conclusion, a new beginning

114 From the "re-orientation" of philosophy initiated by *Being and Time* to the "pre-" and "post-philosophical" meditations and "other beginning of philosophy," which preoccupied Heidegger's later thinking, Heidegger approached myth and *mythos* as of fundamental importance to the question, "history," and disclosure of Being. For the fundamental-ontology of Dasein, for the truth of Being, and for the History of Being, myth/*mythos* carries something primordial and originary. Heidegger broached or preliminarily intuited what this might be along several pathways. Down one path, this is inquiry into "mythical Dasein," into the Dasein whose understanding and interpreting is to be found in sacred narratives and rites and in the world-force of *mana*, in the Dasein whose existential analytic is that of "being carried." Down another, this is sensing a peculiar hermeneutics of reading, hearing, and "experiencing" *mythoi*, whether cosmologies or Plato's cave. This path, Heidegger ventured, is essentially linked to *mythos* as the "legendary word," as that which primordially conceals and unconceals in such a way that beings are immediately presented with a given sense, "directive" or "hint" of Being. From this path as well, Heidegger (re)turned to the relation between Being and the Divine. Purposefully and thoughtfully pointing toward one or another of these paths, Heidegger was proceeding along a *Weg*, which, never coming to be translated and framed into a whole *Werk*, remains open around the "end" of philosophy as (mis-)*logos* which began in some since-lost relation to the Being of *mythos*. In some sense, one might have the impression that Heidegger let himself be "carried" by myth, from confronting mythology with conceptualization ("mythical Dasein") to being open to listening to *mythos* as "primordial utterance." Myth "carries" in its presenting—the world, beings, story, legend—as a given to be absorbed into as primordial, as Heidegger proposed Plato's cave or Parmenides poem "let be." In his interpretations and carried-ways of myth, Heidegger's essential intimation was that of a "new and

more primordial beginning” to myth through the question of Being, and to Being through the question of myth. (Re)turning to myth, being carried into and by myth, is ultimately, most essentially, (re)turning and being carried toward a recovered openness to Being.

A number of lines of inquiry and interpretation deserve to be taken further from Heidegger’s expressions on myth, whether in returning to the hermeneutic work begged by individual passages, approaching the broader relation between poetry and *mythos* (and the “mytho-poetic”), attempting to productively correlate “Heidegger’s myth” with particular theories and cases in the study of myth, including revisiting Heidegger’s engagement with Cassirer on myth and language, or even in taking up Heidegger’s said and unsaid overtures toward a fully-fledged reconsideration of myth as such, etc. In any case, it bears recognizing that Heidegger did in fact have much to say about myth, and much more remains in the pivotal interpretive field of the unsaid, the otherwise-said, and the to-be-said. The hermeneutics of myth anticipated by Heidegger lies still ahead.

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