

**Heideggerian Messianism: From Hitler to “*Es Gibt*”**

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The Heidegger of *Being and Time* and the later post-war Heidegger each offer a distinct model of the relationship between Dasein and Being. Both Heideggers desire the arrival or coming to presence (*Ereignis*) of Being. But whereas the early Heidegger emphasizes Dasein's active role in effecting the "presenceing" of Being, the late Heidegger places the onus of the relationship on Being. Dasein must prepare itself for and make itself receptive to the coming of Being, but ultimately Being must give itself. In his "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger writes that man must be the shepherd of Being, rather than the Lord of Being. In this paper I aim to expose the parallels between Heidegger's attitude towards the coming of Being and the messianist's attitude towards the coming of a Savior. One attitude says that it is up to man to bring about redemption, and only when the world is repaired by man himself will the Messiah come to put on the finishing touches. The other attitude says that man is hopeless and powerless without a Messiah, who will only come by an act of grace. There is nothing man can do to hasten redemption. The Messiah is as likely to come when the world is perfect as he is to come when the world is fallen into total lawlessness. Man can do nothing besides hope. As Heidegger said in a 1966 interview, "Only a God can save us."

I aim to show that this radical shift in Heidegger's philosophy is directly connected to his political decisions during World War II. It is clear from Heidegger's "Rectorate Address" that his philosophy in *Being and Time* led him to endorse Hitler as a messianic redeemer of German Dasein and Western metaphysics. When Hitler proved not to be the Messiah, however, Heidegger, in an attempt to cover over his mistake, not only changed his philosophical emphasis and vocabulary, but denied that any change had taken place, stating that his post-war philosophical writings were nothing but a continuation of *Being and Time*, which had been misinterpreted. He claimed that his later thought had been present in his

early thought all along, and that people had only read Division I of *Being and Time*, while ignoring Division II. Lastly, I aim to show that the messianic notions of the coming of Being described in both early and late Heidegger suffer the same flaw, namely, that they lack any kind of ethical code of behavior. I will argue that Heidegger's egregious omission of an ethic in his early and later works is itself part of a larger philosophical oversight—his neglect of Being-with as a central mode of Dasein's existence. If we synthesize, however, early and late Heidegger, and make Being-with-others-in-the-world the primordial basis for a Dasein-Being relation (as Levinas, Heidegger's Jewish student, did in his formulation of the face-to-face encounter), we can perhaps construct a post-modern messianism, in which redemption, in contrast to Heidegger's definition of death, is defined as the possibility of having more possibilities.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger strongly emphasizes the role of Dasein in disclosing Being. Dasein's choice to lead an authentic or an inauthentic life makes all the difference for the fate of Being. The problem for the Heidegger of *Being and Time* is that philosophy since Plato has ceased to ask the question "What is Being?" and has taken the answer for granted without ever giving it a full account. Modern Dasein has continued to cover over the truth of Being by pursuing ontical questions without giving any consideration to the primacy of the ontological question that precedes and necessitates those questions. In short, the fault is with man, with Dasein. That is why in *Being and Time*, Heidegger proposes an analytic of the different moods of Dasein as the starting point for revealing the structure of Being. "Being," Heidegger famously writes, is only "Being for Dasein." The fate of Being is wrapped up in the fate of Dasein, without whom, Being-itself would, in a sense, cease "to be."

Each mood of Dasein is "always already" revealing Being, yet some moods reveal better than others. Dasein in its everydayness may be revealing Being, but it doesn't

consciously know it. For Heidegger, Being precedes cognition. It “is” what allows for there to be cognition at all. But it is the task of philosophy and the philosopher, according to Heidegger, to rescue Dasein from its everydayness, and to “leap in ahead for” it, so that Dasein can know this, and so Being can manifest itself to and through Dasein in its awakening. On some level, then, *Being and Time* reads not simply as a work of phenomenology, of revealing what is, but also as a work of normative philosophy, of revealing what ought to be. That is why Heidegger is able to write of certain modes of Dasein as being “deficient modes.” *Being and Time* is a preaching, which attempts to show us why the question of the meaning of Being is of the utmost importance to us. Not only that, but it attempts to show us how we can live more authentic and meaningful lives, lives which bring about a heightened awareness of Being, and which, ultimately allow Being “to be” present. In the greatest of all rhetorical tricks, Heidegger seeks to teach us what, he claims, we already know. He wants to show us that we already know, and that we just don’t know it.

Taking a page from Kierkegaard, Heidegger writes that my existence is that which is nearest to me, but in its nearness, is most far. It is precisely its proximity to me that prevents me from seeing it. Only when Dasein can transcend itself and its “situatedness” can it see properly what was always already there. *Being and Time*, under the auspices of addressing the question of the meaning of Being, begins by addressing the human condition. It is absurd, Heidegger thinks, to do ontology about the world without first understanding ourselves. In other words, before we can know Being, we must know our own Being, “Being-there” or “There-being.” “Dasein,” Heidegger writes, “is the being for whom his Being is an issue.” But Heidegger’s Dasein analytic is not simply a description of the human psyche. Though Heidegger, in a resonantly Christian fashion, describes man as “initially and for the most part fallen” or “falling prey” (*Verfallen*), he also offers ways in which man can step out of his

fallenness by “heeding the call of conscience.” Embedded in *Being and Time* is a philosophy of salvation. Not only that, but if human beings are the disclosers of Being and the projectors of meaning, it follows that the redemption of man from fallenness might lead to the uncovering of Being as a whole. Just as a messianist might imply without saying—for to say it outright would be heretical—that the fate of heaven is in man’s hands, Heidegger suggests that it is up to Dasein to reveal Being as a whole. Being will always be revealed, even when Dasein lives a deficient life-style, just as God might be revealed even in the actions of an evil man, but some modes of revelation are better than others. One needn’t observe a murderer pulling the trigger of a gun, for example, to recognize the divine beauty behind the mechanics of his finger’s motion.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger equates meaning and Being. He writes that if Dasein ceased to exist, beings would continue to exist factually, but they would lose their meaning; and thus, their Being would slip away. For Heidegger, Dasein is uniquely positioned to project meaning, because it is the only being that has a history. As Heidegger is fond of saying, “Dasein is thrown from a past and projects into a future.” Dasein is not simply an aggregate of all of its qualities in a given moment. One cannot study Dasein the way one studies a rock. The rock is unaware that it has lived for thousands of years and undergone erosion. But Dasein always carries with it a history and a heritage. The past is always present for Dasein. Heidegger himself, for example, is not simply a philosopher, but a professor, son, husband, German, citizen, and a Catholic, thinking, teaching, and writing at the University of Freiburg in 1927. In addition to having a past, however, Dasein has a future which is also always present. Dasein acts because it anticipates the results of its actions. Dasein goes to school not simply to learn, but to get a degree; Dasein seeks a degree not simply to have as a piece of paper recognizing its accomplishments, but because having a

degree enables Dasein to seek employment, etc. We cannot help having our pasts, but we always choose our futures, our projects. Heidegger, for example, could not have helped the fact that he was of German blood and Catholic origins, but he chose, in 1933, to join the Nazi party, and thereafter, to sign his letters, “*Heil Hitler.*” It was by no means necessary that he should have chosen this route simply because he was a German or a Catholic or a philosopher of Being. He chose to be a Nazi because he believed that doing so would a) advance his career b) effect a unification of the sciences and the humanities and c) liberate the German *Volk*. All of these were projects that Heidegger picked out for himself as a projecting and futural being.

Whatever our individual circumstances and choices may be, both early Heidegger and late Heidegger concur that Dasein *ek-sists*, that is, Dasein stands out of itself (though the way in which Dasein *ek-sists* in each case is, as we shall see later, radically different). For early Heidegger, it is our birth that determines our history and our death that determines our future. In effect, we are “thrown from birth and project unto death.” Dasein’s finitude is the framework for its ability to project. If Dasein lived for ever, time would cease to be an existential horizon, and Being which unfolds on the horizon of time, would lose its significance. All meaning, which is the projection of Dasein, would vanish with the dissipation of Dasein’s finitude, because Dasein would cease to be Dasein. Dasein’s essence, in *Being and Time*, is circumscribed by the fact that Dasein always stands in relation to death, defined as “one’s ownmost possibility of having no more possibilities.” Only an authentic relation to death can yield a life full of meaning and purposeful projects.

Dasein, however, “initially and for the most part,” refuses to face its death authentically. Rather than acknowledging death as immanent and one’s own, Dasein relates to death as only something in the distance, as something that happens to others, but never to

oneself. Dasein flees death by ensnaring itself in the mundane. Dasein fears things, because it is unwilling to face its ultimate fear, death. Rather than fearing the “possibility of having no more possibilities,” Dasein fears monsters or aliens or wolves or car accidents. But all of these other fears are only proxies for the larger and insurmountable fear of death. Because Dasein does not stand in an authentic relation of “being towards death,” Dasein becomes “entangled,” “falls prey,” and engages in “idle talk.” It is only when Dasein experiences *angst*, when the world ceases to be a workshop of things “ready to hand” and a “totality of references,” when death is felt as immanent, and Dasein realizes its incompleteness, that Dasein can gain clarity for itself. Heidegger says that the feeling of *angst* comes as a summons telling Dasein that he is guilty. Dasein is guilty not because he has done anything wrong, but because his very existence is predicated on the guilt that accompanies finitude. Dasein will never be able to realize all his goals, and in the moment of *angst* he recognizes this, and is able to prioritize which goals are important to him. Out of *angst* comes the possibility of choice. An inauthentic Dasein goes to work everyday without considering the possibility of quitting. Authentic Dasein feels everything as a choice. Authentic Dasein needn’t quit his job, he may well decide to stay, but when he resumes his work, it will no longer be in a robotic fashion, but in a highly alert and self-aware one. For Heidegger, the experience of *angst*, which reveals one’s finitude, enables Dasein to be resolute. It needn’t matter what Dasein in an experience of authenticity does, so long as he does it resolutely, with passion, conviction, and purpose.

Since Heidegger writes that Dasein only experiences the mood of *angst* infrequently, it is unclear whether he is simply saying this as a descriptive fact, or whether, behind his words, there is the hope that Dasein will experience *angst* more frequently. But it seems that if *angst* is the only mood that can reveal death properly, and if death is the basis for finitude,

and finitude the basis for temporality, and temporality the horizon of Being, it follows that only an authentic relation to death can lead to true knowledge of Being.

In all moods, Dasein enters into a disclosive relation with Being, but this relation is not to Being-itself, but to Being-in-the-world. In the preliminary analytic, Dasein's mood, which precedes his cognition, is a function of Dasein's standing in relation to the world. Dasein does not bring his mood into the room; the room brings Dasein into his mood. Under this view, Dasein cannot help what mood he enters into, and he has no choice but to live "initially and for the most part" in fear rather than *angst*. Dasein's moods come and go. Dasein is always in a mood, and Dasein is constituted by its moods. In a sense, mood is what brings Being to the there. But, in Division II, Dasein's mood is not simply the function of Dasein's relation to the world, but of Dasein's relation to himself. The world is not the objective world, separate from Dasein, but is the world in which Dasein participates. On some level, Dasein creates the world— his world. Dasein chooses what to notice and what to ignore. Dasein may always be consigned to be in a mood, but on some level, Dasein *can* choose his mood.

What stands, then, between Dasein and authenticity, between Dasein and true disclosure of Being is "the they" or the "they-self." Heidegger writes,

"In utilizing public transportation, in the use of information services such as the newspaper, every other is like the next...In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the they reveals its true dictatorship. We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way they enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way they see and judge. But we also withdraw from the "great mass" the way they withdraw, we find "shocking" what they find shocking. The they, which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness."<sup>1</sup>

In everydayness or averageness, Dasein ceases to be an "I" and becomes one of them. The tyranny of the they-self drags Dasein into an inauthentic relation to death. The they-self turns death into a factoid, into something indefinite, or else, into something definite that will

not occur now, and can be dealt with later. The they-self expects death, but it does not anticipate death. It relates to death as something from the outside, rather than as something that is always already occurring. We are dying in every moment. But this is the basis of life. The they-self eradicates the possibility of death, and consequently of life. For Heidegger, the point is not to relish death, but to live life with death in mind. Anticipating Death makes possible the realization of “one’s ownmost potentiality of being.”

Dasein is thus liberated from the they-self and from an inauthentic relation to death, when it hears the call of conscience. This call is not a call from heaven, nor is it the voice of God in the garden asking, “Where are you?” Dasein calls itself. Dasein hears because Dasein wants to hear, because Dasein calls and reveals itself as wanting to have a conscience. The they-self can never have a conscience, but Dasein can. Dasein, wanting a conscience, calls itself out of the they-self. Dasein frees itself from the contingency of others and, standing before its own death, frees itself for its ownmost potentiality of being.

By using such a religious vocabulary of guilt, thrownness, fallenness, conscience, and authenticity, borrowed heavily from Kierkegaard, Heidegger evokes a secularized philosophical version of the story of the “Fall,” (a fact he tries to write off in “Letter on Humanism”). He also offers a philosophy by which man can liberate himself from his “Fall” and return to a redemptive state. In Genesis, man’s “Fall” is the basis for his mortality (“For on the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die”). But for Heidegger, the issue is not mortality. Mortality will never go away. The issue is how man relates to his mortality. Redemption cannot occur with a Christ who wipes away guilt and original sin and death for all who embrace him. The eradication of guilt and death is a false redemption, and one desired by the they-self which is always fleeing authenticity and entangling itself in averageness. Heidegger never uses the word redemption, but it seems that Dasein can

redeem itself precisely by embracing its guilt, its thrownness, and its death. Dasein can overcome death by accepting it, and using it as the basis for a thoughtful and self-aware existence. Dasein's redemption comes when Dasein chooses a project for itself with resoluteness. Dasein redeems itself when, unbounded by obligations, it makes everything possible and nothing necessary. Dasein gives up its desire to have, for a simple desire to be. In this mode, Dasein accepts his death, accepts his finitude, assigns meaning, and recognizes and reveals Being-as-a-whole. Dasein existentially withdraws from innerworldly beings and communes with Being. Dasein not only liberates itself from the claws of the they, but liberates Being as well.

In Division II of *Being and Time*, Dasein's "historical situatedness" also stands in the way of Dasein's liberation as a kind of they-self. But in *angst*, Dasein is able to similarly free itself from the clutches of history. Its range of choices may still be factually grounded in its historical situatedness, but the way it chooses from this range of historical possibilities is timeless. In the moment of *angst*, in which Dasein calls itself and reveals itself to itself as wanting a conscience, Dasein transcends its temporal horizon. And if Being is always related to as Being-in-the-world, perhaps when Dasein escapes the claws of worldliness, and the world slips away, Dasein is able to discover Being, outside of time and the world, as simply Being. Whatever the case, it is clear that it is up to Dasein to free itself and disclose Being, not the other way around. Dasein does not receive the truth of Being, but projects and creates its own truth. The truth of Being is true because it is true for Dasein.

Though Heidegger promised to disclose Being independently of Dasein in Division III of *Being and Time*, he was unable to deliver on his promise, and who could blame him? Heidegger is himself a Dasein, and his ontology is consequently and necessarily anthropomorphic. Being is dependent on Dasein in much the same way that, for modern

theologians, God is dependent on humanity. Religious messianists, speaking under the preface of an “as it were” (*keinyachol*), often say that if man were to cease believing in God, God would die. Man, they say, must take an active stand for God.

*Being and Time* is incredibly messianic in its tone. But it in no way treats the full disclosure of Being as an inevitable event. Man must toil for his redemption, but being deficient initially and for the most part, it is unclear if Being will ever come. Being is always on its way, omnipresent even in its seeming absence, disclosed even in its hiddenness, unveiled even in its veiling over, but it will never fully arrive until Dasein opens up its eyes and beckons it with resoluteness. Dasein must reveal Being in such a way that it knows that it is revealing Being, if Being is to truly come to presence. Initially and for the most part, Dasein reveals Being unknowingly. Underlying Heidegger’s Dasein analytic is the message that Dasein, calling itself out of the they-self and out of its historicity, can existentially, though not factially, overcome everydayness and death and liberate itself for the quest of the meaning of Being. Only when “Being-there” does this can Being truly “be” there in full disclosure. While Being is anything but a God or a Messiah (for Heidegger, religion has committed the great crime of mistaking God for a Being rather than Being-itself), the way in which Heidegger understands Dasein’s relation to Being resonates strongly with the way modern theologians understand man’s relation to a God or a Messiah.

Many “death of God” theologians have argued that if God is dead it is because man has killed Him. “But,” they say, “God is not yet dead.” “God is dieing and it is up to man to save Him.” Man cannot wait for God to save the world; he must save the world himself. It is precisely the fact that man has waited for God to take care of his mess instead of taking care of it himself that has caused God to be a victim of the world. But even if God is not dead, but simply hidden, as theologians would like to believe, for all intents and purposes God

may as well be dead. His hiddenness renders him effectively dead to the world. It is up to man, according to these theologians, to call God out of the heavens—“to bring heaven down to earth,” as the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who likely studied Heidegger’s philosophy, was fond of saying. This is surely the philosophy of those who seek to rebuild the Temple Mount despite the fact that the Messiah has not yet come. Only by building it, by taking the initiative, will the Messiah feel welcome to come. Similarly, many Marxists, rather than emphasizing the inevitability of the Proletariat revolution that will usher in the end of history, emphasize man’s active role in bringing it about. They rally not around enigmatic lines such as “communism is the riddle of history solved, and knows itself to be that solution,” but around ones such as “Proletariats of the world, unite!” On Passover, Jews pour a cup of wine for Elijah and open their doors for him to enter their houses, because they think that only if they open the door and pour the cup will Elijah enter and drink. So too, for Heidegger, Dasein must open its doors to Being. Being stands waiting at the door, and is always there, even if covered over. But Being is not truly there until Dasein lets it in and fully realizes that it was there all along. If Dasein shuts the door in the face of Being and flees into its world of innerworldly beings, Being will slip away. Dasein, alone, has the power to redeem itself and the fate of Being.

There is no denying that despite the messianic overtones in *Being and Time*, which are accompanied by a religious vocabulary of guilt, thrownness, fallenness, conscience, authenticity, and transcendence, Heidegger’s existentialist philosophy, like most existentialist philosophy, is about as antithetical to moral living as one can get. For Heidegger, morality is seen as a product of the they-self, a chain that Dasein, hearing a call not of good or bad conscience, but simply of conscience, is free to discard, so long as it does so with resoluteness. And it is for this reason that his early messianism fails.

In 1933, Heidegger, with tremendous resolution and a strong desire to unite the humanities and the sciences in the quest for the meaning of Being, joined the Nazi party and became the Rector of the University of Freiburg. In his rectorate address, entitled “The Self-Assertion of the German University,” he speaks passionately of the German people’s “will to essence.” He asks whether “we must take seriously the abandonment of man today in the midst of Being,”<sup>2</sup> and concludes that “we” mustn’t, that German Dasein must continue to question and struggle and seek. He declares, “I renounce the foolish hope in salvation by the hand of chance.”<sup>3</sup> “Struggle,” which is the communal experience of angst, will, Heidegger says, “implant within the entire body of teachers and students that fundamental mood out of which self-limiting self-assertion will empower resolute self-examination.” Only then will the German “Volk fulfill its historical mission” as the fateful saviors of Western metaphysics.<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, the potency which Heidegger gave to Dasein in the struggle to disclose Being proved to be too much. In the end, Hitler turned out not to be a savior, Germany lost the War, and all of a sudden, it seemed as if Being could never be fully disclosed, but would remain ensnared in the jaws of history. It seemed as if the words of the late Heidegger’s oft quoted poet, Holderlin, had come true: “What has always made the state a hell on earth has been precisely that man has tried to make it his heaven.” No longer could Heidegger hope for a Dasein initiated redemption. He would have to wait for Being to give itself. All man can do, according to the post-war Heidegger, is submit silently before Being. Dasein must no longer call itself to conscience, but must remain silent in order to hear the call of Being. Instead of having a “will to power” or a “will to essence,” Dasein must, in the late Heidegger, have a “will not to will.” Dasein must “listen to the world.”

Reflecting on his days as the rector of the University, Heidegger sought to extirpate himself from responsibility without ever expressing real regret for his actions. He writes,

“The rectorate was an attempt to see something in the movement that had come to power, beyond all its failings and crudeness, that was much more far-reaching and that could perhaps one day bring a concentration on the Germans’ Western historical essence. It will in no way be denied that at the time I believed in such possibilities and for that reason renounced the actual vocation of thinking in favor of being effective in an official capacity. In no way will what was caused by my own inadequacy in office be played down. But these points of view do not capture what is essential and what moved me to accept the rectorate.”<sup>5</sup>

Heidegger could not accept true responsibility for his choices, calling them “inadequate” but not “wrong.” This is likely because under his post-war philosophy, everything is an unveiling and a veiling over of Being, and each event is no better or worse than the next. In early Heidegger, an action is better or worse on the basis of whether it comes from an authentic place and is committed with resoluteness. In late Heidegger, because Being must give itself, Dasein’s actions, whether authentic or inauthentic, cannot disclose Being any more than they can cover over Being. In his “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger reinterprets *Being and Time*. He writes, “...the terms ‘authenticity’ and ‘inauthenticity,’ which are used in a provisional fashion, do not imply a moral-existential or an ‘anthropological’ distinction but rather a relation which, because it has been hitherto concealed from philosophy, has yet to be thought for the first time, an ‘ecstatic’ relation of the essence of man to the truth of Being...as such Being remains mysterious.” Depriving Dasein of the significance of its choices such that it makes no difference what it does, Heidegger is able to shift the focus from Dasein to Being. He is, in a sense, trying to take the blame and pressure off human beings, particularly off himself, and put it squarely on the shoulders of “*es gibt*,” (Heidegger’s new name for being, “it gives”). In this way, the Holocaust becomes simply an event in which the problems of modernity are revealed, no worse than anything else, and everything becomes a learning experience. In 1949, He wrote, “Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry. As for its essence, it is the same thing as the manufacture of corpses in the gas

chambers and the death camps, and the same thing as blockades and reduction of countries to famine, the same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.”<sup>6</sup>

Whereas early Heidegger was overly zealous about man’s role in bringing about redemption, the late Heidegger is almost resigned to the possibility of redemption, viewing it as something that man can prepare for only by thinking and pondering, but not by doing. The post-war Heidegger is incredibly relativistic. Whereas early Heidegger gives a special place to the destiny of the German people and the German language in unfolding the fate of Being and reversing the mistakes of the West since Plato, late Heidegger states,

“Not only do we lack any criterion which would permit us to evaluate the perfection of an epoch of metaphysics as compared with any other epoch. The right to this kind of evaluation does not exist. Plato’s thinking is no more perfect than Parmenides’. Hegel’s philosophy is no more perfect than Kant’s. Each epoch of philosophy has its own necessity. We simply have to acknowledge the fact that a philosophy is the way it is. It is not our business to prefer one to the other...”<sup>7</sup>

Early Heidegger argued that since Plato, the West had been on the wrong track. The late Heidegger seems to think that every philosopher reveals and hides Being, and no thinker can be called more disclosive of Being than any other.

Whereas early Heidegger’s messianism stresses the active role of Dasein in seeking out the meaning of Being, late Heidegger’s messianism stresses the passive role of Dasein in simply readying itself for the receiving of Being. The late Heidegger’s messianism is apocalyptic rather than epochal. Being will emerge not in the midst of an authentic German movement, but in the lessons learned from the horrors of modern technology. Like the Rabbis after the destruction of the Second Temple, Heidegger after WWII sees the coming of the Messiah or the revealing of Being not as a present reality, but as a reality that will occur only in the indefinite future. Heidegger’s words, in many ways, parallel those of R. Yochanan ben Zakkai, who warned his fellow messianists, “If you hear that the Messiah is

coming, finish planting your crops and then go to greet him.” Heidegger said, about 20 years after WWII,

“...philosophy will not be able to effect an immediate transformation of the present condition of the world. This is not only true of philosophy, but of all merely human thought and endeavor. Only a god can save us. The sole possibility that is left for us is to prepare a sort of readiness, through thinking and poeticizing, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god in the time of foundering (Untergang); for in the face of the god who is absent, we founder.”<sup>8</sup>

But Heidegger’s post-war philosophy is not simply a secularized or paganized version of ben Zakkai’s cautious messianism. For, like his philosophy in *Being and Time*, it lacks any imperative of responsibility. For ben Zakkai, one should, while waiting for the Messiah to come, plant seeds, an activity done by many and for the sake of others. One should be with others in the world. For Heidegger, one should philosophize, poeticize, and create art, activities typically done alone. He writes exultingly that “the poet calls all the brightness of the sights of the sky and every sound of its courses and breezes into the singing word and there makes them shine and ring.”<sup>9</sup> But the poet poeticizes alone, and initially and for the most part, for himself. The poet toils only poetically, but he does not toil with his fellow in a common field. In his “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger writes that man must dwell poetically in the house of being. But nowhere does Heidegger say that man must dwell with other men. Man must simply dwell with language. Heidegger writes that man must be a shepherd of Being, but he fails to say that man must be a shepherd of beings, as well. Late Heidegger’s messianism of waiting and preparing for Being is as flawed as early Heidegger’s messianism of pursuing Being. Both fail to endorse the primordial importance of ethical behavior. Hans Jonas, one of Heidegger’s best Jewish disciples, beautifully and powerfully writes,

“But as to Heidegger’s being, it is an occurrence of unveiling, a fate-laden happening upon thought: so was the Fuhrer and the call of German destiny under him: an unveiling of something indeed, a call of being all right, fate-laden in every sense:

neither then nor now did Heidegger's thought provide a norm by which to decide how to answer such calls—linguistically or otherwise: no norm except depth, resolution, and the sheer force of being that issues the call. But to the believer, ever suspicious of this world, depth may mean the abyss, and force, the prince of this world. As if the devil were not part of the voice of being! Heidegger's own answer is to the shame of philosophy, on record, and I hope, not forgotten: 'Not doctrines and ideas be the rules of your being. The Fuhrer himself and alone is the present and future German reality and its law. Learn ever deeper to know: that from now on each and every thing demands decision, and every action, responsibility. Heil Hitler.'"<sup>10</sup>

For both early and late Heidegger, man ek-sists, initially and for the most part, for and by himself. In *Being and Time*, Dasein must stand in relation to his own death and his ownmost potentiality of Being, and free himself existentially from the they-self (a term not dissimilar to Marx's species-being). In late Heidegger, Dasein must scale the dimension between the sky and the earth, and engage in philosophical wonder (*thaumazein*). He must fall silent before Being. But he needn't have any ethical relation to beings. Heidegger, responding to Jean Beaufret's critique that his philosophy lacks ethics, writes in "Letter on Humanism," "The tragedies of Sophocles...preserve the *ethos* in their sagas more primordially than Aristotle's lectures on 'ethics.'"<sup>11</sup> For late Heidegger, it seems that the only imperative remaining for Dasein is to let "Being—be,"<sup>12</sup> a poetic way of saying, "live and let live." In short, Heidegger's philosophies, in *Being and Time* and his later works, are antithetical to moral living. While one can draw parallels between Heidegger's messianic attitude towards Being and religious messianists' attitudes towards God, one can do no more than say that Heidegger's philosophy employs a vocabulary consisting in religious and messianic terms.

Heidegger's critique of religion and philosophy alike is that they have treated God as a Being rather than Being itself. But perhaps, religion has treated God as a Being, because it doesn't want people abandoning their fellow beings in search or in anticipation of Being. Perhaps, by making God a Being, religion has allowed its followers to model their human relationships around their relationship to God, rather than in contrast to God. We do not

have to sacrifice our children in obedience to God, and in fact, are prohibited from doing so, (though Kierkegaard, who Heidegger adores, might say otherwise). Like the mystical God, Being “is” not, at least in the proper sense of the word “is.” Like the mystical God, Being precedes “isness.” But as such, neither the mystical God nor Being can command, desire, hope, reward, punish, hear worship, be pleased, be angered, etc. Beings, however, can, and they must. Both the mystical God and Being promote antinomianism, but the God of communal, deontological religion is necessarily a Being, a Being who exists in the world.

Hannah Arendt’s critique of philosophy is that the philosopher forgets he is a person among persons. Seeing this from Plato to Heidegger, she says that philosophers forget we are plural beings and that life goes on between persons, not between a person and Being. If Heidegger’s active messianism led him to embrace Nazism while his passive messianism led him to sink into a philosophy of total relativism, such that he could never express regret for his Nazi past, it is because, in each case, Heidegger ignores the importance of human plurality and working with others for a better world. Heideggerian messianism promises redemption only for the individual or for a specific group of people, the Germans, but it never considers the unity of all Dasein.

It is Heidegger’s disregard for Being-with-others-in-the-world that causes him to philosophize at the extremes. If Heidegger were able to conceive of Being-with-others-in-the-world as his Jewish student Levinas does, as unfolding Being in the “face-to-face” encounter, perhaps, his philosophy would have found a middle ground between the two messianisms he presents in his early and later work. Instead of putting the onus of the presence-ing of Being primarily on Dasein or primarily on Being, he could have argued that both are equiprimordially and coterminously reliant upon each other. Here is what Heidegger could have said: Dasein needs Being as much as Being needs Dasein. Dasein

cannot exist without *Sein*, and *Sein*, so to speak, cannot “exist,” without Dasein. But, Dasein can only find *Sein* in the other. Just as “there is no Being without Dasein,” so too, is there no Dasein without other Dasein. It is only by relating to someone as one with me, yet wholly other, that I can experience the truth of myself, and therefore, the truth of Being. I can rescue myself and therefore, also, Being, only when I give myself up to the service of the other. Being is never just Being, but always Being-in-the-world. And as such, Being can only be grasped through beings.

To conclude, “we can argue,” as Richard Wolin might say, “with Heidegger against Heidegger,” using what we find insightful and exciting in his philosophy and throwing out what we find abhorrent. Like any philosophy, Heidegger’s is only as good as it can be put into practice. Even though Heidegger was simply a modern example of Thales, of one who gazed in wonder at the stars and stumbled into a well, this does not excuse him or his philosophy. The problem with Heidegger is not simply with the choices he made, but with the fact that he used his philosophy to justify those choices, and when his choices were exposed as reprehensible, reinterpreted his philosophy and tried to cover over his past. But this should not diminish all of Heidegger’s brilliance. If Being discloses itself always already to and through all Dasein, it should not matter entirely for his thought that he was a Nazi. If anything, we learn from Heidegger that Being discloses itself to and through Jews, Germans, and even Nazis. Being can be fully revealed to humanity as a whole, only when human beings collectively share in each other’s unique revelations.

The *Zohar* says that 600,000 Torahs were received at Mount Sinai, because each person there heard according to his own ability. The true, original Torah may as well not exist. Since Torah exists for the sake of the world, Torah not in the world is not Torah. The true Torah can be received only when all who stand at Sinai—we are always already standing

there—listen intently and authentically to themselves, rather than feeling compelled by others to discard or sublimate their special revelations. At the same time, however, true Torah can only be rendered harmonious, when everybody listens respectfully and humbly to the revelations of others, viewing their own revelations as merely a portion of true Revelation. This dialectic is expressed in the Talmud’s advice that one should carry two notes to oneself, one in each pocket. One should read, “For me, alone, was the world created.” The other should read, “I am but dust of the earth.” The resolution of this tension, between being unique and being a mere part, finds its apotheosis in the figure of the messiah, who, as Franz Rosenzweig articulates, brings together creation, revelation, and redemption and man, God, and world.

Only when all members of the community can share in everyone’s revelations and allow them to join in harmonious dialogue with each other will true Torah give itself, and beings hear without covering over. Until then, human constructions and interpretations of Torah will be mere mimetic representations, and God’s face will remain unseen. Torah, here, needn’t be restricted to the Hebrew Bible or the Oral Law, but can function generally as what its name suggests, Teaching. The Five Books of Moses represent only one of the many revelations of Being. According to the Kabbalists, Torah is the blueprint of the world, and existed years before Creation itself. Torah includes all contents of Creation. It includes the words of Moses and Heidegger, Isaiah and Holderlin, God and Being, and every Dasein who ever lived.

The arrival of Being, of Truth, of a God who can save us, of Meaning, should stand neither as an immanent fact that can occur in any moment of resoluteness, nor as an indefinite and distant possibility that is beyond our control, but should stand somewhere in between. Somewhere in between the rashness that could bring the world’s greatest

philosopher since Plato to shout “*Heil Hitler!*” and the moral ambivalence that could allow him to pronounce everything as equally veiling and unveiling, is the possibility for a philosophy in which human beings engage in bringing each other ever closer to each other, and consequently, to Being. Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, argues that one cannot die for another, and that one must accept his death upon himself as his ownmost potentiality of being. This makes sense only if Dasein sees his death as the possibility of *his* having no more possibilities. But what if Dasein, caring not simply about himself, but about the fate of all Dasein, of all beings, of all faces of Being, of all souls who bear the divine spark, made for himself a project that could be carried on by others in the face of his death? Then, his death would not mean the end of possibilities, but the beginning of possibilities for others. Death would no longer be something to be fled, feared, or experienced in angst, but something to be overcome in the transcendent infinitude of the inter-personal and trans-personal relationships that constitute a community. If the exposition of Being or Meaning or a God who can save us were the ultimate project, not simply of a single Dasein, but of all Dasein, then redemption—the ultimate project—could triumph over death as the possibility of always having more possibilities. The Torah each person hears may vary, but the Sinai from which each Torah comes does not. We needn’t agree on everything, but we must all acknowledge that we stand at the foot of the mountain, far removed from, yet still seized by, some kind of revelation.

Redemption may never be reached, but it will always stand as a possibility driving all human beings towards their collective potentialities of being. Though Heidegger’s philosophy fails on ethical counts, it can be reworked such that it offers a notion of being-towards-the-infinite. On such a formulation, one can never die, so long as one leaves behind others to carry on in one’s project. So long as Dasein does not turn its back on its neighbor,

it can live on, and its revelation can be left as an inheritance to future generations.

Heidegger's philosophy itself— which borrows from the pre-Socratics, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche and contests with Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant—continues the work of other beings. The key is not simply to relate to dead people through their texts, however, but to engage with others while they are alive, in order to save them from dying. Not everybody can write down a philosophy for future generations to study. But we can all learn from the other in the face-to-face encounter. We can receive what the face of the other reveals while respecting what, like the face of God, remains wholly unknowable, too intense and ineffable to be gazed upon. We can dwell with others as both a part of us and apart from us, unifying through identity but also through difference.

We must dwell poetically with others in the world, making ethical behavior into an art that reveals Being. We must commit acts of loving kindness not as automata reacting in accordance with the they-self, but as authentic beings, choosing to do so resolutely. When we heed the call of conscience which comes from the face of the other, we must stand not out of the world, but into it, and heed it as the call of Being, as Being-in-the-world.

*Thaumazein* must come not from looking at the stars, which are hugely finite, but which we mistakenly call infinite, but from gazing into the eyes of the other.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. by Joan Stambaugh. (New York: SUNY Press, 1966), 119.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, "1933 Rectorate Address," in *The Heidegger Controversy*, edited by Richard Wolin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 33.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts," in Günther Neske & Emil Kettering (eds.), *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in F, p. 58. Lacoue-Labarthe's source is Wolfgang Schirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit* (Freiburg, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," *On "Time and Being,"* trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York, 1972), p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> *Der Spiegel's* 23 September 1966 interview with Heidegger, published posthumously, on 31 May 1976, translated by Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo in *The Heidegger Controversy*, edited by Richard Wolin.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Poetically Man Dwells" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 225.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophic Biology*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 247.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Basic Writings*. Ed. by David Farrell Krell. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 256.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 259.