Chapter 30

Overcoming the Subjectivisms of Our Age (or Why Heidegger Is Not a Phenomenologist)

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Yet Being is never dependent upon existing humanity.
—Heidegger, “Recollection in Metaphysics,” 1941

The human being for itself has no power over truth, which remains independent of the human being.

Why, still, Heidegger after Heidegger? For many reasons, but an especially important one is to help free us from the many and varied “subjectivisms” of the contemporary age, including the persistent Cartesianism and Kantianism of classical phenomenology as inaugurated by Husserl. Husserl’s basic position was strongly inflected toward the dependence of “being” on human subjectivity: “It is a being [ein Sein] that consciousness in its own experiences posits, . . . but over and beyond this, is nothing at all” (Ideas I, §49). The later Heidegger refused all such human-centric perspectives, and I have attempted to show the manifold dimensions of his critique in both Engaging Heidegger and Heidegger’s Way of Being. His heralded turn to Sein/Seyn (henceforth, Being), as he worked this out over the course of his lifetime of thinking, represented a decisive turn away from all prevailing modern versions of the human being as the measure of all things.

Yet rather than restate the case already made, I would like to consider the matter afresh and highlight several of his signature themes along the way. In 1967, Heidegger delivered an address to the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Athens, Greece, under the title “The Provenance of Art and the Determination of Thinking.” This lecture is not well known, and it has not yet been published in Heidegger’s Complete Works (Gesamtausgabe). The address is
one of several that he delivered in the 1960s that speak to similar themes, yet what is especially notable in this particular talk is his appeal to the figure of the Greek goddess Athena in order to highlight the core matter of “Alētheia” and how Alētheia is not only the “provenance” of “art,” but also “older,” “more primordial,” and “more enduring” than the human being and all that is brought forth as “art” by the human being. In other words, Alētheia (as Being), although cor-related with the human being in the expanse of the time of human beings, is nonetheless independent of the human being. Yet let us approach this conclusion slowly by way of a consideration of the lecture text.

ATHENA SPEAKS

Heidegger opens the address by stating in a characteristic manner that the matter of the inception of the “arts and sciences” among the Greeks is not fundamentally an “historical” matter that lies in the distant past, but rather a matter—and an experience—that remains “present” to us. The task before us, he states, is to “meditate on the provenance of art in Hellas” (136/119). Note that he uses the word “Hellas,” and not “Greece” (Griechenland), as he begins his reflection. This is his reminder, familiar to us from many other places in his work, that, in his view, we must peel back the layers of Roman- and Latinized thinking that have accrued over the centuries in order for us to arrive again at the originary matter for thought; thus, our seeking must find its way back not to Roman Graecia, but to Hellas. In the following line, he sets out the aim of the meditation: “We shall try to get a glimpse into the region [Bereich] that already prevails prior to all art and that first bestows to art its ownmost character” (136/119). This “region” that “prevails” and is “prior” to all art—and therefore “prior” to the human being—is “A-lētheia,” as he will tell us in due course, but at the outset he has already clearly signaled the destination of his thinking.

To proceed, he calls upon “the goddess Athena” for “counsel and guidance.” This is not simply a polite rhetorical gesture to his Athenian hosts. The later Heidegger was deeply moved by the “invocation” to the gods or muses that opened the great poems of the ancient Greek poets such as Homer and Pindar. These ancient invocations honored the gods for their “wisdom” and expressed an abiding human humility to listen and learn—which Heidegger laments has been increasingly lost in the present “egoist” age.

The matter of the significance of “the gods” in the later Heidegger’s thinking is complex, but we should at least keep in view that he always insisted that “the gods” are never mere projections of the human being; that is, “the gods,” no less than we “mortals,” emerge from out of Being, the temporal-spatial emerging/unfolding “way” (or ontological process) wherein
and whereby all beings issue forth and come to be. Certainly, for Heidegger, the “gods” or “divinities” are not traditional ontotheological timeless entities, for they, too, are “temporal” as they emerge from out of the temporal way itself—Being—their “source.” Some recent readings of Heidegger—which are no more than variations of Husserl’s transcendental idealism—are entirely off the mark to suggest that for the later Heidegger the human being is the “source” of “Being,” and, accordingly, these readings are also mistaken in trying to settle the matter of “the gods” in his thinking by claiming them for the human being, that is, by claiming that “the gods” are only insofar as the human being is. Heidegger—at every turn—upends this kind of position. In this talk, not only does he “invoke” the goddess Athena, but he adds that even as we look to her for counsel and illumination on the core matter for thinking, we must ever keep in mind that “we cannot penetrate into the plenitude of her divinity” (136/119). What is more, he states, “We are only attempting to explore what Athena says to us about the provenance of art.” He recalls that our human task is to be attentive and listen to “what Athena says.” In other words, it is not simply humans who “say” and “speak”; the goddess “says” and “speaks,” too.

Admittedly, what and how “the gods” “are” as they emerge from out of the Being-way, and what and how “the gods” “say” and “speak,” are considerations that remain for us to reflect upon further—and this only testifies to the continuing resonance of Heidegger’s thinking. Even so, let us recognize that what he opens for our thinking in such passages is altogether closed off in every kind of reductive human-centric reading that insists on positing the human being as the singular “source” of all “saying.” In other words, what is lost in these reductive human-centric readings is Heidegger’s abiding call for us to be “open” to how all things “speak” to us. As he put this in a seminar in Le Thor a couple of years later in 1969: “The Greeks are those human beings who lived immediately [unmittelbar] in the manifestness of phenomena—through the specifically ek-static capacity of letting the phenomena speak to them, [yet] modern man, Cartesian man, se solum alloquendo, speaks only to himself” (GA 15: 331/38). For us to be “open” in this Greek way is for us to be “open” to hearing how the sea, the trees, the animals—all that is, even “the gods” and “muses”—how everything “speaks” to us. Yet it seems that we are no longer listening—or we are listening only for what we need and demand to hear.

Heidegger recalls that Homer names Athena polumetis, “the manifold counselor” (136/119), the one who helps in many and varied ways. It is Athena who “prevails” over everything that human beings bring forth, and it is she who “dispenses her special counsel to humans who produce tools, vases, and jewels.” All who are skilled and masters at crafting we may call technites, but he cautions that “we understand this word in too limited a
sense when we translate it as ‘artisan.’” The technitēs is one whose activity “is guided by a comprehension whose name is technē,” yet this word does not simply mean “a doing and making”; rather, technē is fundamentally “a form of knowing.” This “knowing” is a seeing in advance of what is to be brought forth, and what is to be brought forth is not simply a crafted chair or sculpture or building—but also “a work of science or of philosophy, of poetry or of public rhetoric.” In this way, then, “art is technē, but not technicity [Technik],” and “the artist is technitēs, but not a technician or even an artisan” (137/120).

Thus “art,” according to Heidegger, is a kind of technē, and technē is a “knowing” that is a looking ahead to the creation and completion of any work. This “knowing” as a “looking ahead” therefore requires “exceptional vision and brightness and clarity,” and again he invokes the goddess Athena, who is not only the manifold counselor, polumetis, but also well known as the bright and shining one, glaucopis. He considers the Greek word glaucos and observes that the adjective glaucos usually refers to “the radiant gleaming [das strahlende Glänzen] of the sea, the stars, the moon, but also the shimmer of the olive tree” (137/120). The published translation opts for “lustre” to translate his word Glänzen, and this is acceptable, of course, but I think that the word “gleaming” gets us much closer to the “shining forth” that he always had in view. In chapter 2 of Heidegger’s Way of Being, I highlight and discuss how this word glänzen is widely used by Heidegger and is one of his most favored words in speaking of the “shining forth” of beings and of the Being-way itself—and not surprisingly, he himself had pointed out that this very word was widely used and highly favored by Hölderlin in the first place.3

Athena’s eyes are glaucos, that is, “gleaming and illuminating.” It is for this reason, he adds, that the owl, whose eyes are “fiery-blazing,” has the name hé glaux in Greek and is forever associated with her, “a sign of her essence.” The owl’s bright eyes are able to see at night as well, and, correspondingly, Athena’s bright and gleaming glance is able to “make visible what is otherwise invisible” (120/137). Yet where is Athena’s illuminating glance directed? What is the “invisible” she has in view? The clue, he says, is to be found on the sacred relief on the Acropolis museum where Athena appears as the skeptomenē, “the meditating one.”

What follows is a familiar motif, but now unfolded in terms of Athena as the meditating one. Athena’s glance is turned toward “the boundary stone, to the boundary.” Athena’s bright eyes watch over meditatively the “boundary” or “limit” of things, but this limit is not a mere limitation or marker for the end of something. Rather, “limit,” understood in a genuinely Greek manner, is what determines something coming to be in its ownmost character and fullness. Indeed, something cannot come to be unless it enters into its limit or boundary; its boundary is its very being. In this sense, then, Athena does not
cast a meditative look only upon that which is brought forth by humans, but more broadly—and “above all,” Heidegger states—upon that which allows all things of the earth and sky that require no human action and production to come into their “limit” and therefore their being. This *that-by-which* all such beings come to be is what the ancient Greeks named *physis*. Again characteristically, he warns of the narrowing of the Greek understanding of *physis* in the Roman appropriation of *physis* as *natura*, but his central point is that the Greeks recognized (and therefore we may recognize once again) that *physis* is “that which emerges from itself forth into its respective limit and therein lingers” (138/121).

Indeed, even today, he observes, “we are able to experience the fullness of the mystery of *physis* in Hellas, where in an astounding yet at the same time restrained manner there appears a mountain, an island, a coast, an olive tree.” He admits that there is something to be said for the exceptional Greek visible “light” that allows us this experience, but this visible light is itself granted by another kind of light that is much more difficult to see (and for this reason is comparatively “invisible,” although Athena, like the owl, is able to see it). Yet before naming this unique light, he emphasizes that it was the Greeks who first recognized that *physis*—“the whole of the world”—always already addresses human beings and lays claim upon them so that human “knowing and doing” is compelled to cor-respond to this claim. Athena has her gleaming eyes upon *physis*, and as we know from the wealth of Heidegger’s other reflections on the earliest Greek thinkers and poets, *physis* is another name for Being. Recall, for instance, his decisive statement in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935): “*Physis* is Being itself” (GA 40: 17). Accordingly, although he does not name Being in this address, we may say that it is Being as *physis* that ever rises up to us, opens us, and draws us into cor-spondence (*Entsprechung*). As I have expressed this in *Heidegger’s Way of Being*: “*physis* endlessly arising, and we endlessly astonished.”

Art, then, is a “cor-respondence” to and with *physis*, and this belonging together of *technē* and *physis* is but another way of characterizing the relation of the human being to Being. He returns to the primordial “light” by which and through which everything comes to be gathered into what it is. This is the “lightning-flash” (*der Blitz*) of which Heraclitus speaks in fragment 64: “But the lightning steers everything.” The lightning brings everything into its “limit” and “steers” everything into place. From Heidegger’s many other elucidations of this fragment we know that he reads this “lightning-flash” as another name for Being as “the primordial *Logos*” that lets be and gathers all that is, but here he does not restate this. He simply observes that the lightning is hurled by Zeus, “the highest god,” and that Athena is Zeus’s daughter. Athena alone knows where the lightning is kept, as she herself tells us in Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*. Heidegger sums up by observing that it is precisely
because Athena has this “knowing” that she is the manifold counselor, 
polumētis; the brightly seeing one, glaucopis; and the goddess who meditates
on physis, skeptomenē. We must hearken to Athena if we are “to understand
even a little of the mystery of the provenance of art in Hellas.”

OPENING TO A-LĒTHEIA: “OLDER” AND
“MORE ENDURING” THAN THE HUMAN BEING

What follows in the lecture is a disquisition on the perils of the contemporary
age that is dominated by cybernetic and technological modeling and thinking.
The age of unremitting calculative thinking has largely cut us off from that
very “region” that is the provenance of art. The ground that he covers here
is familiar; he had been making these same observations in much the same
way throughout the 1960s. This is not to say, of course, that the details of
his critique in this particular lecture are not worth examining, yet I am more
interested in distilling one crucial component of his critique in order to get to
the heart of the matter.

To do this, let us restate in another way what we have already discussed.
For Heidegger, technē, all human making, doing, and thinking—all human
creation of whatever kind—emerges by virtue of our openness to that
“region” in which all things emerge. We may call this “region,” along with
the ancient Greeks, physis. Our unfolding “belongs” with the unfolding of
physis. We create along with physis. Our “artful” gathering cor-responds with
the primary gathering of physis. We might say, then, that our creation of any
kind of “work” is always a “working with” Athena (or the other gods); that
is, it is a “working with” physis, which Athena ever has her gleaming eyes
upon. Ultimately, then, our “working with” entails that, on one level, we
yield, give way, release ourselves to physis, which is beyond our making and
control. So what, then, is the fundamental problem in the present age? If we
distill Heidegger’s message, it is this: The thoroughgoing subjectivism in the
contemporary age has cut us off from our “source,” physis. Two statements
from his lecture bring this into sharpest relief:

Industrial society constitutes the ultimate elevation of egoity [Ichheit], that is, of
subjectivity. In it, the human being rests exclusively on itself and on the domains
of its lived world, reworked into institutions. (124/144)

This is subjectivity resting only on itself. All objects are attributed to this sub-
ject. Industrial society arrogantly proclaims itself as the absolute norm of every
objectivity. (125/145)
At root, then, it is this conviction that we are the “source” of all that “is” that has so deformed and disabled us in the contemporary age by blocking us from entering into the fullness of our “essence” in relation to Being as \( \text{physis} \). Heidegger specifically points to the dominance of “industrial society,” but what he is assailing more generally is the insistence, embedded in our contemporary culture in manifold ways, that the human being measures out all that “is” and that “world” refers to no more than the sum of all human meaning and naming, interests and concerns, action and producing. We have become forgetful that any particular being (\( \text{ein Seiendes} \)) is always more than how it is measured out by the human being, and that Being (\( \text{Sein} \)), the ontological temporal way or process wherein and whereby all beings issue forth, is always more than this human measure as well. The contemporary insistence on the human perspective (including the phenomenological insistence on the “first-person perspective”) is the chief impediment to our opening to Being as \( \text{physis} \)—as \( \text{Alētheia} \).

\( \text{Alētheia} \). Finally, we arrive at the other Greek \( \text{Ur} \)-word. He calls upon us to take a “step-back” from the prevailing “egoity” of the present age in order to enter again into the fullness of our existence. This means recovering and restoring our relation to “the open and free domain” that bestows and grants all things, and this domain was named by the Greeks \( \text{A-lētheia} \). \( \text{A-lētheia} \) or “un-concealment” is the primordial “openness” that “does not do away with concealment; rather unconcealment is invariably in need of concealment” (127/147). He adds the hyphen in the Greek word \( \text{A-lētheia} \) in order to emphasize that the dimension of concealment and reserve—the \( \text{lethe} \) dimension—is intrinsic to all unconcealment.

Yet we note, too, that he capitalizes the Greek word \( \text{Alētheia} \) as he had done on many occasions in his earlier work, and especially in the brilliant lecture courses on Parmenides, Heraclitus, and Anaximander in the early 1940s.\(^7\) In those places, Heidegger repeatedly stated that \( \text{Alētheia} \) is another name for Being—and we recognize this as his truly original and distinctive position on “truth”: “Truth” is in the first place the unending temporal unfolding, the radiant emergence, of all that is. To put this succinctly, “is-ing” is “true-ing.”\(^8\) The capitalization of \( \text{Alētheia} \) signals the continuity with the earlier work. \( \text{Alētheia} \) as Being (Being as \( \text{Alētheia} \)) is the “open and free” domain or region that grants all unconcealment and yet also holds back in reserve. \( \text{Alētheia} \) as Being is, in the first place, the locus of unconcealment and concealment—not the human being, whatever our own activity of unconcealing and concealing.

This tells us most clearly that all persisting philosophical positions that posit the human being as the “source” of Being—that is, as the “source” of all unconcealment and concealment—are simply symptomatic of the hubris and narcissism of the prevailing modern subjectivism that the later Heidegger
identified again and again as blocking us from entering into the fullness of our \textit{Da-sein}.\textsuperscript{9}

The Greeks glimpsed the “region” that bestows all things, including human beings and their “art,” and they gave the name \textit{alētheia (A-lētheia)} to this region—but also \textit{physis}, provided that we keep in view the originary indication of this word. That is, insofar as \textit{physis} names only the pure “light” or pure transparency of unconcealment as it came to be understood among the Greek philosophers (Plato’s \textit{eidos} or Aristotle’s \textit{morphē}, for example), then this name is not yet fundamental. Nevertheless, the earliest Greek thinkers and poets, and especially Heraclitus, had in view \textit{physis} in the richest and fullest sense as the unending temporal emergence from concealment that ever shelters concealment. Heidegger cites Heraclitus’s fragment 123, as he had so many times before, \textit{physis kryptesthai philei}, or as he translates this saying here: “To emerging-forth from itself, self-concealing properly belongs.” What Heraclitus already knew we are called upon to know—and experience—once again for ourselves in the present age.

With a series of concluding questions, Heidegger makes the point that for us to restore and embrace our relation with (Being as \textit{physis} as) \textit{Alētheia} is for us to experience once again “awe” and “wonder” and “humility” (all translations of \textit{Scheu}) before the unending temporal-spatial unfolding of all things and what “cannot be planned or controlled, or calculated and made” by us. In other words, our releasement to Being is a releasement from our subjectivist prisons, and this holds out the promise of our “dwelling” once more, of our finding our home again “upon the earth.” A dwelling and abiding, he says, that is once again open to listening to “the voice” (\textit{Stimme}) of \textit{A-lētheia}.\textsuperscript{10} An openness that is not necessarily opposed to ontic mastering, but rather an openness, a releasement, that tempers and keeps humble these ontic efforts. He adds that while we do not know what will become of the present age, we do know that “the \textit{A-lētheia} that conceals itself in the Greek light, and which grants this light in the first place, \textit{is older and more primordial and consequently more enduring} than every work and fabrication devised by human beings and brought forth by the human hand” (128/149; my italics).

This is the culminating statement. He maintains that \textit{A-lētheia} grants the Greek light in the first place. What does this mean? He appears to be speaking of the “Greek light” of sheer unconcealment (\textit{eidos, idea, morphē}), which was the focus of Plato and Aristotle and the later medieval metaphysicians (\textit{essentialia, quidditas, actualitas}). Yet recall that the primordial light of \textit{A-lētheia} (as unconcealment-concealment) was indeed glimpsed by the earliest Greek thinkers Parmenides, Anaximander, and Heraclitus; it is the “lightning” of Zeus that grants and “steers” all things, the “lightning” that is intimately known by Athena.
But to the crucial part of the line: \( A-lētheia \) is “older, more primordial, and consequently more enduring” than the human being and the full spectrum of “art.” Let us be clear on the significance of what he is saying: \( A-lētheia \), this ancient Greek \( Ur \)-word for Being, is not dependent upon the human being. Being as \( A-lētheia \) is independent of the human being; in other words, the “is-ing” of all things unfolds both before and after the human being. The later Heidegger made this point in several places, not simply in this lecture, and it captures the fundamental thrust of his thinking after \textit{Being and Time}.\(^{11}\)

Thus, what is at issue here is not the cor-relation of Being and the human being in the expanse of the duration of human beings; indeed, Heidegger always highlighted this cor-relation. What is at issue, and what he is repudiating in this talk (and elsewhere in the later work), is any human-centric position—including a strict transcendental-phenomenological position—that holds that Being “is” only insofar as the human being is. To put this more pointedly: The later Heidegger is not a phenomenologist in this strict sense. Indeed, it is any understanding of the “cor-relation” that makes Being dependent upon the human being that is ruled out by his emphatic statement—and it must be ruled out if we are to take a step in thinking toward breaking free of the prevailing and unrelenting “egoity” or “subjectivism” that has taken hold of the modern and contemporary age and that has installed the human being as the measure of all things. We are called to recall, as he states in another place, that “[Being as] \textit{kosmos} is the measure-giving; the measure that \textit{kosmos} gives is it itself as \textit{physis}.”\(^{12}\)

Being (as \textit{physis} as \( alētheia \) as \textit{kosmos}) is the “measure” that is not made by us, and Heidegger is perfectly clear about this: “It [Being itself (\textit{Sein selbst})] is nothing made and has therefore also no determinate beginning at a point in time and no corresponding ending of its existence.”\(^{13}\) Yet this is so hard for us to understand and accept in the contemporary age—except most notably in the \textit{best} thinking of theoretical physics and science (which cannot be dismissed as mere “scientism”). It is possible, then, for us to consider (even if Heidegger did not) that his later thinking joins the deepest reflections of theoretical science in setting all things free from our measure.

So, why, still, Heidegger after Heidegger? No small matter: To free all things from ourselves; to free us from ourselves.

\section*{NOTES}

Chapter 30

Society for Phenomenology 44:2 (2013): 119–28. Parenthesized references will refer to this lecture unless otherwise indicated. References follow this form: (English/German), but I have modified the English translation, especially in the last key line on Alētheia. The German text will be included in GA 80.2.

2. In my Heidegger’s Way of Being (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), I point out the affinities of Heidegger’s later thinking with American authors such as Walt Whitman, E.E. Cummings, and John Muir. With respect to Heidegger’s “gods,” one may also consider these lines from John Muir on being in the presence of Yosemite Falls at midnight: “How interesting does man become considered in his relations to the spirit of this rock and water! How significant does every atom of our world become amid the influences of those beings unseen, spiritual, angelic mountaineers that so throng these pure mansions of crystal foam and purple granite” (from his letter to Mrs. Ezra S. Carr, April 3, 1871).


4. Yet, for Heidegger, Hölderlin’s “Nature” (die Natur) does indeed name physis in the richest Greek way; see Chapter 2 of Heidegger’s Way of Being.

5. Capobianco, Heidegger’s Way of Being, 64.


7. See especially GA 55, Heraklit. For some translations and discussion of these brilliant lecture courses, see Capobianco, Heidegger’s Way of Being, Chapters 5 and 6, as well as “Heidegger on Heraclitus.”

8. For more on the matter of Being as “primordial truth,” see Capobianco, Heidegger’s Way of Being, esp. Ch. 4.

9. Heidegger studies need to be open to consider how the best thinking in contemporary theoretical astrophysics (which is by no means mere “scientism” or “technicity”) may dovetail with Heidegger’s later thinking of Being as “time-space” (Zeit-Raum), as physis and alētheia. We should consider, too, the remarkable nearness in spirit of the later Heidegger’s theme of Gelassenheit (“releaseasement”) with several of Albert Einstein’s broader reflections: “A human being is part of the whole, called by us ‘Universe,’ a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty”: from a letter Einstein wrote at age 70 (dated March 4, 1950) to Norman Salit (Einstein Archives, 61–226). See also a similarly worded letter by Einstein dated February 12, 1950 to Robert Marcus (Einstein Archives, 60–424/425/426). In document 60–425 (in German), he also states: “Not to nourish the illusion but to try to overcome it is the way for us to reach the
attainable measure of inner peace.” With thanks to Chaya Becker, Archivist, Albert Einstein Archives, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

10. For more on “the voice” of Being as the primordial Logos, see Chapter 6 of Capobianco, *Heidegger’s Way of Being*.

11. See especially Capobianco, *Heidegger’s Way of Being*, Chapter 1, and “Heidegger on Heraclitus.” The later Heidegger “turned” away from his own transcendentally inclined statements about Sein in *Being and Time* and in other places in the early work—for example, in *Being and Time*, section 43(c). For more on this, see my article “In the *Black Notebooks*: Heidegger’s ‘Turn’ Away from the Transcendental-Phenomenological Positioning of Being as *Alētheia* and *Physis*,” in *Zur Hermeneutik von Heideggers ‘Schwarzen Heften’*, *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 11*, ed. Alfred Denker and Holger Zaborowski (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2017).
