Facing Nature: The Infinite in the Flesh


This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of.
Murdoch University
Perth, Western Australia
2004
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research.

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Abstract

“Facing Nature: The Infinite in the Flesh”
by
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This thesis explores the relation between two interpretations of chôra, drawn from a reading of Plato’s Timaeus. The first I label the elemental chôra. The second, I call the social chôra. The first chapter addresses the elements in Ionian philosophy, with an eye toward the political and social backdrop of the important cosmological notion of isonomia, law of equals. Here social and elemental are continuous. Chapter two looks at the next phase of Presocratic thought, Elea, specifically Parmenides and his influence on later thought, then turns to Heidegger’s reading of Parmenides’ through the key word of alêtheia. Finally, I offer a reading of Parmenides through a different key word—trust. The third chapter examines Plato’s cosmology in the Timaeus, focusing on the way the beginning of this dialogue inflects the dialogue in a political/social direction, putting the social chôra in tension with the elemental chôra that the body of the Timaeus’ discusses. In the fourth chapter, which examines the Phaedrus, this tension is inverted, since this dialogue on writing and justice set in what proves to be the mesmerizing and erotic elemental milieu of the world outside the walls of the polis. The second half of the dissertation turns to some modern thinkers within the phenomenological tradition or its wake who write about elementals. Chapter five examines Gaston Bachelard’s reveries on imagination which dream the natural world of fire, air, water, and earth from the standpoint of what he calls material and dynamic imagination, concepts that imply a strong sense of embodiment. Chapter six treats Levinas’ description of the elemental and fixes it in a stark relation to the human. I will suggest some possible points of contact between the elemental and the social in Levinas. Chapter seven turns to John Sallis’ analysis of the imagination as the means of access proper to the elemental in ways that differ from Bachelard. He position the earth as a fundamental other. I will suggest that in the end his position inherits Heidegger’s lack of emphasis on embodied and needy humanity. Alphonso Lingis offers his own unique reading of the elemental in a more Levinasian and Merleau-Pontian vein, speaking of the directives the world, both human and natural, puts to us, and returning to a philosophy of substance that puts the body in the picture. Chapter eight uses his thought to focus the issue of the dissertation.
For Karen
1956-2002

For
Aaron 1991-
and
William 1997-
(The sun shines.)

--Martin Heidegger\(^1\)

Never would it be possible for a stone, no more than for an airplane, to elevate itself toward the sun in jubilation and to move like a lark, which nevertheless does not see the open.

--Heidegger\(^2\)

Words cannot express the joy that the sun brings to all living things.

--Carl Linnaeus\(^3\)

_Sola Skinner likt, på fattig folk og rikt._
The sun shines the same on poor people and rich.

--Norwegian proverb

_Mine, thine._—‘This dog is mine,’ said those poor children; ‘that is my place in the sun.’ Here is the beginning and the image of the usurpation of all the earth.

--Pascal\(^4\)

Prior to the practical perception that draws out a practicable layout and pursues objectives, there is the appetite for the elements.

--Alphonso Lingis\(^5\)

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\(^2\) Ibid, p. 160.


\(^4\) _Pensees_, 295.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my sons, Aaron and Will, for inspiration in various forms. In the years to come I aspire to live out an apology for the way this project has distracted me from them, I hope not too much to their detriment. My wife, Nancy, has supported me at every step. She is a grace to me. I thank Paul MacDonald for offering consistently sound advice on matters both practical and theoretical. This project would not have materialized without his help and would have been much better had I followed his advice more consistently. I thank Martin McAvoy for helping me launch this venture in its early years. Gratitude also is due to Peta Bowden for suggestions and encouragement and to Lubica Ucnik for the same and for recommending I read Patočka. I have appreciated the inspiration of the Sir Walter’s gang at Murdoch University, any of whom I would be glad to call a friend. I have also benefited from time with Horst Ruthrof, Arnold Thompson, Barry Maund, Andrew Brennan, and Niall Lucy, all of whose comments and questions along the way led me to think more clearly. Professor John Llewelyn’s encouragement and generosity of spirit proved essential to this project reaching this stage. In addition, I have tried to do justice to comments from Beatrice Han-Pilé and Ulrich Haas.

Thanks go to many people who would have had less direct interest in the content of this work, but whose friendship has so often led them to inquire about its progress. Their voices have bolstered and intrigued me. In particular, I thank my parents for their encouragement to their son.
In spite of their philosophical differences, Levinas said of Sartre’s personal generosity, “that is the human.” All these persons I have named represent to me the vast pleasure and responsibility of being in debt to the generosity of others.

Finally, I must thank Murdoch University for providing the opportunity for this work and the financial support for projects along the way. Also thanks go to the staff of the Cambridge, MN public library and the libraries at the University of Minnesota, St. John’s University, Collegeville MN, and St. Benedict’s University, St. Joseph, MN.

I dedicate this work to my sister, Karen Hadland, who died too soon, of cancer, some three years past now, and to my sons whose futures remain open. It is my hope that the force of the hyphens on the page of dedication might not be overlooked.

Prospect Park, Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A.
Introduction

In the fifth century BCE, Xenophanes insisted that the universe did not inhale (mê mentoi anapnein).¹ In the twentieth century Emmanuel Levinas muses, “yet we must now ask if even the difference that separates essence in war from essence in peace does not presuppose that breathlessness of the spirit, or the spirit holding its breath, in which since Plato what is beyond the essence is conceived and expressed: And ask if this breathlessness or holding back is not the extreme possibility of the Spirit, bearing a sense of what is beyond the essence?”² Xenophanes’ comment demonstrates his distaste for anthropomorphic deities and a passion for perfect completeness that took off in the work of Parmenides. For the cosmos to have begun with an inhalation, as certain Greek cosmogonies seemed to believe, would have meant the presence of something outside of it to be inhaled, something more than all that is, that exceeds Parmenides’ ‘what is.’ This beyond is a puzzling notion. Xenophanes seems to have been denying the ‘beyond all that is.’ Levinas, one suspects, sought to hear this ‘otherwise,’ and the image of “holding its breath,” preserves the sense that this beyond is not actualized as real, like being, but it is still within proximity, what he calls the infinite.

Xenophanes’ passion for wholeness and aseity manifested itself in various ways in ancient Greece: Collectively it appeared in claims about the wholeness of the cosmos (if not ‘the’ ontos), such as Parmenides’ image of a sphere, and distributively it can be seen in the revulsion provoked by Zeno’s paradoxes and the notion of infinite divisibility. The word that seems to form some continuity between these two moments,

the collective and the distributive, is ‘apeiron.’ *Apeiron* gets translated as the ‘boundless’ or the ‘infinite,’ but also as ‘indeterminate.’ The Pythagoreans associated the word with evil. A.W. Moore distinguishes two senses of the infinite. He calls the first sense the ‘metaphysical’ infinite, the whole, in the sense of unbounded by anything beyond it. The second sense, which comes to be associated with Zeno, he names the ‘mathematical’ infinite. The metaphysical infinite is completeness, the sense of ‘no more.’ In regard to *apeiron*, this ‘no more’ plays out in the view that the cosmos is unbounded, not exceeded by anything outside of it. If the cosmos had inhaled, this would have meant something existed that was external to it and thus its lack of completeness. Xenophanes insists, “*mê mentoi,*” absolutely not! The mathematical sense of the infinite, on the other hand, suggests a sense of always one more, n+1. We might see its reflection in Anaxagoras’ seeds which always contained more possible presentations, since they were infinitely divisible, or in Empedocles’ image for the elements of roots, which also did not reach a termination, but disappeared into the unseen, therefore seemingly preserving the possibility of further manifestation. On the cosmic level the mathematical infinite implies that the infinite as endless. On a microcosmic level, which tends to merge with the physical, it manifests in the infinite divisibility to which Zeno turned his attention. We will see that Zeno’s critiques seem to be an effort to question infinite divisibility, to which atomism responded with a-tombs, the uncuttables. These atoms were devised to put a stop to this infinite and represent

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Democritus’ own “mê mentoi.” In some sense, atomism fixed a boundary within matter like Xenophanes did beyond what is.

To knock away the ‘primitive’ crust on these notions, I offer two depictions from more recent philosophical tradition that will try to put some contemporary flesh on the questions involved. One portrait pertains to the collective or boundary issue, the metaphysical, and focuses on the image of space flight as a going beyond the boundaries of what is. The other depiction pertains to what can be called the distributive or internal question, the infinite within, which bumps up against the very nature of space. First consider the internal depiction. It moves from John Sallis’ description of space, through Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm of one hand touching the other, to the image of the handshake between two people. Sallis, in describing ‘spacing,’ which seems quite like Plato’s chôra for him, says spacing is,

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a \text{a movement that is such as to open the very space in which it occurs. One could call it a ‘relation’ of space to itself, a self-opening of space, providing it is distinguished sufficiently from the dialectical relation to self that would be elevated into spirit so as to effectively cancel both space and spacing. Spacing is rather a self-relation that is eccentric.}^4
\]

Here we note a kind of spatiality which is self-constituting. The description also seems to continue the Heideggerian priority of temporality, even to spatiality.\(^5\)

In the next step in this portrait, the expression, “a ‘relation’ of space to itself,” leads on to Levinas’ description of Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm. The chiasm refers to the

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\(^5\) We can note in passing this description’s continuity with Heidegger’s connection of genesis and phthoron by a hyphen in “The Anaximander Fragment,” and the emphasis on non-kinetic movement that dominates the beginning sections of the Heraclitus Seminar. See “The Anaximander Fragment,” in Early Greek Thinking, p. 31.
crossing of within and the without in the moment when my one hand touches the other and in the immediate reversibility of this touching, wherein I sense that the material I touch when I touch and the material with which I touch are of the same flesh.\(^6\) Levinas says of this flesh “it is almost as if space were touching itself through man.”\(^7\) With Merleau-Ponty the relation of space to itself becomes more refined, restricted, and special. In addition, it more overtly evokes interior and exterior realms. In light of Merleau-Ponty’s description, there seems to be too little physicality in Sallis’ descriptions of spacing to permit this relation of space to itself to be one of touching, for the world to have Merleau-Ponty’s flesh. Arising space cannot gain the kind of purchase Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm affords. I will raise the question below, whether Heidegger’s thought, which seems to determine Sallis’ work, does not indeed lack the ability to do justice to the body.\(^8\) The chiasm would seem to move space toward flesh, where the humanity of spatiality is not so much a function of history, but of embodied existence.

But Levinas pushes the matter even further than Merleau-Ponty does. Rather than one person’s two hands touching each other, Levinas prefers the image of the handshake, the contact between two separate persons strange to each other. Flesh now becomes alien. Space finds itself alien to itself, which must be a kind of rupture. The

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\(^6\) The Visible and the Invisible, Claude Lefort, ed., Alphonso Lingis, trans. (Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968), Ch. 4, esp. pp. 133, 139. Hereafter abbreviated VI.

\(^7\) Is It Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas, Jill Robbins ed. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 172-3. Hereafter RtB.

\(^8\) Heidegger later acknowledges that the body is a difficult question. “The body phenomenon is the most difficult problem.” Heraclitus Seminar, p. 145.
handshake is a going beyond knowledge and is a gift. It is the recognition of the asymmetry of the face of the other. It would seem that in this handshake space becomes strange to itself, an alien flesh that causes me to stop up short and attend, to welcome or repel. This image of space’s relation to itself culminating in it being alien to itself, is the first, distributive emblematic moment of the *apeiron* I wish to highlight. It is not the kind of problem Zeno wrestled with when he sought to show divisible space is logically contradictory, though one might want to say that Zeno created the opening for such a view by highlighting the paradox that became the infinite in Levinas’ sense. Or perhaps Zeno’s insight is dependent upon a sense of something that exceeds homogeneous space. For Levinas is even fond of reversing the priority of ideas and suggesting that the face gives rise to such mathematical ideas as a straight line.

A rupture seems to have arisen in space, a limit, but not the one, we suspect, sought by Zeno and defined by the atomists. We will have occasion to see that heterogeneous, Bachelard’s term for space, and eccentric, the word used by Sallis to describe space, in Greek is *atopos*, out of place, and Socrates comes to be described as *atopotatos*, most out of place. Furthermore, the nature of such eccentricity is precisely at issue in the discussion in Chapter Three of *chōra* in the Timaeus, to which Socrates is continually paralleled. Does *chōra* as an eccentricity refer to a kind of inescapable difference or remainder in space, or does it refer to the human encounter signified by

9 See *Outside the Subject*, Michael B. Smith, trans. (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 101. Merleau-Ponty says the handshake is reversible, like my own hands touching. VI, p. 142. Regarding the handshake, a curious moment arises in *Heraclitus Seminar*, while Fink is contrasting the distanciality of seeing with the immediate proximity involved in touching. Heidegger interjects, “But what about when I now give you my hand?” p. 141. Fink’s reply registers no sense of difference between touching of another human and touching any other entity in the world.
the handshake, what Levinas comes to place always prior to beginning and calls anarchie?

I would like to link these two options, spacing as described by Sallis and the handshake in Levinas’ description, to two ways of approaching Plato’s *chôra*. *Chôra* in its elemental sense is the active quality of space that Sallis suggests, its resistance to decomposition, a quality of the elemental observed by Plato and which marks its intimacy with *chôra*. It resists decomposition because, in language that will emerge in chapter five, it is eccentric and heterogeneous rather than concentric and homogeneous. Of these two types of space, one Ionian and the other Eleatic/Atomistic, both yield elements, but the first does so in *chôra* while the second does so discretely in the void. The discussion here about the Ionian strand of physics, isolated in chapter one’s discussion of Anaximander, speaks of this elemental *chôra*. For Sallis and perhaps also to some extent for Plato, this receding character finally refers back to the earth, interpreted for Sallis in a Heideggerian manner, along the lines of concealment, the abysmal ground over which we hover, but for Plato in terms of earth as the site of the *polis*. Sallis’ kind of ‘physical’ or elemental *chôra* reflects a reading of the *Timaeus* that takes it as a ‘cosmological’ dialogue, albeit a self-effacing one, as Sallis so carefully demonstrates its numerous rebeginnings. I will ask whether or not Sallis, and Heidegger, quite attain the proper attention to our own embodiment in this *chôra* as the social and political beings.

The elemental *chôra* interests me first because of the power, or force, to use Sallis’ word, of this basic experience of the physical world. In this context I use the

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10 *RtB*, pp. 127, 135.
word *chôra* to speak of a certain inherent movement in the physical world, a depth in spatiality that one might say is both substantive and verbal at the same time. It seems to me very much like Zeno’s infinite without the tyrannous formality of supertasks. It may be such a burden at times but is also a joy to which we are subject as part of Linnaeus’ all living things, something for which we have a ‘thirst,’ as Lingis says. Levinas described this aspect of the elemental well, but in the end may have turned a deaf ear to it when faced with the human; Bachelard reveled too exclusively in it, and Lingis seems to have captured it most successfully without, it seems closing off a second aspect of *chôra*, the social *chôra*.

For one can read *chôra* differently, a reading I see in the source of the idea itself, the *Timaeus*. Here *chôra* is not just the tensile and evasive medium of in-formation, and not just a cosmic iteration of the historicity of Being, of time-space that comes to pass (away)\(^1\) in the horizon of temporality, which seems to be the Heideggerian vein in which Sallis and Charles Scott speak of *chôra*,\(^2\) but as a matter of hospitality and welcome, where the receding quality of *chôra* refers to the site of welcome by the host, the outstretched hand of welcome in the handshake, the stepping aside of the *après vous* that yields to the other, lets her pass first through the door. Here *chôra* begins specifically with the human and appears in a social guise, aligning more fully with Plato’s primary interest, justice in the *polis*. I call it *chôra* because Plato links hospitality and *chôra* but also because the model for it is Socrates, who is eccentric.

\(^1\) The expression ‘coming to pass (away)’ is Charles Scott’s, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 49.
These two readings of eccentric *chôra*, the elemental and the social, are what I wish to indicate by talking about spatiality and the handshake. I call it ‘social’ as a way of pointing to what Levinas says about face, while allowing enough flexibility in the term to accommodate some thinkers who follow after Levinas in setting social relations as primary but do not invoke the extreme form of the infinite that characterizes his thought.

The second emblematic moment in regard to *apeiron*, the collective moment, comes in reference to the important Heideggerian theme of earth. In his famous interview in *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger says in the context of a discussion of technology, “technology tears people away and uproots them from the earth more and more. I don’t know if you are scared; I was certainly scared when I recently saw the photographs of the earth taken from the moon. We don’t need an atom bomb at all; the uprooting of human beings is already taking place.” Here one sees concerns typical of Heidegger’s later thought, the primacy of earth as the proper human abode, the aversion about objectifying thought embodied in this instance by the actual process of gaining an

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13 “*Der Spiegel* Interview with Martin Heidegger,” in Günther Neske and Emil Kettering, *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, Lisa Harries and Joachim Neugroschel, trans. (New York: Paragon House, 1990), p. 55. Heidegger’s shock might be contrasted with the expectations he expressed more than twenty years earlier. Speaking of the oblivion of being he says, “Therefore it could be that an invisible cloud of forgetting itself, the oblivion of Being, hangs over the whole sphere of the earth and its humanity, a cloud in which is forgotten not this or that being but Being itself, a cloud no airplane could ever breach even if capable of the most formidable altitude. Accordingly, it could also be that at an appropriate time an experience precisely of this oblivion of Being might arise—arise as a need, and so be necessary.” *Parmenides*, André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, trans. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 28.
an external point of view on the proper abode from outer space. The atom bomb is drawn into ontological equivalence with space flight, as it is with air travel in an earlier essay.\textsuperscript{14}

Prior to this interview, and prior to the moon landing that concerned Heidegger, in 1961 Levinas wrote an essay entitled “Heidegger, Gagarin and Us.”\textsuperscript{15} He begins with a description of the dangers of technology that sounds somewhat like Heidegger’s language: existing has nearly come to be synonymous with exploiting nature, and the human being is in danger of becoming a cog in a machine. Of this apocalyptic pronouncement he says, “there is some truth in this declamation. Technical things are dangerous.”\textsuperscript{16} But he counters that there is also a great hope for human liberation today, liberation from the tyranny of particularity. Then in a reversal of Heidegger’s critique he claims, “the development of technical progress is not the cause—it is already the effect of this lightening of human substance, emptying itself of its nocturnal sluggishness.”\textsuperscript{17} He names “Heidegger and the Heideggerians” as the ones he has in mind in speaking of this parochial sluggishness and then depicts the kind of existence among things gleaming with Being that draws its images from Heidegger’s writings: bridges, jugs of wine, landscapes. This “enrootedness” is, he claims, “anti-human” and presents “the eternal seductiveness of the pagan.” Judaism, he argues, “is perhaps no more than the negation of all that . . . The mystery of things is the source of all cruelty

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, 231.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}
towards men.” Enrootedness in landscape creates natives and strangers; “in this light technology is less dangerous than the spirits [genies] of the Place.” Technology suspends the reign of the alternative of enrootedness and exile. After technology one has the opportunity “to perceive men outside of the situation in which they are placed, and let the human face shine in all its nudity. Socrates preferred the town, in which one meets people, to the countryside and trees. Judaism is the brother of the Socratic message.” Socrates the eccentric again intrudes. We will examine, in chapter 4, this moment in the country alluded to by Levinas. In chapter 3, we will look at Plato’s treatment of the ultimate ‘landscape’ or place for constructing cosmology that is concerned, in a tradition going back to Anaximander, mainly with the polis, and find there precisely this concern for natives and strangers.

Then Levinas turns to Gagarin, who also turns out to bear a family resemblance to Socrates. Yuri Gagarin was the cosmonaut who had recently flown into space, the first human to do so. Beyond the science and the courage involved in this feat, what mattered to Levinas was that “he left the Place.” For a time a human existed in “geometrical space. A man existed in the absolute of homogeneous space.” Now, unlike in Sallis’ description of spacing, homogeneous space, space with only a passive

20 Ibid., p. 233.
21 Note that Charles Scott seeks to turn the tables on Levinas. He describes Levinas’ thought as itself a tribal attempt to return to transcendent meaning via a divine covenant. “We probably prefer, like all tribes, to universalize by fundamental values and rights a particularity that gives us our names and values, even when we are otherwise exiled and homeless.” Advantages and Disadvantages, p. 180.
relation to itself, is celebrated. This space frees us from the seductions of the particular. The place, earth, is suspended in its primacy, in favor of the human other. The earth ceases to be a mystery and becomes instead a place for the human to find food, drink, and shelter. “The earth is for that. Man is his own master, in order to serve man. Let us remain masters of the mystery that the earth breathes.”23 Is it gratuitous that the image, the metaphor, of breath reappears here? Was Gagarin’s flight a breath of fresh air for human kind? In it technology has “demystified the universe. It has freed Nature from a spell. Because of its abstract universalism, it runs up against imaginations and passions. But it has discovered man in the nudity of his face.”24

I will employ at times here the Parmenidean image of the sphere. For Heidegger, the sphere is an image of the same and the perimeter of the sphere is as the pre-Socratics suggested it was, without beginning and end, inscrutable. One has no standard for regarding the sphere itself, for it is inscrutable and unbreachable. The nature of the perimeter governs the nature of the interior. The inscrutability of the perimeter, the sameness of beginning and end in it, means one has no epistemological fulcrum or point of leverage upon which to construct metaphysics. The interior then becomes determined by an absence of metaphysics and one speaks of the historicity of Being, the groundlessness of what shows itself (what is in the opening of this sphere). Levinas sees the perimeter as breachable, as perhaps, in the case of Gagarin, even yielding homogeneous space of justice. The issue will seem to be whether this space exists or is merely another metaphysical quest.

22 Difficult Freedom, p. 233.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 234.
For now I merely seek to describe the contrast of orientations, made stark with this example of space flight. The distance necessary to break free of earth and then to turn back and look at the earth portends ruin for Heidegger, a violation of nearness, and hope for Levinas, the opening to the proximity of the other. In the separation that for Levinas produces the dwelling—a separation he calls extra-territoriality, each of us imitates a Gagarinian move away from terra; in this dwelling, space coils into the human shaking hands with the other, offering hospitality at the open door of the dwelling. Or, said differently, only after this face to face is space revealed. Does space lose itself in that handshake, so that it is finally cancelled entirely as Derrida claims about *Totality and Infinity*? Is something essential lost in the breach of the sphere of place, such that the view of the earth as a whole object set into some context beyond it should cause horror? Is this ‘beyond’ our destruction, as in the displacement of meanings to another realm enacted as Platonism, a realm that certain cosmonauts of the soul will seek to glimpse in their chariot ride around the rim of the heavens in the *Phaedrus*, or is the beyond a breach in our provincial sphere that opens onto questions of justice, and so our hope? Those Platonic cosmonauts in the myth of the soul in the *Phaedrus* will see not the foundations of physical reality, or even being, but a colorless *diskaiosunê* and *sophrosunê*, justice and moderation.

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26 In light of this global view of earth, it is interesting to observe that in their introduction to a collection of essays on international politics that takes considerable inspiration from Levinas, David Campbell and Mark Shapiro write, “the most general insight that integrates our studies is a recognition of the radical entanglement between moral discourses and spatial imaginaries. Accordingly, a primary emphasis of the investigations is on ‘moral spaces,’ the bounded locations whose inhabitants acquire the privileges deriving from practices of ethical inclusion, and on the need to intervene in
I have chosen *chôra* as the lens for this project. Heidegger does not fit neatly into these two divisions and a final judgment on his philosophy in this regard will evade us. He might say that this distinction between elemental and social *chôra* is misguided but are part of our current confusion about being. “Theories of nature and doctrines of history do not dissolve the confusion. They further confuse everything until it is unrecognizable since they themselves feed on the confusion prevailing over the distinction between beings and Being.”27 He does not make much use of the idea of *chôra*, but he does refer to it in one work in language that would certainly mean he sees in this word his own idea of Being. “Might *chôra* not mean: that which abstracts itself from every particular, that which withdraws, and in such a way precisely admits and ‘makes place’ for something else?”28 This reading, which echoes the idea of concealing openness, seems continued for the most part in Sallis’ reading of *chôra*, but Sallis expands his treatment with direct talk of the elemental that Heidegger eschews. That a Heideggerian view might not admit any fundamental sense for what I call the social *chôra* seems evident from how he treats the verb *chôrei* in regard to humans later in the same work, in the context of an analysis of a choral verse from *Antigone*. Heidegger links *chôrei* with *unheimlich*, an essential feature of human existence: “*chôrei*, he abandons the place, starts out—and ventures into the preponderant power of the

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placeless waves. The word stands like a pillar in the edifice of these verses.”

Chôra in my schema is different. Social chôra is the gesture of hospitality.

I will eventually come to suggest that this interpretation of chôra in a Heideggerian vein needs to be fleshed out, if you will, so it can bear more physicality, which may amount to supplementing Heidegger, or perhaps it contravenes his whole project. I take this point to be the gist of Alphonso Lingis’ assertion that Heidegger’s primary value is as a philosopher of language. Lingis himself is quite attuned the fact that “the call of phenomenology to return to the matter as such must be take to mean the call from what is.”

He seems to think Heidegger overlooks the intensely physical quality of what is. Lingis finds in the end Heidegger’s philosophy to be too determined by a praktognostic model, which puts too much emphasis on human dealings with the world and not enough on the world with which humans are dealing. John Caputo also seems to find in Heidegger an inattentiveness to flesh, saying that Heidegger “left out the whole thematics of the ethics of mercy, of the cry for justice, the appeal that issues from flesh and pain, from afflicted flesh.” Caputo speaks of Heidegger’s essentializing tendency, which in the end results in a loss of facticity. Luce Irigaray also takes Heidegger to task around questions of the substantiality or “elementality” of

29 Ibid., p. 153.
33 Ibid., p. x.
34 Caputo, p. 57.
35 Ibid., p. 73, and Chapter 6.
his notion of *phusis*. Irigaray claims that Heidegger’s notion of the open is a void, absent all awareness of physical dependency, a dependency that begins before birth and so also calls into question the notion of *Geworfenheit* and the autonomy it inflicts upon humans.\(^37\)

In addition to questions on the level of the physical world, of elemental *chôra*, these commentators, also seem to question Heidegger on the level of human community—social *chôra*. Caputo and Irigaray, as well as Lingis, follow somewhat in Levinas’ trajectory in drawing a focus away from the individuating mood of angst\(^38\) and toward more communal emotions or experiences. For example, Caputo speaks of Heidegger’s original dual focus on the facticity of early Christian existence and of ancient Greece. Caputo labels these two domains that of *Kardia* and *Sorge*, respectively, and suggests that Heidegger lost sight of the former quite quickly. *Kardia* is of the heart, driven by a compassion, by an attentiveness to the other’s pain.\(^39\) Luce Irigaray also adopts a critique of Heidegger centered the priority of *kardia*, or love in her language, seeking to reframe the meaning of philosophy from the love of wisdom to the wisdom of love.\(^40\) Irigaray goes so far as to imply that Heidegger’s cosmos is driven by hatred.\(^41\) Lingis, too, seems to follow loosely in Levinas’ wake by placing a

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37 Ibid., see e.g., Ch 2.

38 Caputo sees Heidegger’s analysis of anxiety as a brilliant description of mood that destroys all mind-body dualism, but says that the focus on mood leads to the ignoring of important individual, subjective experiences like pain. Caputo, p. 69.

39 Ibid., Chapter Three, esp. p. 70.


41 Forgetting of Air, p. 75.
positive human connection into prominence, in his case trust.\textsuperscript{42} Each of these three moves seeks to keep in view what I am calling the social side of \textit{chôra}.

These figures seem therefore to suggest two critiques of Heidegger that I would also advance. First, that he has not attended sufficiently to the social dimensions of existence, what I am calling here the social \textit{chôra}, an ethical moment of stepping aside that is elaborated by Levinas and that is prefigured in Socrates’ dictum that it is better to be harmed than to harm and in the idea of the good beyond being, an idea given quasi-mythological punch in the \textit{Phaedrus}. The second critique would be that Heidegger’s treatment of \textit{ta onta} loses track of their elementality, the materiality of existence, what I would call the physical \textit{chôra}, an Ionian tradition that Heidegger does not quite seem to capture, in spite of his otherwise productive treatments of Heraclitus. For in this light, modified by a greater focus on substantiality, on the body and flesh, \textit{chôra} comes to describe a certain physical tradition that finds expression in Heraclitus and later in Stoic cosmology, a physical tradition that puts plenum in a first position and consequently does not privilege decomposability as the primary frame for understanding the material world. With the exception of this latter feature, this type of \textit{chôra} may cease to be recognizably Heideggerian. The space represented therein is, on the experiential level at the least and possibly also on the level of modern physics, tensile and dynamic. It is space that gives way within itself. I will suggest that in spite of Heidegger’s continuities with Heraclitus, the Heideggerian emphasis on the nothing might interfere with a proper view of this kind of \textit{chôra}.\textsuperscript{43} The focus I want to preserve can come to the

\textsuperscript{42} See “Trust,” in Hooke and Fuchs; and \textit{Trust}, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2004), esp. pp. 59-69.
\textsuperscript{43} I take something like this to be Luce Irigaray’s point in \textit{The Forgetting of Air}. 
fore, I think, in Bachelard’s descriptions of the material and dynamic imaginations, bodily imagination in the world, a view with the potential to put the body at the center of existence.

This project might be viewed as a kind of dialogue between these two meanings of *chôra* I have pointed to, much like John Llewellyn’s *The Middle Voice of Ecological Consciousness* is a dialogue between Levinas and Heidegger on the level of face and nonhuman entities, although I would not presume to suggest I have accomplished anything chiasmic, or middle voiced for that matter. What the final relation between these two notions of *chôra* might properly be I cannot say with confidence at this point, but will make some tentative suggestions, with help from Alphonso Lingis, around the theme of trust.

I take my justification for calling these two zones of focus *chôra* from my reading of Plato’s Timaeus, in which I believe Plato is playing *chôra* in both of these directions, the social and the physical. I recognize that this distinction runs afoul of Heidegger’s approach, which sees the human and nature as an opposition born of metaphysics. Neither kind of *chôra* seems terribly conducive to his thought. It may be that Charles Scott is correct in suggesting that both of these areas, nature and the human, are best dealt with within the scope of the question of Being, and that attempts to prioritize the human or the natural are unjustified valuations with negative consequences.44

44 One can read two of his books in light. *Advantages and Disadvantages* puts emphasizes the non-necessity of specific thinking about the human *polis*, and *The Lives of Things* operates similarly in regard to *phusis*.
Though the driving force in this project is defined by contemporary thinkers, I have sought to keep the Greek instigation of the conversation in view, especially the thought of the early *physikoi* and Plato’s use of their cosmology and his social inflection of their physics, an inflection that seems also to be present in their cosmologies. I start with the Greeks because they play a strong role in the thinking of both Heidegger and Levinas and because I see the social and elemental distinction first taking shape in their thought. In strictly physical terms, what I am calling the elemental, I seek to explore a relation to the physical world that is not defined by atomism and decomposition, or which in the terms in which the debate arises in the ancient world, a cosmos in which the void does not hold such a decisive, internal place as it did in atomism, where it defined the horizon of what is. The object of this exploration is a kind of continuity in the experienced physical world that is, as I have suggested, more akin to the tradition that travels through Heraclitus and the Stoics, and might be said to reassert itself among such modern thinkers as Bergson and Bachelard, if not in modern physics itself. The relation to this medium is enjoyment, *jouissance*. At the same time, I wonder if this decomposable cosmos seen in atomism does not have its echoes on the social level, in a kind of social atomism.

So the first four chapters of this project engage Greek philosophy. Chapters 1 and 2 examine pre-Socratic philosophy, but with an eye toward the debate between Heidegger and Levinas, rather than in strictly historical terms. The first chapter serves to introduce the Ionian cosmology’s theory of opposites, whereby the qualities in the world are seen as defined over against one another, in dependent opposition. A view of

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45 I have in mind here some of David Bohm’s comments in *Wholeness and the*
space seems implied in this theory, and it is space that has the nature of something other
than a rigid receptacle, space that is tensile and active, not subject to the parsing that
renders things discrete objects to be manipulated, moved about and possessed. This
kind of space does not require the internal horizon of a void, so as to accommodate
division. These opposites are organized in terms of balance, by what is called isonomia,
a balance that according the Jean-Pierre Vernant finds its impetus from the changes the
polis is undergoing, away from aristocracy and toward democracy. Isonomia mirror’s
Heidegger’s ‘sphere’ somewhat but one might ask whether that sphere can contain
Ionian thought, which bears a latent political dimension that may breach the sphere of
Being.

Chapter 2 brings in Elea. Parmenides’ thought represents a tremendous puzzle
on historical grounds. But whether he was rejecting Ionian cosmology or merely
reforming it, his introduction of the discrete opposition— ‘is or is not’—set the stage
for the development of Atomism. On the historical questions I generally follow Patricia
Curd’s interpretation of Parmenides and subsequent Pre-Socratic tradition. Much of the
chapter examines Heidegger’s analysis of Parmenides through the lens of Alêtheia
which reads Parmenides in terms of a unified sphere, an image of Being as complete
and inscrutable. I raise some questions about his interpretation of Parmenides and its
reliance on a disputed textual variant. I hope these questions might open the way to
‘breach’ that sphere by re-reading Parmenides through another notion in his poem, the
notion of trust. Historically, Parmenides challenges the Ionian theory of opposites,
arguing that it is too ambiguous because it relies on negative definitions (hot is not cold

and cold is not hot) that seem to lack sufficient clarity. Though he may not have intended it, the effect of Parmenides argument is the void suggested by atomism, which seems to imply a different kind of space, and a cosmos in which discrete, though invisible, entities ruled. Heidegger’s use of Parmenides is quite different, and perhaps he himself rejects it in the end, but it nonetheless makes use of the nothing as contrasted to the Same (Being), though the contrast is integral rather than absolute. The Same in Heidegger seems to follow Parmenides’ image of the sphere, which Heidegger delineates in terms of *alētheia*, the sphere of unconcealing concealment. But other themes in Parmenides seem overlooked by Heidegger, including the important, interhuman qualities of trust and persuasion. Perhaps these images act like a philosophical Gagarin to pierce the sphere that would seem to Heidegger to be complete, a totality.

The first two chapters have three goals. First to describe the development of the void as it leads to Atomism and the remnants of a different kind of spatiality in the Ionian tradition, one more amenable to the elemental as I read it in Levinas and Bachelard. Second, to highlight some political overtones behind these early cosmological efforts. Third, to raise some questions about Heidegger’s treatment of one of his favorite topics, early Greek thinking.

In Chapter 3, I examine Plato’s ‘cosmological’ dialogue, the *Timaeus*. In the *Timaeus* one finds strange political inflections added to a putatively cosmological dialogue. The chapter focuses primarily on the opening segment, which I see as deflecting cosmological conversation into political terms. I argue that the kind of space (*chôra*) in which Plato’s cosmos unfolds carries forward the same political overtone we
found in Ionian cosmology in the first chapter. In addition, the cosmological sense of
Ionian space as tensile and somehow responsive, the elemental *chôra* follows along as well. Images of nourishment and hospitality dominate the dialogue’s opening, and Socrates himself as teacher and citizen comes to be associated with the public space of *chôra*. At stake in this chapter is the issue of how to interpret *chôra*. Do we consider it cosmically/ontologically or socially and metaphysically (in Levinas’ sense of ontology and metaphysics)? Or, in order to question discrete oppositions, can both senses be present?

In Chapter 4, I turn to the *Phaedrus*. Whereas the *Timaeus*’ planned discussion of the elemental *chôra* was deflected by the social *chôra*, in the *Phaedrus* the situation seems reversed. The plan to discuss *logos*, in the form of speeches, comes to be disarmed at least momentarily by the elemental *chôra* that constitutes the setting of the dialogue. So we find the contrast between social and nature again. Socrates wanders out ‘in nature.’ He proclaims humans to be of more interest to him than trees, but promptly comes a bit unglued in his natural surroundings, rendered ecstatic by the beauties of the place. Here we see Plato carrying on a conversation, behind the conversation transpiring between Socrates and Phaedrus, with the elemental or the cosmic. I discuss what seems to be Plato’s view of its role in shaping humans and the limits of its influence over us. This power is a kind of *eros*, like the physicality of sexual desire, but also like the power that spoken language has over our souls, and so it seems to be also the power of the human other. The soul is described in this dialogue by the image of chariot ride up to the edge of the heavens in order to gain a glimpse of what is beyond. The image meshes nicely with Gagarin’s space flight and the different
responses it evoked from Heidegger and Levinas. The beauty found beyond the rim of heaven is also in the world and shines forth luminously. Many see only that shining. Also beyond the rim of heaven, but without any of the luminous color of the beautiful, are justice and moderation.

In Chapter 5 we leap across more than two millennia and land in France in the years surrounding the Second World War. Bergson has challenged the positivist hegemony of the quantitative and asserted the priority of the qualitative, of durée, and the priority of the plenum over the old void of Zeno and the Atomists; it is a new beginning Levinas claims made phenomenology itself possible.\textsuperscript{46} In these years when Surrealists are turning their ears toward dreams in search of marvels, one early practitioner of phenomenology, Gaston Bachelard, speaks of rêveries, waking dreams, and puts aside his specialty of philosophy of science, to write books about Fire, Air, Water, and Earth, about the Imagination of Matter and the Imagination of Movement. Here a non-discrete elemental asserts itself, not as defined and independent uncuttables, but as a force in itself, a force in physics, to be sure, but a force in the imagination. The key issue here is that the human exists not in a stuff-filled void, but in a fullness to which cannot but respond, a fullness with which the human seems to have an intuitive link, a link that invites reverie, which is expressed in part through literature. Bachelard claims formal imagination, the medium of science and philosophy, for which moments of nothingness are necessary in order to distinguish incontrovertible boundaries, has ruled human thinking. He challenges this rule in the name of the material and dynamic imaginations, which are governed by contradiction, the confusion of boundaries. I will

include a discussion of Bachelard’s “Philosophy of No” which shows that his philosophy of science seems also to push in the direction of the elemental that seems to me to be a reprise of Heraclitus. One wonders if Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the flesh of the world or Levinas’ ideas about the jouissance of the human in the elemental are not inspired to some degree by these material and dynamic imaginations described by Bachelard.

Chapter 6 turns to Levinas himself, particularly the elemental but also his differences with Heidegger. I discuss the importance of the elemental and the human mode of enjoyment. The ethical command presupposes the possibility of suffering that existence in and dependence on the elemental produces. I suggest two ways not explicitly acknowledge by Levinas that this sense of possession by the non-possessable is not completely personal, but follows on naturally to the social. One way is the latent welcome ingredient in the dwelling, which seems a kind of prevenient welcome of the other ‘prior’ to the social moment of the knock on the door. So the dwelling seems to represent a bridge from elemental chôra to social chôra. The other way the nonpossessable follows to the social is the vulnerability it renders to us. As a body bound to a milieu I do not control; I am vulnerable to indifferent forces, but also to the actions of others, whether the piercing of steel that kills, or the chemical resonances between pesticides and hormones that can deform a fetus in the womb. As bodies we are implanted in milieu of the elemental in ways that Heidegger’s thrownness does not seem to make clear enough.

Chapter 7 picks up a direct treatment of the elemental by John Sallis, a thinker in the Heideggerian lineage, but who opens the door to discussion of the elemental. With
the goal of overturning the kind of decompositional thinking perfected in atomism, Sallis thinks the elemental by rethinking the role of imagination in experience. Much as with Bachelard, imagination is always ‘switched on.’ He situates imagination not in a secondary role, putting its hand to the raw materials provided by perception, but as precisely playing a role in those perceptions, of shaping them. Rather than composition, he speaks of manifestation. The word for this appearing within manifestation seems to be *schein*, a term oozing with Heideggerian luminosity, but which, I will suggest, situates the basic reality of the elemental too much outside the domain of human commerce and too much in the domain of the gods, as a kind of privileged time. In addition, when paired with the downplaying of subjectivity found in the Heideggerian approach, the body comes to be overlooked, which is not a benign omission.

In chapter 8, the final chapter, I turn to a contemporary thinker who is more in the lineage of Levinas’ work, Alphonso Lingis. Like Levinas, Lingis moves away from the Heideggerian framework, particularly on the grounds that it still remains within a thinking articulated by means of a void and so misses the substantiality of human existence. Lingis also goes beyond Levinas at the point of what he calls Levinas’ positivism regarding the natural world, treating it solely in relation to human actions and purposes. Lingis suggests instead that the world itself is replete with directives, and seems to feel no obligation to choose between the human and the natural, elemental or social, in talking of these directives. Lingis therefore stakes out a position where the elemental *chôra* and the social *chôra* seem able to coexist, if not find some continuity. It seems that for Lingis one can have the sacred groves and the ethical power of the human other, though perhaps not as strongly stated as Levinas would want. Yet for
Lingis the handshake discussed earlier does not fall back into being of the same order as my one hand touching the other that is Merleau-Ponty’s avenue into the flesh of the world. Lingis invokes the idea of trust. Trust may not have the degree of passivity Levinas finds in the ethical relation, though one could hardly say it is entirely active. The idea of trust also, I suggest, describes a relation to the elemental that might show itself in sleep, and may even provide a way to place death that does not remain within the scope of anxiety over the nothing.

The title of this work, *Facing Nature: The Infinite in the Flesh*, seems to ignore Levinas’ distinction between the *apeiron* and the infinite and forces together language from Levinas and Merleau-Ponty in a way that is perhaps not entirely appropriate, but it does seem to reflect the outcome produced by Lingis, translator of both of those thinkers. I hope it will suffice. In sum I seek to render the point of Levinas’ perhaps too theological term ‘created.’ As opposed to being thrown, we are created. We do not find ourselves abandoned on a tide of contingencies but find ourselves immersed in a plenum that suffices and welcomes us despite its inherent contingency. Our freedom is also a positive entity, something actualized in this fullness. In a world where we are possessed by a nonpossessable, being ‘created’ means our freedom is finite but also responsible. This world is one where to be public that is not so prone to the inauthentic.

47 E.g. “Knowledge as a critique, as a tracing back to what precedes freedom, can arise only in a being that has an origin prior to its origin—that is created.” TI, p. 85. Cf. also, pp. 63, 103ff, 147f, 218, 279, 292; and *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Alphonso Lingis, trans. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 147.
Chapter 1

Reading Anaximander In and Out of the Heideggerian Sphere

The sun will not transgress his measures. If he does, the Furies, ministers of Justice, will find him out.

--Heraclitus

The αυτά [εόντα] refers to everything present, everything that presences by lingering awhile: gods and men, temples and cities, sea and land, eagle and snake, tree and shrub, wind and light, stone and sand, day and night.

--Heidegger

One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs.

--Heraclitus

In the sentences of the archaic language, the state of affairs speaks, not the conceptual meaning.

--Heidegger

The aims of this chapter are three. One, it seeks to expose what might be called the Ionian strand of Greek cosmology, characterized by a logical form I will call dependent opposition, wherein opposites are defined in relation to each other, e.g., hot and cold, wet and dry, and a physics described by a continuous plenum. This kind of ‘physics’ seems to be involved, as we will see in chapter three with Plato’s choice of

1 Charles H. Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), (94; LXIV). All references to Heraclitus will include first the fragment number assigned by Diels and Kranz, the classic source (Hermann Diels, Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker (Berlin: Weidmann, 1951-2)), then Kahn’s numbering for Heraclitus is in Roman numerals.
3 Kahn, (91, LI).
chôra instead of kenos for his first context of the cosmos. Ionian physics will also come into play in part two of this project, where I describe the kind of elemental milieu that one finds in Levinas’ description of the elemental, and which founds the possibility of enjoyment and thereby the possibility of suffering. The link to a more full emphasis on embodiment within such an elemental continuum also emerges in discussion of Bachelard’ material and dynamic imaginations, but also in the discussion in Chapter 4 of the Phaedrus. This first topic, the elemental milieu, pertains to chôra interpreted in elemental terms, as opposed to the social interpretation of chôra I see also in the Timaeus but that I also suggest is present in Anaximander’s cosmology, treated here, and in Parmenides’ poem, discussed in the next chapter.

The second aim of this chapter indeed pertains to social chôra. This aim is to explore the relation between the polis and the kosmos and to suggest that this relation is quite intimate. The cosmos and the city mirror each other and the balance in the cosmos reflects, even sustains the balance in the city. This debate opens onto the social chôra yet stays with a more historical reading. Based on Jean-Pierre Vernant’s analysis of the Greek city-state, the discussion will look for an historical opening for situating dikê, justice, and the physical science of cosmology in close proximity to each other, where cosmic justice and public justice are the same justice. Put in other words, the juridical language of the Anaximander fragment, justice, injustice, and penalty, is not simply a public metaphor applied to the cosmos, and the importance of cosmology is in how it supports the polis. This discussion will examine the way in which of valuing the

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concerns of polis, understood as the human realm, as equal to or even prior to cosmos. Perhaps such a reading will open the path for Plato’s social chôra.

Third, the chapter will consider to a limited degree Heidegger’s reading of the fragment. Heidegger refuses the question of what these juridical images apply to and instead seeks to suspend the common understandings we have of these words. Rather he wants to lay bare the temporal structure of the whiling of beings, determined or dispensed by usage, that makes possible any ethics or concern for justice. This means the question of the Being of beings. Justice becomes jointure, the coming to pass of beings in their temporal Being, and injustice the push for perdurance, which violates or forgets the temporal structure of existing, the Being of beings. The ethical nature of his treatment of Anaximander takes shape in one’s relation to this temporal structure of Being, which precedes any other ethical concern. \[^5\] In regard to his interpretation of dikê in relation to being instead of polis and cosmos, the question will be about the priority of being to dikê, a question that comes to its clearest focus in antiquity, to be discussed in chapters three and four, in Plato and that prefigures the issue of Levinas’ critique in the name of the good beyond being. Levinas would seem to argue that if Being is defined temporally as whiling, and the dispensation of this Being comes from usage, read as historically determined ethos, then we are precisely in the situation where a particular people’s ethos might produce a rampant evil. The lexicon is in Heidegger’s favor here in regard to the pre-Socratics, since their term, dikê, is pervaded by the sense

:\[^5\] I am relying on Karin De Boer, “Giving Due: Heidegger’s Interpretation of the Anaximander Fragment,” in Research in Phenomenology, Vol. XXVII, 1997, pp. 150ff, but also on Charles Scott’s reading in On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), Chapter 4 “A (Non-
of custom and usage. Plato uses the term *dikaiousunê*, which is more unambiguously ‘justice.’ This sense of usage or custom seems to me to be the spirit of Levinas’ talk of paganism in the sense of a loyalty to tribal deities.

Aside from this question of whether Heidegger totalizes by interpreting the other in relation to the same, and the ethical as subordinate to historicity, I want to ask whether Heidegger’s move may actually lose (or call into question) in one and the same moment “the elementality of *phusis*” and, in the name of the priority of this Sameness of Being, the good beyond being. The close of the his essay on the Anaximander fragment indicates that the object of Heidegger’s ethical concern is, as usual, the marshaling of nature’s resources and the push toward world government, the ascendancy of technological human being. Such critical appraisals mark well a movement in our current history, but the alternative of letting beings be is not so clear about how they are in their being, and whether some of them ‘are’ elementally. Perhaps Heidegger would insist that one cannot make the distinction between nature and history that would seem to be in play in my concern for the elemental and the political without enacting this technological fix.

This chapter deals with the beginning of philosophy on several levels. It takes into consideration the first philosophical text, the Anaximander Fragment. Furthermore, the chapter asks about what ‘external’ circumstances helped birth the love of wisdom. And finally it takes up the matter of how this philosophy itself is to begin—

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Passing Sense of Tragedy,” which is decidedly more reticent regarding ‘ethics’ in Heidegger’s thought.

6 The phrase comes from Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*. Mary Beth Mader, trans. (London: Athlone Press, 1999), p. 74. She also takes on the image in Heidegger of the circle and groundlessness, Ibid., pp. 2, 6, 80f, 159.
what is its starting point, ethics or ontology? Tradition dictates that philosophy began with Thales, of Miletus, in Ionia, now western Turkey. In a story that has itself become something of a myth, Thales wrested thought free from myth, albeit in a necessarily crude fashion still encumbered by the concrete, by water, since he posited water as first cause, the condition of regularity in the cosmos. Despite the clumsiness of his effort, the fact that as far as we know he first proposed a material archê makes him the archê of philosophy. Thales thereby hacked his way out of the thicket of superstition, in which unpredictable immortal powers whimsically entangled the human project.

Something interesting happened in Ionia in the sixth century B.C.E., but questions about philosophy’s beginning linger. For example, did Thales begin, or did Hesiod and Homer, or even the Greek language itself? Furthermore, was the beginning so strictly philosophical or did philosophy follow out of political changes? Consider that Thales finds his way onto various lists of the Seven Sages of ancient tradition, which places him into a specific context, viz. the practical wisdom associated with public life. We will see in the next chapter that Heraclitus and Parmenides were both reputed to have been amongst this group of ones wise enough to be considered worthy to give laws. Plato’s Timaeus, the subject of Chapter 3, is replete with references to Solon, who put together the Athenian constitution. So the requirements of public life seem to be a part of the context of philosophy’s beginning, though of course such a

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7 All dates, unless noted otherwise, refer to B.C.E.
9 Jean-Pierre Vernant, The Origins of Greek Thought (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 69-70. Regarding placing the beginning of philosophy with Thales, see Ibid., p. 102. Note that in his schema the proper opposition to physis (which he says
focus assumes a certain meaning of beginning, a historical or even historiographical one. By what right do we separate out the political, the human, prior to asking the question of beginning? But by what right do we suppress talk of the political and natural? If these other loci may have helped give birth to philosophy, then the clear beginning of philosophy in Thales may lose some distinction, shifting over into politics, political particularities themselves arising out of historical changes. But one could ask in turn how these historical changes were possible. Consideration of these historical factors may be tantamount, as Heidegger says, to searching in a dictionary for the very rules that give the words it contains their meaning. The difficulty might be we find it hard to trust Heidegger’s promise that “where boundaries between disciplines do not appear, boundless indeterminacy and flux do not necessarily prevail: on the contrary, an appropriate articulation of a matter purely thought may well come to language when it has been freed from every oversimplification.”

Perhaps it is too difficult to think purely.

We are speaking of Anaximander’s cosmology. But the term, cosmology, will have a different sense than the strictly physical sense we usually give it. What is not emphasized in Anaximander’s new beginning is what we might see as a separation of the physical and the theological. These kinds of distinctions seem the lifeblood of philosophy as we understand it—and they grow, one would think, from certain ‘natural’ joints in the subject matter, but they become fixed into discrete subjects along the lines of the divisions in Aristotle’s textual corpus. For Anaximander, I will suggest, in

the Ionians isolated as their sole concern) is mythos. The change from mythos to physis marks the beginning of history according to Vernant.

10 “Anaximander Fragment,” p. 21
addition to the fact that the cosmos is divine, so that the *kosmos* and *theos* are not
discrete, *polis* and *kosmos* also are not yet discrete. I will not deal much with the
*kosmos/theos* conjunction, which we cannot help but see reprised in Heidegger’s
enigmatic fourfold, hints of which will appear in the discussion of the uncanny in
Chapter 2. In this regard Heidegger could well be credited with reviving a pre-Socratic
view of the cosmos, and Levinas with rejecting at least this facet of pre-Socratic
philosophy when he distinguishes the *apeiron*, the mere indeterminate from which
pagan gods and monsters emerge, from the infinite, which as face has a positive
content. In this sense the two thinkers might simply be read as picking up two different
strands of thinking prior to Plato. For Levinas, via Plato, may be reviving another
theme from pre-Socratic thought that might be described as a social lineage, though
Levinas would certainly seem to be going beyond articulating a mere natural joint
between the social the cosmic. In this chapter the issue focuses more on this
*polis/cosmos* conjunction of this pre-Socratic world than any *theos/cosmos* conjunction.

Along the way, and in Chapter 2, certain questions will arise regarding whether
Heidegger’s emphasis devalues the place of *polis* in his thinking, bringing into account
somewhat Heidegger’s politics.\footnote{The literature on this Nazi question is extensive and growing. For a good collection
of original texts, as well as reactions to Heidegger’s involvement with National
Socialism from many who were close to him or his thought, see Günther Neske and
Emil Kettering, eds., *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and
Answers*, Lisa Harries and Joachim Neugroschel, trans. (New York: Paragon House,
1990). Julian Young’s work (*Heidegger, Philosophy and Nazism* (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1997)) presents one extreme, the apologetic, on this
matter. Victor Farias offers a quite hostile treatment in *Heidegger and Nazism*, Joseph
Margolis and Tom Rockmore, eds., Paul Burrell, Dominic Di Bernardi, and Gabriel R.
*Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, Ewald Osers, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.:
Historical Beginnings

To get oriented historically, one can address the problem of archai from the starting point of Anaximander’s apeiron, and what seems closely related to it, his theory of opposites, which could be read as a basic assumption behind Ionian cosmology in general and its legacy in the Stoics. Expressing a traditional view, Charles Kahn says,

What the system of Anaximander represents for us is nothing less than the advent, in the West at any rate, of a rational outlook on the natural world. This new point of view asserted itself with the total force of a volcanic eruption, and the ensuing flood of speculation soon spread from Miletus across the length and breadth of the lands in which Greek was spoken.¹²

Several words in this formulation are suggestive. ‘System’ may indicate an expectation of finding a scientific model in Anaximander’s thought, though we will attune our ear to the possibility of a political system as well. We might read “rational outlook” as equivalent to emergence of the model of archê, first cause. The positing of this concept itself holds most promise of being an innovation, a beginning. One cannot deny that

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Harvard University Press, 1998), for a more moderate approach. Herman Philipse (Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998)) makes the matter of Heidegger’s Nazi commitments a defining motif in his interpretation of Heidegger. He argues that the Contributions to Philosophy, which he juxtaposes with Being and Time as Heidegger’s other major work, is the wellspring for all of Heidegger’s ‘later’ works and constitutes a theology for Heidegger’s new Nazi religion, one that is in play to the end of Heidegger’s career. John Caputo’s reading (Demythologizing Heidegger (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993)) is similar to Philipse’s, if considerably less suspicious of religion in general. Caputo discerns a change in Heidegger’s thought conducive to Nazi ideology when Heidegger drops his bivalent focus on the facticity of early Christian life on the one hand and the Greek world on the other in favor of an exclusive focus on a Graeco-German axis. Philipse’s emphasis on the pagan religious character of Heidegger’s Nazism seems consonant with Levinas’ blasts against Heidegger, most sharply put in “Heidegger Gagarin and Us,” in Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism, Séan Hand, trans. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. For another look at Heidegger’s political sense see Slavoj Žižek, The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology, (London: Verso, 1999), Chapter 1.
Kahn’s claims are true. Anaximander’s thought does seem to involve the kind of intellectual excitement that eventually leads to systemic and scientific thought, even if such thought might be accused of arising from later tradition, which is forgetful of something essential in Anaximander.

Anaximander’s cosmic *apeiron* can be read in two directions. First it might be read internally and positively, as a formless material from which the universe is made. In this case it comes to look something like Aristotle’s *hulê*, which it may indeed prefigure, and would be more like the water and air proposed by his fellow Milesians. Second, it might be seen negatively and externally, or formally, as the quasi-Aristotelian non-bounded boundary of the cosmos, an external, qualitatively unique limit with a formal similarity to the unmoved mover—containing and actuating what is within yet distinct from it in a decisive way. This second, external reading, drained of its physical qualities, would coalesce with the image of the sphere in which the beginning and end are the same, or inscrutable, since like the *apeiron* the sphere offers no determination. This sphere, with the spatial qualities removed, would seem to resemble something like the difference between Being and beings—indeterminacy of the ‘perimeter’ suggesting the non-metaphysical, temporal/historical understanding of Being that always withdraws from beings.

Kahn argues that Anaximander’s *apeiron* functions negatively, to provide a governing origin that is not itself a component of the world.¹³ Such an independent

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¹³ For a useful summary of scholarship on Anaximander up to about 1970, see Leo Sweeney, S.J., *Infinity in the Presocratics: A Bibliographical and Philosophical Study* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), especially the introduction and Chapters One and
archê puts the external *apeiron* into an essential relationship with what is within because it guarantees balance among the dependent, worldly elements. Something like a theory of dependent opposition persists in Anaximander’s cosmos, and the *apeiron* enables this arrangement. In which case the *apeiron* is precisely the ‘nowhere’ from which Levinas’ elemental comes. As non-possessable, not to be circumscribed, Levinas’ elemental seems precisely to require the continuity that arises in the Ionian tradition through the logic of dependent opposition. We might note as well that the element is also nobody’s, hence it is at least public, even if it is finally not possessable even by the public itself. It is no accident that he would use the term *apeiron* to describe the source of the elemental.

In Ionia, *apeiron*’s force is, it seems, both external and internal at the same time—external as disarming any kind of causal grounding, internal as enabling a continuity of the lived milieu. Such a dynamic theory continues on in the thought of Heraclitus. One might speculate that the relation between external and internal *apeiron* is dynamic, perhaps giving rise to Anaximander’s deification of the cosmos, only to be disemboweled later by a more analytic, materialistic style of thinking. Here Levinas’ sharp distinction between the *apeiron* and the infinite seems a departure from this earlier Greek tradition, and Heidegger’s ontological difference does indeed seem crudely prefigured by this indeterminacy that determines, since like *apeiron* it is a

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Two. Sweeney questions the distinction between the negative and positive infinite as applied to the *Presocratics*, preferring determinate and indeterminate (p. xxix). My use of the term negative seeks to distinguish the *apeiron* from innerworldly qualities, whether viewed as substrates (material) or powers (qualitative).


15 Ibid., 131.
difference that determines what it differs from. Heidegger interprets *apeiron* in terms of *chreôn*, read as usage. “But usage, enjoining order and so limiting what is present, distributes boundaries. As τὸ χρεῶν it is therefore at the same time ἀπειρόν, that which is without boundaries, since its essence consists in sending boundaries of the while to whatever lingers awhile in presence.”\(^{16}\) Here *apeiron* seems to figure in the epochal structure of Being, sending meaning through a *ethos*, read either narrowly in Hubert Dreyfus’ cultural manner or more broadly in a way Herman Philipse calls epochal Neo-Hegelian.\(^{17}\) Heidegger links it specifically with *Moira*, fate, Parmenides’ word for Being.\(^{18}\)

**Sources**

Only one fragment from Anaximander’s writing still exists. Together with a series of ancient descriptions of Anaximander’s views (such material commonly referred to as ‘doxography’) the fragment constitutes the only first-hand material available to historians. In addition, two other sources relate to this investigation: the Hippocratic medical tradition, which figures prominently in the *Phaedrus*, and Aristotle’s description of the theory of opposites. The Anaximander fragment is quoted in a text by Simplicius from the sixth century of the Common Era and reads,

> out of those things (*ex hōn*) whence is the generation (*genesis*) for existing things, into these again does their destruction (*phthoran*) take place (*ginesthai*), according

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\(^{16}\)“Anaximander Fragment,” p. 54.  
\(^{18}\) Anaximander Fragment, pp. 55.
to what must needs be: for they make amends and give reparation to one another (allêlois) for their offense, according to the ordinance of time.19

Interpreters tend to approach this passage with the question of physics in mind. What are the elements in mind and how do they relate to each other. The best answer here tends to be the theory of opposites, something like in Aristotle. As one quality or element obtains, its counterpart wanes accordingly. But there is another opposition in the fragment that receives less attention, the opposition between justice (dikên) and injustice (adikias). Dikê figures in Heraclitus and Parmenides as well.

Regarding the physical oppositions in this fragment, two terms give hints about its original context in Anaximander’s book. The plural hôn suggests that the missing antecedent, the entity or entities from which arising and passing have their source, is not to apeiron (which is singular) but rather the opposites (hot/cold, dry/wet), thus implying an internally balanced cosmos instead of an interchange between to apeiron and the world that to apeiron surrounds. The reflexive pronoun (allêlois-dative plural) implies a reciprocal or symmetrical relation between the objects it links, which would seem to indicate that allêlois cannot include to apeiron, which is archê and therefore reciprocal with nothing.20 Therefore the external reading of apeiron would prima facie seem more correct. The main question pertains to whether the interchange described occurs between to apeiron and what stands out of it or transpires reciprocally between the pairs of opposites or elements. Either 1) existents pay retribution to the boundless for coming

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19 Kahn, Anaximander, p. 166. “... ex ôn de hê genesis esti tois ousi, kai tên phthoran eis tauta ginesthai kata to chreôn, didonai gar auta dikên kai tisin allêlois tês adikias kata tên tou chronou taxin.” Emphasis added. Heidegger allows only the underlined portion. See “Anaximander Fragment,” p. 29.
to be, a kind of tragic view of existence, or 2) some kind of balance in the world persists, made possible by the boundless, by its difference (and indifference) and by its containment of opposition, whether the boundless is conceived in spatial or cosmological terms or strictly in metaphysical terms as the *unity* of the opposites. Note that this second option does not render the relation between the *apeiron* and what it contains inert or strictly formal. I would suggest that the external and internal moments of the boundless are perhaps dependent on one another and so form a unity of a sort, where the uniqueness of the boundless enables the internal balance of the opposites, which in turn seems to allow the uniqueness of the boundless.  

> It is interesting to consider Heidegger’s reading of his abbreviated fragment here. His fragment does not include the *hón* that draws us into the internal/physical model. But he does consider one pronoun, *auta*, which similarly refers back to something that precedes it, but is not part of the fragment. The antecedent to this

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21 Freudenthal complicates matters by accepting the notion of equilibrium, but distinguishing between static and dynamic equilibria. We can consider the difference between them as a matter of a symmetrical world (self-contained and so physics alone rules) on the one hand, and an asymmetrical one (dependent, which means metaphysics is required), on the other. In Freudenthal’s view, the internal model would be a static equilibrium only, in the sense that it is dependent on what is outside (the boundless) to maintain it. Thus he says, “as long as the theory of opposites prevailed, physics could not do without metaphysics,” p. 197. His argument seems reasonable but to engage it requires introducing aspects of Anaximander’s *apeiron* that go beyond my scope here, such as its eternity and divinity. He does not dispute that “the basic constituents of Anaximander’s world are equal opposite powers balanced against one another in a dynamic equilibrium,” p. 198. He merely claims that something external to it maintains that equilibrium. I am arguing that at least in a logical sense *apeiron* in relation to the theory of opposites does precisely this.
pronoun, as far as Heidegger is concerned, is *ta onta*.\(^\text{22}\) The assignment of an antecedent seems to be random, and Heidegger of course forewarns us about this possible criticism by historiography. One can make this connection it seems because *ta onta* is the question of early Greek thinking, a claim he considers to be outside the possibilities of demonstration, since such demonstration would instantly involve methods that alienate us from the matter there for thinking. In the words of Charles Scott, in his discussion of Heidegger’s treatment of Anaximander, “the very historiographic standards of truth and intelligent responsibility which guide the ethics of contemporary scholarship mislead us into a dominance of calculative and representative thinking which *prioritizes* the subject that that thinking includes.” The “disciplined transfer of meaning” implicit in such scholarship perpetuates an “ethos of presence” that obscures Anaximander’s saying.\(^\text{23}\) But Heidegger’s rejection of a physical interpretation in favor of a purely ontological and the assumption it entails that the two are incompatible might be the point at which he ‘loses’ the elementality of phusis that Irigaray sees as missing from his thought.\(^\text{24}\) In this light it could it be accurate to say, anticipating the inclusion of *dikê* as somehow ‘beyond’ or standing over cosmos, that Levinas’ philosophy might be more true to Anaximander? At the very least, perhaps the pre-Socratic legacy may not belong unambiguously to Heidegger, or, as he would prefer to have it, Heidegger to it.

Returning now to the traditional interpretation, in addition to the occurrence in the fragment of this plural pronoun and the reciprocal *allelois*, we note that the verb

\(^{22}\) “The Anaximander Fragment,” p. 20.

\(^{23}\) *Advantages and Disadvantages*, p. 53. Emphasis original.

\(^{24}\) *The Forgetting of Air*, p. 74.
ginesthai is middle voice.\textsuperscript{25} In Greek, the middle voice finds its sense between (or possibly outside of) active and passive voice. L.R. Palmer argues that the original distinction in Indo-European languages is between active voice and middle voice, with passive voice evolving later out of the middle voice. Active voice indicated an event that proceeded “from the subject outward.” Middle voice referred to an event within the subject or which reflected back onto the subject.\textsuperscript{26} In the middle voice no action is transferred to an object, but neither is the event of the verb strictly localized in a subject. The middle voice predominates Heidegger’s analysis of whiling, reflected on the page as the hyphen between genesis-pthora.

Another source for understanding the Anaximander fragment, the Hippocratic medical tradition, crystallizes for the most part a bit later than Anaximander, but remains relevant to the question of opposites, since the Hippocratic theory of health and disease assumes the opposites. Balance between opposing forces (isonomia) defines health. The rule of one element or basic force over the others (monarchia) causes disease. The physician’s duty is to restore balance by reinforcing the threatened opposite. Since the person is a microcosm, a small version of the cosmos, one would expect that the interchange between opposites in the human body would mirror an interchange described in Anaximander’s cosmology, an internal change. Freudenthal, however, points out that the Hippocratic tradition accommodated linear processes, too, primarily aging, seen as a gradual drying out. Consequently, he claims, an internally

\textsuperscript{25} Scott emphasizes that the voice of the verb (ginesthai) is the middle voice. See On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics, pp. 49, 55.
\textsuperscript{26} L.R. Palmer, The Greek Language, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1980), pp. 292-3. Heidegger might claim that the persistence of the subject in this description represents a
active model does not necessarily follow, for the rather linear, asymmetrical process of
drying up suggests a lack of balance between elements. In response to Freudenthal we
can point out that water is not strictly opposite to anything, but rather a composite of
wet and cold. The amount of water in the universe could change but the opposites
remain in balance. Also, the drying of aging need not be a linear process if one does not
view the individual human as a physically discrete entity but instead looks on her as
part of the entire cosmic process, as indeed Hippocratic tradition seems to do in
describing the link between climate and character. We will see in the discussion of
the Phaedrus that Plato alludes to the Greek medical tradition as well. The significance
of this medical theory here is that in it the body mirrors the cosmic balance and that
health and disease are described in terms with political overtones.

The Cosmology

Now we turn to Anaximander’s basic cosmology, most of which is derived from
the traditions about Anaximander, rather than the fragment itself. It is at this point
that it becomes clear that Anaximander seems to be talking about what we call science.
The description will follow the basic progression of cosmogony, with inevitable pauses
to discuss key notions. The clear starting point is the proposition that Anaximander’s
beginning (archê) is apeiron. The first term, archê (pl. archai), has two major
meanings. First it means priority/beginning. In the discussion here this priority can be

Romanization of middle voice Cf. Parmenides. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz,
27 Freudenthal, p. 221.
temporal (the first thing to be) or physical (the most fundamental component of material reality). The second meaning of archê is power/authority, usually political. Within the first meaning, both physical and temporal priority link archê with the question of unity. The apeiron of Anaximander is said to be in a relation of periechein (embrace) to the world. Much like a king’s army, apeiron surrounds and contains all that is, hence unifying it, whether physically or by virtue of the potential threat. Spatially, archê holds the various forces and oppositions in relation to each other. Thus the two definitions (priority and power) manifest together because this priority ‘holds.’ In fact, Jean-Pierre Vernant, true to his political interpretation, translates archê as ‘power’ throughout his book, *The Origins of Greek Thought*.

The second key notion in Anaximander’s basic formula, apeiron, most accurately translates as the unbounded, or unlimited. But lest we too enthusiastically seize this concept, we should heed this warning: “Anaximander’s Apeiron is perhaps the most obscure notion in Greek philosophy. Aristotle was puzzled by it, suggesting various and greatly differing interpretations of the concept.” 30 Aristotle places Anaximander here among the monists and there among the pluralists, which one might expect if Anaximander’s cosmos is a balance of opposites, and therefore plural, held in place by a single, all embracing entity/nonentity. From Heidegger’s standpoint, one might argue that Aristotle’s confusion indeed reflects the kind of confusion that would arise if something essential in what Anaximander said was forgotten. Parmenides will pick up on the ambiguity of apeiron as entity/nonentity, when he isolates the opposition

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29 I draw this information about Anaximander’s cosmos from Kahn, *Anaximander*.  
of is/is not and rejects the is-not. Here Parmenides may be reflecting some of the Pythagorean anxiety regarding the *apeiron*.\(^{31}\)

Heidegger would most likely not reach for Vernant’s language of power in speaking of *arché*, preferring what might be viewed as opposite language, *lassen*. Nonetheless, given the role of the *apeiron* in embracing what is and allowing it to be what it is, the indeterminacy of the horizon which grants world would seem appropriate to his thought. This horizon of *apeiron* not only delimits in the sense of an all, as a collection of entities into a universal group, but this *apeiron* determines the relations between these entities, lets balance and order prevail, lets these entities hang together, just as in a more materialistic reading of Anaximander, the *apeiron* functions to permit the balance necessary for the elements to function. In Heidegger’s sense, we have not just *ta polla*, the many things, but *ta eonta*, all things together in Being. “*τὰ ὄντα* does not mean an arbitrary or boundless multiplicity; rather, it means *τὰ πάντα*, the totality of being [*All des Seienden*]. Thus *τὰ ὄντα* means manifold being in totality [*das Mannigfaltig Seinden im Ganzen*].”\(^{32}\) But of course he wants to avoid any hint of metaphysical materialism; his focus might be, to borrow a term prominent in *Heraclitus Seminar*, on the movement of being in its self-showing. In this later work he actually

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\(^{31}\) Some claim that ‘infinite’ in the modern sense, or even in Zeno’s sense, represents an anachronism when applied to Anaximander’s *apeiron*, as does the notion of the qualitatively indeterminate (Ibid., p. 230), which early on found description as *aoriston*, only later linking with *apeiron* in Pythagoras. But Sweeney sees *apeiron* and *aoriston* as linked from the beginning (p. xxx) which accords with his rejection (p. xxvii) of Sinnige’s claim that *apeiron* as indeterminate emerges first in Pythagoras. See Theo Gerard Sinnige, *Matter and Infinity in the Presocratic Schools and Plato*, (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum and Co, 1968), Chapter III. Curiously, *aoriston* does not show up in Kahn’s index of Greek terms (*Anaximander*, p. 250).

\(^{32}\) “Anaximander Fragment,” pp. 20f.
speaks of an “embracing allness,” as opposed to “the sum of individuals.” The embrace grants appearance and might be akin to his frequently used notion of gathering. Within Heidegger’s thinking, the *apeiron* which becomes indeterminate may lead on to *chôra*. “Might *chôra* not mean: that which abstracts itself from every particular, that which withdraws, and in such a way precisely admits and ‘makes place’ for something else?”

The function of *apeiron*, at least formally, seems to fit with Heidegger’s language of granting reck, of allowing beings to give heed to one another, which Karin de Boer sees as the essential concern of Heidegger’s treatment of the Anaximander Fragment, providing a basis for ethical thinking not founded on traditional ontological concepts. Thus the first move of suspending the juridical sense of *dike*, *adikia* and *tisis*, part and parcel of suspending distinctions between natural and created, or natural and ethical and logical.

Regarding *archê* in Heidegger’s reading of the Western tradition’s dawning in Anaximander, *archê* is the problem, because after Aristotle we read it through a false temporality, consequently interpreting the genesis (*genesis*) and destruction (*phthora*) depicted in the Anaximander fragment as contrary processes in a linear relation rather than as the *genesis-phthora* of a Becoming not opposed to Being. Heidegger refuses priority to *archê*, when that priority is read through a faulty understanding of space and time. Spatially this faulty reading would involve speaking of elements, and setting one element as basic to the others. Thus he questions Fink’s reading in *Heraclitus Seminar*.

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33 *Heraclitus Seminar*, p. 5.  
by suggesting that Fink seeks “the transformations of things with respect to one ground.” Fink quickly clarifies that he does not mean substance or the absolute when he speaks of this allness, but light and time.36

To clarify how Fink’s response might fit a Heideggerian frame, and how the *apeiron*’s dual position as gathering hold of what is and indeterminate horizon of presencing, we might point out here one more interpretation of *apeiron* that links it specifically to Heidegger’s thinking of Being. Like Heidegger and Fink, Gadamer rejects any notion of *apeiron* as indeterminate substance, calling such an interpretation the source of confusion about the relation of Anaximenes to Anaximander. Picking up on the geometric imagery of a circle or sphere, Gadamer says, “A periodic motion continues without limit and without end. The *apeiron* is actually that which has neither beginning nor end, in that it comes back into itself again and again like a loop.” Notice here that the mathematical infinite (always more) and the metaphysical infinite (complete and unbounded) seem to be resolved.37 The circle is complete, but its periodicity always continues. Gadamer goes on, “This is the miracle of being: the motion that regulates itself constantly and progressively into the infinite. This, it would seem, is the true beginning of existing things. Heidegger has established precisely this decisive point, namely, the idea that temporality is the key characteristic of that which is.”

The image of a sphere will come into play in Heidegger’s reading of Parmenides in Chapter 2, where the sphere’s absolute homogeneity gives no point that would be a

35 “Anaximander Fragment,” p. 31.
36 *Heraclitus Seminar*, p. 10.
likely beginning and so is *apeiron*. This interpretation also shows how Heidegger can link Ionian and Eleatic thought so easily, while on historical grounds they seem quite different. This *apeiron* constantly defers any clear *archê*. Such an *archê* would result in metaphysics. So Gadamer says, “Formulated schematically and a little provocatively, I would like to suggest that, for existing things, the beginning consists in the fact that they have no beginning because what exists preserves itself in its continual periodicity.”38 This description might imply that to say that the formula “*apeiron* is *archê*” or if we even reverse subject and predicate, *archê* is *apeiron* means that the beginning of being is without determination, without beginning. It introduces groundlessness into the ground of Being and beings, an explanation of beings that puts their being/origin outside of the domain or *archê* understood as causal explanation. We might point out that for the Greeks such an endless periodicity would be related to the movement of the sun back and forth between each of its *tropai*, and so would already imply a certain sense based in ‘physics.’

As I mentioned, Irigaray wonders if Heidegger’s philosophy of Being does not “forget air,” or the elementality of phusis. What of the character of this internal world? Conventional commentators most often approach Anaximander’s *apeiron* by means of comparison with the other two Milesians—Thales and Anaximenes. For Thales, apart from any genetic (temporal) role, water at least fulfilled the function of a physical foundation. The earth floats on water. Anaximander’s move to a nonmaterial *archê* is regarded as a rejection of Thales’ proto-materialist position. Hence arguments obtain regarding whether *apeiron* is a substance, like water, or not. Of course, the obvious

question is whence enters the notion of substance in place of archê. We are perhaps already dealing here with Aristotle. We can see how the tension ingredient in apeiron led the idea of the infinite in two directions, one more abstract or formal, the other material. First, apeiron becomes a deficient quantity in Aristotle, always only potential. The crucible of Zeno’s paradoxes may be responsible for this iteration. The second direction seems to be toward hulê or hypokeimenon (substance) in Aristotle, the substrate material of physical reality, which by itself is indeterminate, and therefore apeiron.

After the boundless, the next step in Anaximander’s cosmogony is the separating out\textsuperscript{39} from the original apeiron of a gonimon, a seed, which then produces the opposites hot and cold. This step also sparks interpretive controversies about whether the primordial apeiron was therefore a mixture containing the gonimon already or a unity. Cast in other terms: when or how could differentiation begin? Arguments ensue about whether this gonimon is botanical or embryological.\textsuperscript{40} Also, questions develop over the hot and cold, an important point in the theory of opposites. Plagued again by questions of substance, the question arises, were hot and cold linked with some sort of physical elements or not?\textsuperscript{41} Anaximander’s cosmogony continues with a further separation, driven now by the interplay of opposites, and also now more materially rendered. Fire tends upward, and earth downward. The stellar bodies are conceived as

\textsuperscript{39} Apokrinesthai. The same term applies to the separating of finer and courser vapors that produces wind. Kahn, Anaximander, p. 100.

\textsuperscript{40} Freudenthal takes the botanical line (pp. 214ff).

\textsuperscript{41} This issue is raised by Eugen Fink in Heraclitus Seminar, pp. 155ff.
bands of fire (kukloi, circles), akin to the wheel of a chariot, with apertures producing the sun and moon.\textsuperscript{42}

Presumably the celestial bodies must be on circumscribing bands rather than independent, singular entities in order to preserve the symmetry of the cosmos, an indication of the importance of symmetry for Anaximander. Scholars do seem to agree on the fact that Anaximander’s universe was characterized by a kind of equipoise.\textsuperscript{43} While Thales’ earth floated on water, Anaximander argued that since it was equidistant from all points on the circumference of the universe, the earth has no inclination to move one way or the other and therefore requires no physical support. “To understand why human beings could walk on the ground in complete safety, and why the earth did not fall as objects on its surface did, it was enough to know that all the radii of a circle are equal.”\textsuperscript{44} Perhaps Heidegger would be inclined to say this equipoise is what Parmenides means by the Same.

But the question of how this geometrical observation came to be applied to cosmology seems to need an answer. It seems to assume that geometry already had a grip on the minds of those cosmologists, if not their fellow citizens. Because of its difference from Thales and what we take to be his materialism grounded in more immediate experience, wood floating on water, one cannot escape the impression that this formulation of equipoise or symmetry represents a significant innovation. It stands alone, as does the notion of apeiron as primary archê. Kahn sees this principle of

\textsuperscript{42} Note that various ratios are attached to the dimensions of these bands in relation to their distance from the earth. Naddaf employs these ratios in his political reading, pp. 9ff.
\textsuperscript{43} Anaximander, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{44} Vernant, p. 121.
equipoise, the belief that without differentiation no support or ground is needed, as a matter of symmetry, or indifference, and as a predecessor to Leibniz’s Principle of Sufficient Reason—everything which is true implies a reason why it is so and not otherwise. We will come upon Leibniz’s Principle of Sufficient Reason in the next chapter, when Heidegger invokes it in “What Is Metaphysics?” This link to Leibniz, along with Kahn’s claim that Anaximander plays the rationalist to the other Ionian empiricists (perhaps an anticipation of the Eleatics), raises the question of mathematics and the relation between Anaximander and the Pythagorean school, which Kahn calls “an unbroken preservation of the oldest Milesian ideas,”⁴⁵ Milesian here apparently meaning Anaximander’s cosmology, more or (usually) less grasped by his fellow Milesians.⁴⁶

Of the celestial bodies, the stars are closest, then the moon, then the sun.

Beyond the celestial realm, the boundless embraces (periechein) the universe. As noted, in relation to the question of substance, scholars debate whether the apeiron is present in the universe, as a kind of material substrate for whatever exists, or is instead only on the outside and therefore primarily a governing principle, a debate which again seems to fall out in terms of empiricism and rationalism. This question of what is beyond is complex and repeats throughout the western tradition, particularly in relation to the void and the plenum, with Atomists sacrificing a beyond altogether by making the void internal to the cosmos, a move which seems to approximate an acceptance of the mathematical sense of the infinite in uniting both the unlimited cosmos with a sense

⁴⁵ Anaximander, p. 94.
of relatively thorough, though not absolute, divisibility. Atomist thinking tends to represent the tradition that emphasizes discrete opposition. With the Stoics, heirs of the Heraclitean trajectory we are engaging in this chapter, the beyond was the locale of the void, apparently the nothing that exceeds *apeiron*; the metaphysical infinite as completeness allows nothing more, literally unbounded in the sense of having something beyond it. For Heraclitus and the Stoics, the void could not at all be internal to the cosmos, but had to remain external to it, lest the sympathy that united the cosmic whole, which was itself an organic entity, be disrupted. Cosmic sympathy seemed to require a plenum. Aristotle’s suggestion that empty space could have no inclination, which seems to recapitulate Anaximander’s principle of equipoise, meant for the Stoics that if the void were internal to the cosmos any of the processes we observe whereby order ensues, would be impossible. For Anaximander’s *apeiron* was outside or within the cosmos remains unclear, probably because of the ambiguity of the term itself. But with this leap into a broader history of the tradition, we see again the overarching motif with which I introduced this project, the perimeter of the heavens and the beyond, whether the beyond of the *huperouranion*, witnessed by Plato’s charioteers in the *Phaedrus*, or his good beyond being, which would seem to require his cosmology to be framed by or put off tempo by the political, considerations that I will argue in Chapter 3, inflect the *Timaeus*. The issue is making room for the stranger in the name of whom Levinas celebrates Gagarin and questions what he sees as Heidegger’s provincial

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dwelling in the fourfold. As the outside is defined, the inside is also defined—continuous plenum or cold void and mindless atoms.

Anaximander also offers a biological theory. Water predominates in the beginning of the cosmos and, life develops from it and evolves. Humans emerging from some sort of proto animal. Finally, the sea represents the remnants of the early cosmic waters, waters in the process of drying up.48 Certainly here is progressive view of development, with some events prior to others. The ‘now’ versus ‘then’ of the developmental account seems at odds with the idea of an enduring harmony, much like the idea of aging seems to breach the balance of opposites. Perhaps unity maintains priority via oscillation, and linear development is a lesser function. As mentioned above Gadamer suggests that apeiron refers to an endless process of oscillation, perhaps much like that described by the movements of the sun back and forth between its tropoi, turning points, the two tropics.

If we presuppose a universe in balance with itself in virtue of either being carried by water or being ordered in accordance with a regular periodicity, as the case may be, we encounter the following problem: how is it possible to describe or rather to think this universe without at the same time raising the question of how the universe originated and what was there before it? This is a problem that has occupied human thinking to this day.49

In summary, distinctive in Anaximander’s cosmology is, first, the notion of apeiron, especially what appears to be its nonmaterial character, and, second, the symmetrical balance of the cosmos which moves away from a rather literal picture of the earth’s position and fate in the universe set within a still broader, unclarified context of forces to something closer to what modern physicists might call an inertial frame. In

48 Anaximander, see pp. 85ff.
49 Gadamer, p. 97.
Thales and Anaximenes the earth follows whatever forces act upon it, a scenario that repeats somewhat the capricious fate of things earthly found in myth and, we might add, seems in some way unable to think the universe as a whole. But Anaximander’s view grants the earth (and accordingly its human denizens) some autonomy or at least stability. Both moves seem to reflect abstractions away from purely material descriptions. I have tried to suggest some formal similarities between this view and Heidegger’s interpretation of Anaximander. However, it is obvious that Anaximander was concerned somewhat with physics and with cosmogony. This fact, derived admittedly from the doxography, does not derail Heidegger’s interpretation, which has been placed from the start outside of concerns with historical accuracy and correspondence, but it does raise the question of whether his focus on beings in their Being, listed sans all categories in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, is too neutral, both for the elemental quality of the cosmos and for the uniqueness of humans required by justice.

**Ta Anentiai—The Elemental Opposites**

Regarding the material opposites more specifically, Charles Kahn finds the purest expression of the Ionian view of the material world in Aristotle’s description of the opposites (*Gen/Cor* 330a30,33). Many opposites are listed at various places in the literature, ten being attributed by Aristotle to the Pythagoreans, and these ten are in no way strictly physical realities, since male and female, and odd and even make the list. In Aristotle’s schema dry/wet, hot/cold, respectively, oppose each other. But a single

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50 *Anaximander*, p. 126.
quality from one pair can mix with either quality of the other pair, producing the four elements. Dry and hot make fire. Dry and cold make earth. Wet and hot produce air, wet and cold, water. One element changes to another when one of the two opposites comprising it transforms into its other. Thus earth (cold and dry) becomes water (cold and wet) with the change of dry to wet. “For opposites, the destruction (phthoran) of one thing is the generation (genesis) of another.” Note also Aristotle’s use of the terms from Anaximander’s fragment—genesis and phthora—in describing this type of opposition, and in an apparently different way than Heidegger’s description of whiling employs these terms. Irigaray suggests that this Ionian dependent opposition pattern relates to Empedocles’ cosmic principle of Eros (a major force in the Phaedrus, too). This interpretation would set her in the Stoic physical tradition that sets a high priority on the sympathy that prevails within the cosmos. Opposites being attracted to each other represents the operations of eros, whereas like attracted to like represents hatred, the ‘emotion’ she sees operative, in what seems an overstrong criticism, in Heidegger’s focus on the nothing. Leaving aside this issue of cosmic forces, the upshot, says Irigaray, is that Heidegger’s cosmos does not attain elemental continuity, but privileges contiguity between discretely placed beings in an expanse of nothing. Heidegger’s (or more usually ‘his’) talk of thrownness is a kind of reaction in mourning to the loss of

51 See Ibid.
52 Note that Kahn claims Aristotle here is more classical, in the sense that he adopts a qualitative description of physical reality. Plato finally ends up with geometrical shapes as primary explanation of differences in physical reality. Democritus finds atoms and void as the basis. These two therefore anticipate the more quantitative approach of modern science, though Democritus’ atoms still find their variations on qualitative grounds, unlike modern chemistry, which grounds qualitative difference between elements on a single quantitative feature, viz. atomic number. Anaximander, p. 129.
53 Generatione et Corruptione, 318a23, cited in Ibid., p. 132.
undifferentiated unity in gestation, thus his emphasis on the authentic ownmost possibility of his being attained in being-unto-death. Regardless of what one makes of this criticism, Irigaray’s position does point out the incessant refusal of any talk of an element in Heidegger, and she identifies the role of the nothing as of particular significance here. We will discuss this further in Chapter 2.

In contrast to Atomism’s hypothetical, discrete entities, we have with Aristotle’s opposites a certain reticence regarding making the physical elements too overtly conspicuous. Aristotle grounds the more discrete and palpable elements—earth, fire, air, and water—on less defined qualities. Empedocles uses the term ‘roots,’ emphasizing a certain withdrawal from view. So too Anaxagoras’ infinitely divisible seeds carry in them a certain tolerance for enigma. Plato opts for the image of letters, but insists that the elements are actually barely even as decomposed as syllables and so not immediately accessible in their uniqueness. The hiddenness of nature, at least material nature’s essence, seems in place in a large portion of the early tradition. In all of these construals, the elemental retains a certain non-possessability, or at least resistance to circumscription. These qualities are entirely consistent with apeiron as discussed above, and, I think, with chôra, as we will see it in Plato’s cosmology. Plato will understand chôra to have a social dimension, and I consider Anaximander’s apeiron to have a social role as well. In the end, I will suggest that such a role does not have its origin entirely within Being, within the question of arising meaning.

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54 Forgetting of Air, p. 75
For our purposes in relation to the elemental, the important point about the opposites is that they are mutually dependent upon one another. One opposite has no meaning without the other and so they could be construed as having a genuine, internal unity, a continuity. Parmenides seems to recoil at this idea that one opposite implies the idea of the other. Hot has no sense without cold, dry without wet. Thus they are distinct (different) but inseparable (identified). Furthermore, to realize this identity, or perhaps having realized this identity, the necessary conclusion is that no single worldly element can be archê, lest the oppositions be put out of balance, or because nothing could be opposite to an archê without being an archê also and at the same time limiting that archê. Hence an archê different from any of the opposites is needed. Anaximander selected apeiron to perform this function, and although the term may or may not have meant indeterminate at the time, some brand of indeterminacy would seem necessary if it is to perform the function it is called to, i.e., to delimited what makes things determinate without itself being within that cycle of determination. In chapter six we will see Levinas treat the elemental in precisely this way. It is a milieu rather than an atomist collection discrete entities and it comes as if from nowhere. Though the human is linked to this alimentary elemental, is of it and in it, the human also stands out from the elemental since the human has the idea of the infinite. He applies the word apeiron and links it to the mythical, distinguishing apeiron from the infinite. It is this idea of the infinite that introduces a domain that qualifies or challenges life in the elemental, i.e. the other, the good beyond being, and in a certain light, the political.

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56 Totality and Infinity, p. 141.
A Political Bridge

At this point I would like to introduce a new question into the mix. So far the discussion has operated within basic assumptions about the projects of the Pre-Socratic philosophers as natural philosophers, or, in Heidegger’s trajectory of *phusis*, as philosophers of *ta eonta*. But recall that at the outset, I noted authors who raised a different set of questions, about Anaximander, and about philosophy itself. These questions had to do with the political space of philosophy. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Gerard Naddaf (himself relying on Vernant) use sociological analysis to describe Ionian philosophy as initiating a cosmology suitable for nascent democracy.

The question applies to Heidegger as well. His involvement with Nazism plagues his legacy. This issue is not easily resolved. Ironically this question may arise in a space Heidegger himself opened in his analysis of Anaximander’s fragment and which makes the political implications of Heidegger’s thought important in the first place insofar as it allowed his confusions (to be generous) about Nazism. “The fragment speaks of manifold being in totality. But not only things belong among beings. In the fullest sense, ‘things’ are not only things of nature. Man, things produced by man, and the situation or environment effected and realized by the deeds

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57 *Physikoi* is the common moniker, and given our assumptions about what physics is, whether Aristotelian or Galilean, we read them accordingly.

58 Pierre Bourdieu challenges Heidegger’s philosophy, shifting foreground (ontological) and background (political), contending Heidegger’s philosophy is an encoding of Nazism in highly abstract terms. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, Peter Collier, trans. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). For a summary of some of the literature on this issue, see above, n. 11. Philipse quite convincingly dispatches Bourdieu’s view, (pp. 441-442, n. 332, but raises his own concerns about the
and omissions of men, also belong among beings, and so do daimonic and divine beings. All these are not merely ‘also’ in being; they are even more in being than mere things.” This more may be meant as a contrast with the mere ‘also,’ suggesting the difference between the totality of beings and “manifold being in totality” and its dependence on the gather in language and so on the human. Such a reading would not necessarily ‘elevate’ the human above other beings. In so far as this ‘more’ yields an inclination, the polis (at least historically—geschichtlich—understood as the domain of human action) seems precisely the domain to which he grants priority here, though as we will see in Chapter 2 he insists that the polis is not political. Politics per se seems still far from Heidegger’s concern here.

Regarding Anaximander, it seems that just as he was not outside the realm of physics, the political in a more specific sense is also persistent in his thought. Naddaf argues that “Anaximander’s cosmological model reflects what he saw as the only possible way of ridding the polis of the political dissension of his time: isonomia.” Anaximander lived during a time that Terry Buckley calls “the age of Greek

relationship between Heidegger’s later philosophy and his Nazi sympathies, see section 14, esp. part B.
60 In line with Heidegger’s project, Charles Scott seeks to detach politics from philosophy as metaphysics and remove what he sees as a Platonic project to invoke metaphysical leverage in political matters. One cannot unambiguously align political thinking with metaphysics, for metaphysics has forgotten the tragic simultaneity of arising and ruin. Consequently metaphysical politics inevitably carries with it forgotten values that destroy its best intentions. Politics inevitably has advantages and disadvantages that cannot be separated from each other, mirroring the genesisphthoron structure of Being. See Advantages and Disadvantages and The Question of Ethics: Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990).
61 Naddaf, p. 2.
Tyranny." That this political reading of Anaximander does capture something original in Greek thought, neglected by later assessments, may find support from various places. First, to regard Anaximander as political problem solver agrees with the tradition of the Sages, which generally includes Thales and Solon. Solon was at work constructing the Athenian constitution in 594 when Anaximander was a young man. Diogenes Laertius suggests that Parmenides helped create laws (IX 23), and Heraclitus was asked to do so but refused (IX 2-3). Also, in Plato’s *Timaeus*, we find Plato’s cosmology preceded by, the dialogue *begins* with, a conversation (itself a continuation of a conversation already *begun* the day before) about the best way to order a society, a discussion that specifically invokes Solon in his role as statesman. In addition, the prime agent in Plato’s cosmology is the *demiurge* (*dêmiourgos*—*dêmos* + *ergon*, working for the people or, taken as a substantive, a public craftsman or artisan). Vernant makes the case that the *harmonia* model of cosmology found in Plato and Pythagoras is at heart aristocratic, which is distinct from the tradition of *isonomia* found in Ionian thought and also reflected prominently in Hippocratic theory regarding health (*isonomia*) and sickness (*monarchia*). But here the point is that Plato easily connects politics and cosmology, or more accurately perhaps, does not participate in their separation, an act perhaps fully realized only after Plato, by Aristotle. On the other hand one could argue

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63 See also M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Greeks* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), pp. 74ff. *Dêmos* has the connotation of rural vs. city (*polis*), and rural districts generally were associated with the masses (*hoi polloi*), while the wealth tended to concentrate in the center of the city state rather than in outlying regions. Vernant, p. 32, especially n. 8.
64 *Ibid.*, pp. 96f. Perhaps the Platonic and Pythagorean view was more in line with Solon’s reforms (594), where equal distribution was not the goal so much as balance between differentiated classes for the sake of public order, hence *harmonia.*
that this tradition of the public sage, the fact that public roles do not yet seem separated out, reflects on a public level the kind of unity Heidegger posits in his focus on *ta eonta*, and argues against allowing a separation in regard to fields of philosophy, fragmenting *ta eonta* into cosmology and *polis* and interpreting one in terms of the other. Then these figures would be thinkers rather than politicians or physicists. Separating out the human for special emphasis, whether as ‘more’ like Heidegger does or as a ‘beyond’ like Levinas, is about the problem of where to situate politics and the human.

A second point encouraging this political reading: the reforms of Cleisthenes (508) press more toward *isonomia* by the disruption of aristocratic political organization in favor of strictly geographical organization of political power, creating *demoi*, each internally articulated into tribes. The leadership of the city rotated according to the calendar. Cleisthenes effectively reorganized Greek political space and time along the lines of the ideal of *isonomia*. Notice, too, the neutral, geometrical, character of space and time in Cleisthenes’ Athens, much less determinate, governed strictly by formulas, not contents, a geometry that puts us firmly in line with Levinas’ description of the geometrical space of Gagarin’s space flight mentioned in the introduction, a space in which Levinas situates the possibility of justice. This space might be said to be blind to distinctions of persons in the way one calls justice blind. Thirdly, as already noted, the Hippocratic view of the physical body as a microcosm also may support a political reading of early philosophy. It would not be outrageous for the Greeks to take the additional step of saying that as the *polis* mirrors the *cosmos*, the political body reflects

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another microcosm, a view we could indeed read into Plato, and that the body, the city and the *kosmos* all were subject to the law of opposites. In Chapter 4 I will try to show this juxtaposition of body and city in reading the *Phaedrus*, where as part of a medical regimen a walk to the city walls of Megara is proposed, though not carried out. Finally, even though Heidegger begins by trying to suspend the juridical-political implications of the Anaximander fragment, we can note the prominence of political and legal language in the Anaximander Fragment (*dikên, tisin, adikias*), not to mention also in Heraclitus and Parmenides, and ask what results when we do not suspend those implications, i.e., when we turn to early Greek philosophy in a different way than Heidegger’s, even though it may run the risk of falling back into disciplines and endlessly wielding reasons.

Vernant’s case about the origins of Greek thought moves as follows. Early Mycenaean civilization was more like the near eastern monarchies, strictly centered on the king (*wanax*) who unified the society symbolically and effectively, functioning as the authority (*archê*) in religion, military matters, and agriculture. His rule was grounded upon the warrior class and a scribal, administrative class, whose members recorded the affairs of the palace/state. On the sidelines was the *demos*, the common class. The Dorian invasion of the late twelfth century ended Mycenaean civilization, leading to a dark age. The *wanax* was replaced by the more local *basileies*. Thus the oriental style monarchy ceased and so also did the scribal class and consequently widespread use of writing, and the balance between different groups in society provided

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67 The Dorian invasion (end of the twelfth century) disrupted the monarchical system, sending Greece eventually in the direction of democracy and away from monarchical models common to the ancient near east. *Ibid.*, pp. 36f.
by the wanax is disrupted. Various official functions or realms were now allotted to
different figures as portions (môirai—also the word for fate). With this change the
problem of unity and diversity (one and many) arises politically, as does the very
possibility of struggle (agon) or strife (eris) within the group instead of between groups.
Struggle in turn presupposes peers or equals. The matter then becomes how unity (the
polis) can be maintained apart from the unifying power of the monarch.

When contact was restored with eastern nations, due to an increase in
commerce, for some reason the Greek culture that emerged differentiated rather than
accommodated itself to its eastern neighbors. Here of course is a question for Vernant.
What was that reason? These other peoples were called barbaroi, barbarians, defined
as persons who could not speak Greek. So language plays a defining role—a boundary
(peras) embracing (periechein) and enclosing what is Greek, but a boundary defined by
what it encloses. Does this language difference suggest a more decisive explanation
for what happened in Greece.68 Surely other civilizations had experienced similar
changes with different results. But even the Greek-speaking Spartans took the new
group ethos in a different direction, a highly authoritarian direction. Language may be

68 Regarding this question of language, see Gadamer, who suggests a role for the neuter
gender, pp. 12ff. J. D. Denniston, describes a general transformation in Greek writing
at the end of the 5th century and which unfurled in the fourth, a movement that
followed most of the Presocratics, yet which they prefigured. Greek Prose Style
(London: Oxford University Press, 1952), e.g., p. 22. Cf. also Jean-Pierre Vernant’s
description of the role of language in the transition from the Mycenaean court scribal
system to the public realm as early as the 9th century (pp. 34ff). Heidegger, of course,
speaks often about the genius of Greek, as well as the disruptiveness of Latin, the
language which births the Cartesian legacy. For examples see Parmenides, pp. 40 ff;
and “The Anaximander Fragment,” pp. 56-7. Raymond Adolph Prier argues that the
Presocratics must be understood by looking backwards to the origins of Greek
language, not looking ahead to Aristotle. Archaic Logic: Symbol and Structure in
the most Greek thing about the Greeks, the house of their Being, so to speak. By way of reply Vernant might point out as one explanation, changes in military technology discussed below.

Causes may be unclear, but the effects can be traced. According to Vernant, the unity of polis, rather than finding foundation in the monarch, must now rather be established in a different vein, as isonomia, the law of equals, by which individual interests could be subordinated to the interests of the whole. This is the problem that Anaximander addresses cosmologically (which at his time still means also politically). Central to this change in Greek society in which the royal court has lost importance is the law court, where disputes now find settlement, the place where nomos (law) rules (has archê). In the democracy, the need to argue a case, rather than rely on pronouncements from a royal personage, provides the ground for the development of rhetoric and logic. Writing, which has now been reintroduced with a new Phoenician script, belongs in the public domain, the realm of nomos, and was no longer the property of an elite class of scribes.

The symbolic focus of this society centers no longer on the palace, but instead is now the agora, established es to koinon—(in the common), es to meso (in the middle/center), echoing the symmetry of Anaximander’s cosmos and the resulting need for balance. “Once the city was centered on the public square it was already a polis in every sense of the word.” Note the implication that a monarchy could not be a polis. The change is essential. Vernant continues,

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69 Vernant, p. 50.  
70 Ibid., p. 48.
Sages like Thales found here a place in the mediation of the tension between the one and many—between equality and rank. They mediated a wisdom from on high, exclusive to them, but did so publicly, as a common property, functioning as a vehicle for a kind of disclosure that belonged not to them but to the city. Philosophy as an outgrowth of this sagacious tradition was always in a position between the religious cult (or at least a disciplinary community of the sort found among the Pythagoreans) on the one hand, and the public square, on the other.\(^7\)

Rather than a restricted, inhabited space, the palace, truth now comes to reside in an open space—the square, not a dwelling space yet a peopled (public) space.

It is interesting to note how the development of *isonomia*, or rather its expansion from the rule within the aristocracy to the rule among a broader group of citizens, was fueled by transformations in the martial practice of the day.\(^7\) In warfare, horse and chariot were replaced by the hoplite soldier, on foot, in ranks, wearing armor. Whereas previously the wealth necessary for ownership of a horse had defined meaningful participation in battle, now anyone who could afford the hoplite gear found a role in defending the city. In addition, the emphasis in battle passed from the heroic exploits of an individual horseman to the need to keep ranks, the suppression of individual interest for the sake of the group.\(^7\) Thus priority moved from noble, individual heroism to cooperation among equals (*isonomia*), and just as with the physical body, the health of the public body depended on balance between parts rather than the rule of one part over the others, repeating on the battlefield the dynamic quality that determines Anaximander’s cosmos.

During the end of the seventh century, further economic expansion in the Mediterranean and the resulting increase in trade and traffic caused the resumption of

\(^7\) On the effect of hoplite warfare on the city, especially tyranny, see Buckley, pp. 49ff.
\(^7\) Vernant, pp. 62ff.
ties with the east. This more global economy produced a crisis in the city-state, caused by a resurgence of the aristocracy at the expense of village collectives (demoi) and therefore challenging isonomia. The response was a reemphasis on dikê, justice, a concept found in “The Anaximander Fragment,” and a central concept in Heraclitus and Parmenides’ texts. To check the powers of aristocratic families, law was generalized even further into the public realm. Mirroring the above mentioned shift from the private familial palace of the king to the open and peopled space of the public square, offenses such as murder were redefined as crimes against the community rather than against a blood group, thus ending the obligation of familial revenge. Also, during this time of conspicuous consumption, a reactionary asceticism emerged. Sôphrosunê (practice of wisdom) and the golden mean were its watchwords, against the hubris of wealth, which disrupted public order (order is a more general meaning of kosmos).

Plato’s charioteer in the Phaedrus seeks to glimpse dikaiosunê and sôphrosunê, along with beauty, and Socrates prays at the end of the dialogue that he might have a moderate attitude toward money. Solon countered the arrogance of the rich because he feared that injustice would lead to enslavement of the masses, then to revolt and disorder. This is the social meaning of the golden mean—moderation.⁷⁴

Curiously, Vernant seems pleased to fix the beginning of philosophy with Thales, arguing against Cornford’s view of continuity between myth and philosophy. But what caused this sudden and dramatic beginning? It was the “projecting onto the world of nature that conception of order and law whose success in the city had made the

⁷⁴ Cf., Buckley, Ch. 5.
human world a cosmos."⁷⁵ Note that *polis*—*cosmos*, in the general sense of order, within the human realm—defines *cosmos* in the specific sense of the universe. Political space and cosmological space were of a piece such that “Greek reason was not so much the product of human commerce with things as of the relation of human beings with one another.”⁷⁶ Greek reason grew out of the needs of human community instead of a pure scientific undertaking. This point I consider important, very much in line with Levinas’ views of reason and clearly echoed in the two Platonic dialogues we will treat later, one which professes to do cosmology but situates cosmology in relation to the *polis*, the other which has Socrates announce the superior heuristic value of humans to trees, then come slightly unglued by a nonhuman world one could describe as erotic in its effects.

But what shall we make now of Vernant’s socio-historical observations? Such analyses seem to occur in a space opened by a reversal of a more idealistic reading of beginnings. They seem to indicate that philosophy cannot be constructed entirely outside questions of society and power, in a field of significance of its own choosing. In spite of the *iso* of *isonomia*, the equality remained a hierarchical or geometrical one rather than arithmetical. Each class had its place, but not necessarily equal portions. It is a *eunomia* of the harmonized, though unequal, portions, like the mathematical ratios 2/1, 3/2, 4/3 that fascinated the Pythagoreans. There was still room for the idea of nobility, *agathos*, as opposed to the base, *kakoi*.⁷⁷

Vernant’s argument seems to have some value in indicating that the appearance of words like justice in these early texts suggests that these thinkers were talking about

⁷⁵ Vernant, p. 108.
something like what we mean when we say justice. Heidegger seems to dismiss any such restrictions on his interpretation. In fact, Vernant’s case might also be viewed as merely demonstrating the non-necessity of democratic government and the logical thought that Vernant says developed out of it, which Heidegger seems to view as products of a certain epoch bestowed by Being.

**When Is Justice Not Justice?**

Heidegger’s treatment of the Anaximander fragment in the article of that name is characterized by several features. First he casts the discussion in terms of history, playing on the German expression for the West as the *Abendland*, literally the evening land. Second, he eschews or even explicitly precludes certain typical sets of philosophical terminology, in the name of the question of Being. As noted above, he defines *ta eonta* as beings, but beings in their Being. At this point the use of the Ionian (Homeric) variant for the participial, which still includes the epsilon common to the other forms of the verb *eimi*, ‘to be,’ is important for two reasons. First it preserves the sense of the Being of these beings in so far as it links them with the rest of the verb forms, i.e. allows being’s essential unity to appear in the very words on the page. Second, it demonstrates the importance of language in Heidegger’s thought, since his analysis can be directed and fueled by a linguistic feature, and one he calls archaic, one that is specifically not common in the Attic, Athenian Greek of Plato and Aristotle but has rather been forgotten in Athens. In fact, he says with self-conscious hyperbole that “the fate of the West may hang on the translation of the word εόν.”78 These first two

78 “Anaximander Fragment,” p. 33.
features of Heidegger’s analysis arise from his emphasis on beginning with the question of Being, or ontology. A third component of his analysis of the Anaximander Fragment stems from Heidegger’s mode of approaching being, what Alphonso Lingis will describe as a prakto-gnostic model, and what Hubert Dreyfus depicts, through the lens of Wittgenstein’s thought, as a kind of cultural hermeneutic. This contextual feature of being seems implied in his discussion of *chreôn*, which he links with the *chraomai*, to take in hand (hence the *praktical* origins of the sense of Being) and which Heidegger speaks of in terms of usage. This emphasis on usage becomes, in the hands of a severe thinker like Charles Scott, *ethos*, which is the origin of ethics.

In the first of these features the region of Being under consideration seems quite epochal. The era continuing from the early Greeks to now, from the dawn to the evening. But at the same time we have not yet caught up with this dawn. The third feature suggests that ethics will always be limited to usage, to custom, which dispenses the limits of beings, though this interpretation in the line of Scott does not quite do justice to what de Boer sees as Heidegger’s effort to offer an ontological reading of an ethical regard for things, arising/grounded in a letting be that frees them from being only as objects for a subject. Since Heidegger is questioning in the light of Being he must put aside distinctions between the natural and created beings, between natural beings and human beings, since all must be questioned in regard to their presence as

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81 *The Question of Ethics*, pp. 142ff.
beings. The effacing of this latter distinction provides, it seems, the basis of Levinas’ object to Heidegger when he says that Heidegger interprets the human in relation to a third term, a neuter term, being. In other contexts Levinas complains of the hegemony of the Same in Heidegger’s thought, the kind of move that seems evident in Heidegger’s claim that “it is proper to dialogue that its conversation speak of the same thing; indeed, that it speaks out of participation in the Same.”

 Granted, Heidegger is referring here to dialogue with the ancient Greeks. But Levinas (and someone like John Caputo, following Levinas) might say that Heidegger has undervalued dialogue with an actual existent other in favor of a dialogue that is a response to the claim (Anspruch) of Being, of existence.

This difference of thought comes to focus also in the second group of terms that Heidegger wants to suspend, namely, the ethical and political connotations of dikê, adikia and tisis. I have suggested that dikê is much more important to the Anaximander fragment than would seem evident from Heidegger’s reading, which certainly seems concerned with justice, interpreted as beings giving reck to each other. This reading certainly would seem to be grounds for some kind of ethic, but an ethic that comes to view in asking the question of the Being of these beings without distinction.

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82 “Anaximander Fragment,” p. 22.
83 I am playing on the title of Existence and Existents, Alphonso Lingis, trans. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), which might also be translated “From Existence to Existents,” as a summary of Levinas’ differences with Heidegger’s focus on Existence as transcendence. Caputo’s complaint in Demythologizing Heidegger is that Heidegger’s turn to an exclusive focus on ancient Greece represents the rise in his thought of a blind monism that was defenseless against the myths of Nazism. I defer more extensive discussion of the debate between Levinas and Heidegger to Chapter 6.
84 I interpret Erazim Kohak’s position in The Embers and the Stars: An Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) along these lines. ‘Natural’ entities merit moral regard because of that simple fact that they are.
The idea of middle voice, which is the voice of the main verb in the fragment, has implications for justice as well. In terms of spatiality the middle voice fails to register if an event can only happen as some sort of movement from one spot to another, such as reflected in subject-object constructions, or perhaps in classical physics. Heidegger’s thinking of Being in the fragment seeks to speak out of some middle voice. And justice cannot be a relation that is fixed by a schema, but must also carry out this middle voice mood, must first come from respectfully letting beings be in their arising passing. One might call it a form, perhaps not of reck-ognizing but at least of reckoning.

One can also see how more analytically oriented philosophers (and languages) underappreciated this aspect of Heidegger. Middle voice is not dependent on a framework (*Ge-stell*) across which one can measure becoming and where, failing to register, middle voice would appear a nothing, a difference unmeasurable, uninscribable, perhaps even *apeiron* in the sense of indeterminate. Death is not a temporal event in the future by a way of being inherent in being-towards. Similarly no framework exists for correctly translating the fragment into ‘our’ language, our subjective domain, but rather, true to the displacement of subject and object that the middle voice accomplishes, we must translate ourselves. We are faced with the task of crossing over, of translating ourselves into the Greek realm, images that play on the notion of the bridge, whose linking of the two banks is an image of how the world

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85 Philipse’s careful reading of Heidegger’s texts could be viewed as such a case. One might suggest this failure to perceive the middle voice qualities of Heidegger’s thought appears most sharply in Philipse’s discussion of Heidegger’s analysis of death, Section 18, and in the way temporality does not seem to come completely to the fore. Luce Irigaray places this middle voice firmly into the context of the Heideggerian theme of the circle of the same, noting that this same is prior to any predication and thus prior to language. *Forgetting of Air*, pp. 80-1
Heidegger draws out an emphasis on the simultaneity of arising (genesis) and passing (phthora) as the nature of becoming. Charles Scott has even combined the two Greek words into one word, genesisphthoran, talking of “coming to pass [away]” and “arising withdrawing” as ways of rendering the notion of presence. This simultaneity of arising and passing away in the eventing of events is consistent with Heidegger’s interpretation of time as the horizon of Being. Time is not marked by events happening in something other than it and thus constituting a measurable duration. Rather, Being is a temporal event with no external horizon on which to be determined. Note the implicit rejection of progressive history of the Hegelian sort, in which events of history register and are preserved in some transcendent ‘medium.’ Heidegger finds all these validations of his thinking in Anaximander’s Fragment.

We are left then with two options for Anaximander’s dikê, an idea that will be a major voice in the next chapter. We have dikê as what we will call, with De Boer, an ethical relation to a structure of Being, the proper way for a temporal being to be with beings that are whiling in the jointure of arising-passing. In this case, any ethical responsibilities toward other humans appear within this horizon of temporality. Or we have a dikê as first a human moment, the polis. This polis may not amount yet to a

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88 Ibid., p. 31.
89 Advantages and Disadvantages, p. 49. The particular phrases Scott uses change frequently, no doubt intentionally so, in order not to give the indication of continuous presence.
90 Though Philipse’s claim that Heidegger puts forth a regressive view of history, as opposed to Hegel’s progressive view, may have some merit, pp. 170ff.
good beyond being. It is indeed more *Historisch* than *Geschichtlich*. Perhaps the best thing is to continue the investigation in the pre-Socratic—or early Greek—domain.
Chapter 2

Parmenides: Letting the Same Lie?

And how could what-is be in the future; and how could it come-to-be? For if it came-to-be, it is not, nor is it if at some time it is going to be. Thus, coming-to-be is extinguished and perishing not to be heard of. Nor is it divisible, since it all alike is; Nor is it somewhat more here, which would keep it from holding together, Nor is it somewhat less, but it is all full of what-is.

--Parmenides

‘Attuned not to me but to the Laying that gathers: letting the Same lie: the fateful occurs (the Laying that gathers): One unifying All.’

--Heidegger

But he has forgotten the simple constituent of phusis. He no longer hears it except through the voices of the logos: the paths he has already laid out within and on physis. It is from the path—which would not be had he not opened it—that what has always already given him air now comes back to him. The elementality of physis—air, water, earth, fire—is always already reduced to nothingness in and by his own element: his language. An ecstasis relative to his natural environment that keeps him exiled form his first homeland.

--Luce Irigaray

In the previous chapter we discussed the Ionian theory of opposites, describing a pattern of thought that initiated Greek cosmology but also undergirded the politics of emerging democracy. I suggested at least a formal homology between Anaximander’s

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2 “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50),” in Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy, David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi, trans. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 75. Hereafter EGT. This is Heidegger’s translation into “our language” of the fragment which reads in Kahn’s translation, “It is wise, listening not to me but to the report, to agree that all things are one” (ouk emou alla tou logou akousantas homolegein sophon estin hen panta einai). The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 50; XXXVI.
cosmos and Heidegger’s beings as a whole and described the basis of Heidegger’s ‘ethic’ as presented in “The Anaximander Fragment.” This is an ethic that does not distinguishably lift the human into prominence in the first instance. So we touched on this ‘elemental chôra’ and the ‘social chôra,’ and the way Heidegger’s thought seems to resist these distinctions. The main points were to show a certain kind of physics that leads to the notion of a plenum and to make on opening in the approach to pre-Socratic thought for a certain Socratic or Platonic strand of concern for the polis that will come to a fuller expression in the Timaeus. In addition to suggesting one reasonable description of the historical beginning of Greek philosophy, this picture of Greek philosophy emerging in chorus with public exigencies suggested a different idea of the nature of philosophy’s beginning that arises, as Vernant suggested, from human interaction with other humans rather than with things. Of course beginning with the distinction between humans and things effaces Heidegger’s ta eonta, beings in their Being, as the opening of Greek thought. The question at hand is whether Heidegger’s move eclipses important issues of the human and of the elemental in the world.

The particular point of human exigencies and their relation to the cosmos perhaps only comes completely into focus in chapter three, but for now we can read the difference in terms of the two notions of chôra I have taken as a guiding image: on the one hand, chôra interpreted either along somewhat cosmological lines as a movement or eccentricity within space itself that Sallis describes as spacing. Or on the other hand, chôra can be a primordial moment on the human plane, the self-deferral that

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approximates the moment before the other as elaborated by Levinas’ philosophy and its
priority even to the meanings given by Being.

In the present chapter, I will seek to develop a similar differentiation in relation
to Parmenides’ thought. For the next resounding moment of Greek philosophy occurs
further west, in Elea on the Italian Peninsula, and Parmenides is the major figure here.
In this chapter I want primarily 1) to examine how Parmenides thought about the
nothing sets the stage for atomistic cosmology that forms the main opposition to Ionian
physics, 2) consider Heidegger on Parmenides and the nothing to see how his
interpretation of the nothing might frustrate an elemental plenum and undercut the kind
of physicality that is the basis for the social plane, and 3) to attempt an alternative
reading of Parmenides to Heidegger’s, not through the lead word of alêtheia, but
through pîstis, trust. Considerable time will be spent on the poem, especially the
Proem, in part because in the Phaedrus Plato seems to be quite specifically echoing the
work of “Father Parmenides” and because it is important to the theme of trust I will
develop.

What can be said of Parmenides’ context generally, and of any political
overtones that sound out in proximity of Parmenides is sparse. Elea was a colony
founded by Phocaea, a north Ionian city, about 540BCE. The colonists had fled Ionia
before the advance of the Persians. Xenophanes spoke of sitting around the fire at
leisure asking, “What age were you when the Mede came?”4 Parmenides, whom
tradition alleged to be a student of Xenophanes, would not have an answer to this
question, for he was born twenty-five or more years after the founding of Elea.
Diogenes Laertius claims Parmenides arose from both good birth and wealth (*genous te huparchôn lamprou kai ploutou*, IX21). Curiously, Diogenes attributes to Parmenides the honor of being the first to declare the earth as spherical, perhaps as a result of his use of the sphere as an image for being, and said Parmenides set two elements as primary, fire and earth, the first functioning as craftsman (*dêmiourgou*), the latter as material (*hulê*). These Greek terms are found in Plato and Aristotle, and so may raise the question of anachronism. Proximity of the sphere and fire makes one think of the sun, which may have received special prominence in Parmenides thought, or which may have later been interpreted as important to his thought because of the image of Helios’ chariot I will describe as operative in the opening of his poem.

Tradition also alleges that Parmenides gave laws to Elea. Diogenes cites Speusippus as saying that “Parmenides is said to have served his native city as a legislator” (*legetai de kai nomous theinai tois politais*; IX23).\(^5\) Parmenides as lawgiver locates him in the tradition of the sage that we discussed in the previous chapter. In the opening of Parmenides’ poem, the goddess in her first greetings to the *kouros* (young boy) who has been brought to the domain of her instruction will say it is no ill fortune (*moira kakê* 1.26) that has accomplished this arrival but right and justice (*themis te dikê te*, 1.28). *Themis*, law, is derived from *tithêmi*, to place or put, the verb in Diogenes statement about Parmenides. What these facts and words say about Parmenides political role and views is uncertain. The role of lawgiver was a typical part of the duties of a sage. Heraclitus, like Solon and Parmenides, was also asked to put down

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\(^4\) *Xenophanes of Colophon. Fragments. A Text and Translation with a Commentary*, Jay Lester (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Fr. 22.
laws for his city. Heraclitus refused, however, thinking his fellow citizens too dense to benefit and going off to play ‘knucklebones’ with the children.\(^6\)

As far as text go, we have fragments of a poem by Parmenides, written in epic style, that begins with an account of a young man, kouros, being driven on a wagon to the gates of the path of night and day, where his escorts, the Héliades, daughters of the sun, persuade Dikê, justice, who is the keeper of the gate, to open the door to them. The wagon passes through and a goddess teaches the kouros. This dramatic setup to the poem is called the proem, and the text of it seems to be in tact as a whole. Following the proem one gets the teaching, in two parts, labeled Alêtheia and Doxa, truth and opinion/belief/appearance.\(^7\) Both of these sections are made up of fragments. The Alêtheia section of the poem describes the nature of eon/esti, what-is. The Doxa section offers a cosmology, difficult to piece together because of its fragmentary nature, but dominated in what text we have by an emphasis on light and the heavens, and aether. It also includes some ancient physiological speculations, pertaining especially to birth, not an insignificant fact given that the poem ostensibly rejects becoming. That the Alêtheia section describes what-is as beyond becoming and perishing has led interpreters to see it as a rejection of the kind of cosmology Anaximander and Heraclitus seemed to advocate. That the Doxa section then proceeds to describe just such a cosmology has proved a tremendous puzzle.

\(^6\) Diogenes, IX 2-3.
Proem.

The proem includes the introductory scenario of a youth, the narrator, being carried to the gates of the path of night and day on a wagon escorted by the Hêliades, the daughters of the sun. This proem will seem to figure into Plato’s myth of the soul in the Phaedrus, which depicts a chariot ride around the perimeter of the heavens. After the young man of Parmenides’ poem is allowed to pass through the gates of the path of night and day, a goddess announces the plan of the poem. She will instruct him about persuasive truth on the one hand and the doxas (beliefs, opinions, seemings) of mortals on the other. This opening section of the poem is variously interpreted as mere dramatic setting, mythical remnant, or rhetorical device in the service of a philosophical skepticism, but it provides a highly visual framing for the poem.8

The scene of the proem begins with movement, that which some claim Parmenides sought to deny. Mares carry “me,” the character who will be addressed as kouros, by the goddess, but who most interpreters take to refer to Parmenides. These horses take him as far as thumos might reach. Thumos gets translated by Gallop as impulse, but can mean any vehement passion. Heraclitus said, “It is hard to fight against passion (thumōi); for whatever it wants it buys at the expense of soul.” (D85;

7 The sections were labeled by the tradition, not Parmenides. See Patricia Curd, The Legacy of Parmenides: Eleatic Monism and Later Presocratic Thought (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 98, n.1.
Kahn CV). We will see in the *Phaedrus* that Plato describes the soul as a chariot with two horses that are opposites (*enantios*, 246B) in breeding, so driving a chariot is a difficult (*chalepê*) business, a case of passion interfering with soul. The gods in Plato’s myth on the other hand have two horses of good breeding, and so are able to make the drive in question easily and at leisure. We can presume that the horses drawing Parmenides’ *kouros* toward the gates of the path of day and night are of the type that transport the gods in the *Phaedrus*, for he is escorted by the *Hêliades*, thus emphasizing a sense of uniqueness for the *kouros* and his trip. He is not in the position of having to control his horses in order to attain the divine perspective.

This journey of the *kouros* occurs upon a route that Parmenides calls *poluphêmon*, which Gallop translates with the quite vague term ‘much speaking’ (1.2). Other possible translations are ‘abounding in songs and legends’ and ‘many-voiced,’ which Liddell-Scott clarifies “i.e. the agora (the ‘parliament,’)” a word originally from *parler*, to speak). One of these latter translations seems preferable, though since the path is not well-trodden it is hard to reconcile the isolation of the path with implications of the public square, unless it is in Heraclitus’ sense of *aristos*: “one man is ten thousand, if he is the best (aristos)” (49; LXIII). Here the many, the few, and the public square might coexist, after all the goddess in question is *Dikê*. In addition to being many-voiced, or possibly parliamentary, this path is of the *daimonos*, the goddess who carries everywhere unscathed the one who knows (*eidota*, knows, lit. have seen 1.3). In the myth of the soul in the *Phaedrus* the goal is also to see into the *hyperouranion*, beyond heaven, so as to glimpse the forms of self-control, justice, and the beautiful. We also recall that Socrates had his own external agent, a *daimon*, which often
restrained him and indeed does restrain him from leaving prematurely during his conversation with Phaedrus. His impulses are limited by the \textit{daimon}. If the limit of how far passion can carry one is the gate of night and day, perhaps the aether which gets so much attention in the \textit{Doxa} section of the poem, then something else is needed to transport the youth further, through the gate of night and day and into the beyond where right and law are seen. This something will seem to be persuasion.

The proem emphasizes the intensity of the action on the journey of \textit{thumos}, with the axles glowing red hot in the naves and giving forth the shrill sound of the pipe. Similar detail is included later when the doors in the gates of night and day are opened to the entourage. Furthermore, the youth had an escort, the \textit{Hêliades}, daughters of the sun. This reference to the \textit{Hêliades} hints at a mythological background for this poem, which, depending on whether one views myth as yet to be discarded remnant of primitive thought, or a conscious device for conveying thoughts otherwise unformulable (as Plato seems to use it), may be illuminating to the poem. \textit{Hêliazó} means to warm in the sun, but the middle voice sense is to sit in the court, since \textit{hêlaia} refers to hall of the chief law court in Athens, possibly the temple of Apollo/Helios in which the \textit{euthunoi}, “the highest guardians of the state,” were elected.\footnote{Walter Burkert, \textit{Greek Religion}, John Raffan, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 335.} So here is another possible reference to the locales of public life. The \textit{Hêliades} were the daughters of Helios (the sun) and Clymene. The reference for Clymene that seems relevant here is the Oceanid mother of \textit{Phaëthon} by Helios, the sun.\footnote{Heidegger and Fink speak of Helios in terms of the illumination of the \textit{hen}, in which \textit{panta}, all things find a place. \textit{See Heraclitus Seminar}, Charles H. Seibert, trans. (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1979), Ch. 3.} Walter Burkert includes Helios among the nature
deities, but says Helios was later consciously conflated with Apollo. His cult at Rhodes was celebrated in part by driving a team of four horses and a chariot into the sea, possibly representing the disastrous experience of Phaëthon, the brother of the Hēliades, who persuaded his father Helios to allow him to drive Helios’ chariot, the sun, across the sky. Similarly the kouros’ escorts persuade the goddess to open the gate of night and day to allow the chariot through. In the myth in question, Phaëthon could not control the horses and came too close to the earth, nearly setting it on fire. So Zeus killed him with a flash of lightning and hurled him into the river Eridanus. Eridanus is a river god on the banks of whose river amber was found. In the aftermath of Phaëthon’s disastrous ride, his sisters, the Hēliades or Phaëthonides, who had yoked the horses to the chariot for him, were metamorphosed into poplars and their tears into amber.

Again, in anticipation of the discussion of the Phaedrus in chapter four, we might remember that that dialogue takes place beside a river, beneath a tree that at one point may actually speak, though it is a plane tree rather than a poplar. In addition, in that dialogue the overbearing heat holds Socrates and Phaedrus in place for the bulk of the conversation. This intense heat is such as one would expect if the sun were to come too close to the earth as it did in Phaëthon’s journey. The conversation in the Phaedrus is intentionally marked in its duration by the need to wait out the midday heat, to wait for the sun to accomplish its journey across the sky. Just as Phaëtheon was unable to manage the horses, in the journey of the soul in the Phaedrus the measure of each driver

11 Burkert, p. 175.
12 Ibid., p. 120.
13 Ibid., p. 175.
is the ability to control the horses, particularly the horse of passion (the kouros’ wagon carries him as far as passion can reach), and thus have a smooth enough ride to come to understand the nature of justice, temperance and beauty. Finally consider the fragment from Heraclitus: “the sun will not transgress his measures. If he does, the Furies, ministers of Justice (Dikê), will find him out” (94; XLIV). Here it is Dikê who sorts out transgressions rather than Zeus (though the oblique cases of Zeus are formed off of the alternate form Dis), but justice is applied to the cosmos. Also the word for minister is epikouros, an assistant or ally, defender or protector. The Hêliades themselves get called kourai by Parmenides (1.9).

I would like to emphasize here one more potential link between Parmenides’ poem and the Phaedrus that pertains to growth of the soul. After describing what-is (being) as one, complete and continuous, Parmenides asks rhetorically of what is pêi kai pothen auxêthen (8.7), “how and from where could [‘what is’] grow.” The opening words, the beginning, of the Phaedrus are Socrates’ call to Phaedrus, poi kai pothen, now addressed not to what-is, Heidegger’s ta eonta, or to the kouros about what-is, but to a human being, about that person “to where and from where, Phaedrus.” “What is your path, Phaedrus?” The path Phaedrus happens to be on is beyond the well worn paths of the city, as the path the kouros travels is not well-traveled. The dialogue then goes on to discuss the soul’s progress and to make an issue of Phaedrus’ associations with the beguiling (much talking) speechwriter Lysis. From Plato’s perspective, which speaks of a good beyond being, a notion which the myth of the soul in the Phaedrus and the dialogue as a whole seeks to expound, the question that Parmenides asked about what-is, to where and from where might it increase, might be lifted to the plane of the
chariot ride, the myth of the soul’s glimpse to the beyond wherein the good might come to view. Thus Plato transforms Parmenides’ theme.

One could read this mythical motif from Parmenides as an issue of *psychê-agogy*, soul care, if one accepts the arguments of Pierre Hadot and Jan Patočka about the role of philosophy in the ancient world. Patočka’s characterization of the different responses of the soul to the *polis* characterized by Democritus (withdrawal) and Plato (engagement) might also suggest a way of linking the *kouros*’ skill at managing the chariot (condition of his soul) and his fitness for life in the *polis*—tending to *themis* and *dikê*, those forces which have dictated the good fate (*moira*, lot or portion) of the *kouros*’ arrival before the goddess.

Apollo’s court, associated with the sun, was where *euthynoi* were elected to be overseers in Athens, Burkert says of this event, which took place in the temple of Helios and Apollo, “The task of surveillance which is entrusted to the *euthynoi* corresponds to Helios ‘who sees over everything and hears everything’. Tradition and natural philosophy form two aspects of the one cult.” Oversight here seems applied to both *Dikê* and to the occupant (Parmenides, *Phaëthon*, Helios, Apollo) of that multiply-

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15 Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Michael Chase, trans. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002); Jan Patočka describes Plato as “a thinker who understands philosophy as a *living work* of someone who cares for the soul in thought and who avoids every final fixing of what he somehow advances, what he lays before us not just for acceptance or belief (belief in the sense of *doxa* [opinion/appearance]), but rather for examination, for further work.” *Plato and Europe*, Peter Lom, trans. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 96. Patočka’s situation adds a cruel twist to issue of the soul and the *polis*. Because of his political activities prevented him from having a teaching post and led to his disfavor among communist Czech officials, he presented the material for this book in private to a circle of interested friends and later died in the custody of the Czech secret police.


17 Burkert, p. 336.
determined site in the wagon, who the goddess says has a need to learn. The occupant
of the chariot, the narrator who says ‘I’ and whom the goddess addresses in the second
person, remains somewhat undefined, a blank space, something like the guest who will
be missing in the opening of the Timaeus, where the question in play is how to raise
good guardians for the city. One could attribute a political dimension to this structure,
the (relatively) open seat in the wagon being the site of the political overseer, the
question being, “who will deal or govern justly.” The fact that tradition claims
Parmenides was asked to put down laws for the people might suggest that his fellow
citizens considered him worthy to occupy that spot of oversight in the chariot.

While the occupant of the chariot, the kouros, would seem to have no direct role
in controlling the horses in Parmenides’ proem, the presence of the sisters of the
misguided Phaëthon as escorts for the kouros might suggest a situation of risk or
danger, that the ascent to the place of wisdom holds some peril. But it seems that unlike
Plato’s charioteers the narrator/youth is not in control of the chariot, for the mares carry
him and he is escorted by the Hêliades. Once there the same god, Dikê, who functions
in the Heraclitus fragment about the Furies keeping the sun within bounds, holds the
keys of retribution (amoibous, exchange, revenge, 1.14). Dikê, translated justice, means
even more so rights as established by custom or usage, or even custom or usage
themselves. In the next chapter we will see that one of Solon’s accomplishments was
to take retribution for crimes away from the clans and institutionalize them in laws that
were to conform to justice, hence to place the keys of retribution in the hands of Dikê
rather than clans, the law (themis) rather than blood. The theme of persuasion (peisan
1.16) appears here in the poem for the first time. Later in the poem forms of peith- are
predicated of truth; can we assume that the *Hêliades* speak truth to *Dikê* to persuade her to open the gate? For in Parmenides’ poem truth is persuasive, which seems to call for dialogue. But of course truth, or *alêtheia*, is what we seek access to, what the goddess promises to reveal. So it seems one must speak truth to get truth, or even risk truth, with trust.

Trust will become important to my interpretation of Parmenides’ poem. We see evidence of trust at various points. In fragment 8, lines 12ff, the strength of trust (*pistios*) will not allow any coming to be within what-is, and the absence of coming to be and perishing is secured by *Dikê*’s refusal to release the bounds in which she holds them. Soon *pistis alêthês* will be the agent that does not release things into generation and corruption (8.27f). The goddess will speak to Parmenides about *alêtheiês eupeitheos* persuasive truth (8.29). In response to the persuasion (*peisan* 8.16) of the *Hêliades*, the goddess *Dikê* opens wide the doorway which swings on carefully described brazen posts, and a gaping gap (*chasm’ achanes*, 1.18) appears. The maidens then drive the chariot through.

Now “the goddess” greets the *kouros* with pronounced hospitality and welcome, and tells him that his journey is not of ill fortune (*moira kakê* 1.26) but rather he has been sent down this rarely traveled path by *themis* and *dikê*, law and justice. *Themis* can refer to that which is laid down by custom, but in this setting the path to which *themis* has directed him is not customarily traveled by humans and so is not the tradition. Conducted by the *Hêliades*, Parmenides’ journey is already not typical of humans, but at the same time having been sent by law and justice, the journey pertains
to the human domain, though perhaps also to the cosmic domain, unless, of course, we interpret *themis* and *dike* as something other than law and justice, like Heidegger might.

The goddess (*thea*) greets the charioteer with the word *chaire*, which Heidegger translates “Blessing be bestowed on you.”¹⁸ The goddess tells the youth that she will explain all things, both, and the parallel is quite pronounced, the unshaken heart of well-persuasive truth (*énem alétheiês eupeitheos atrems étor*) and mortal beliefs, which contain no true trust (*ède brotôn doxas, tais ouk eni pistis aléthês*. 1.29-30). Mourelatos translates *alétheiês eupeitheos* ‘compliant’ or ‘faithful truth.’¹⁹ An important textual variant occurs in these lines which gives *eukukleos* (well-rounded) for *eupeitheos* (well-persuading). This difference will be addressed in the discussion of Heidegger, who relies on the ‘well-rounded’ reading.

**Interpreting the Poem**

Parmenides is often contrasted categorically with Heraclitus, such that he rejects Ionian cosmology outright. Sometimes this opposition between Parmenides and Heraclitus is framed in the shorthand of Being vs. Becoming. But it has more nuanced variations. Alexander Mourelatos argues that Parmenides aims directly at Anaximander’s definition of what is negatively, through *apeiron*. Anaximander defines things in terms of what they are not.

Anaximander’s fundamental cosmogonic statement, that a cosmos somehow emerges out of the *apeiron*, indicts itself as *panapeuthês*, ‘totally uninformative.’ Moreover, if there is contrariety and opposition within the cosmos, ostensibly the realm of the definite, the *apeiron* or negation infects the

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¹⁹ *Route*, p. 155.
cosmos and does not lie wholly outside it—unlike what Anaximander’s theory officially propounds.  

I will suggest that the relation between inside and outside is much more dynamic than Mourelatos allows, a feature that may have led Anaximander to talk of the divinity of the cosmos. In contrast to the strong role for *apeiron* Mourelatos introduces a Homeric image of this Parmenidean determinateness. The sea in Homer is boundless because unstructured, whereas islands are bounded.  

“This Homeric contrast of an island against the *pontos apeirôn*, ‘boundless sea,’ may well count as an aptly Parmenidean image of the contrast between what-is and what-is-not.” He calls this island-sea image “isomorphic” with the central image of fragment B8 where what-is is contained by bonds and within bounds (*en peirasin*). Thus the contrast is one of conceptual determinacy and indeterminacy.  

Patricia Curd, who acknowledges following Mourelatos for the most part, claims that the notion of *esti* at work in Parmenides’ poem is that of predicational unity. Most importantly this interpretation, which does not rule out numerical plurality, permits continuity between Parmenides and the pluralists who follow him. Indeed, in Curd’s interpretation, Parmenides looks like a proto-Atomist, giving birth to the pluralism of Anaxagoras and Empedocles, which comes to be further refined, following Zeno’s critique of divisibility, in Atomism’s modification of

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20 “Alternatives,” pp. 11-12.
21 Recall again Heidegger’s discussion of the use of the verb, *chôrei*, in a chorus from Antigone, “*chôrei* he [man] abandons the place, he starts out—and ventures into the preponderant power of the placeless waves. The word stands like a pillar in the edifice of these verses.” *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 153.
23 The main difference Mourelatos has with the standard interpretation is “one all-important addition: the attributes of what-is are obtained through a refutation not of plurality and difference as such but of contrastive-complementary characterizations.” “Alternatives ,” p. 10.
pluralism by making the basic entities indivisible. Thus we can recognize that Atomism
is in the Parmenidean trajectory as Curd interprets it, but also that Parmenides does
indeed at least precipitate a break with Ionian cosmology, which I am taking to be the
prototype for elemental or physical chôra as Plato speaks of it.

The traditional interpretation, on the other hand, numerical monism, sees
Parmenides denying not just becoming from nothing, but all change and differentiation
whatever, including the kind of rearrangement that typifies Atomism. Such an
interpretation is not surprising when we hear Parmenides saying that what-is (eon/esti)
is ungenerated (agenêton) and indestructible or imperishable (anôlethron), whole
(houlon), single-limbed (mounomeles, or only-begotten, mounogenes, the text is
disputed) and complete (teleston), without past or future but always present, one, and
continuous (suneches) (8.3-6). His argument goes on to describe the impossibility of
the transition from nothing to something, the absolute incompatibility of what-is and
what-is-not. Curd claims that this ontological monism is not Parmenides’ position.
However, in both versions of monism Parmenides’ most far-reaching formal structure is
most clearly an exclusive disjunction. Either ‘is’ or ‘is not.’ The questions arise
regarding what he applies this disjunction to, the whole of what-is, or whatever is to be
claimed as a basic entity.

The interpretation of any given commentator on Parmenides is typified primarily
in terms of what sense they attribute to the all-important Parmenidean verb esti, and its
participial/substantive form eon. The options seem to include the existential sense (‘is’
means ‘to exist’), the veridical sense (‘is’ means ‘to be true’ or ‘to be the case’), the
predicative sense (‘is’ means to be such as to bear one and only one predicate) or a
‘fused’ sense (existence and truth together), yet one also finds talk of a “completive” sense. Curd offers a challenge to what she views as the standard reading of Parmenides. The standard reading of Parmenides, typified in G.E.L. Owen, is that Parmenides called into question, using the nascent tools of rigorous logic, the efforts of the phusikoi prior to him, arguing that no change is possible. Parmenides is taken, says Curd, as a numerical monist, arguing that there is just one thing, so differentiation is not possible and thus neither is change. Logic dictates, says Parmenides in this view, that all is one and must remain as it is. The necessary assumption then is that what change we see must be illusion. Curd argues that this highly counter-intuitive view, drawn too much from Plato and Aristotle’s readings of Parmenides, is not accurate, but actually applies more appropriately to Melissus, whom she situates after Atomism. Parmenides argued not against change in general but against coming to be and perishing, that is, change in metaphysically fundamental substances.

If one interprets esti in the existential sense, Curd insists, then the standard interpretation follows. What exists is one and undifferentiated and therefore motion is, as Zeno demonstrated, impossible. With the existential interpretation of esti, one

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inevitably slips back into the standard interpretation of denying motion. One might note that such a reading assumes a substantialist view of existing. Existing in Heidegger’s sense of whiling, of coming to presence within the whole, would seem to allow an existential reading of esti and still have oneness without lapsing into atomism. Curd would probably consider Heidegger’s reading eccentric at best. If need be her interpretation could make sense along with Heidegger’s so long as Curd’s view was taken to represent the later, metaphysical in Heidegger’s sense of the word, tradition.

Instead of the existential sense of esti Curd argues for what she calls a predicational sense of esti. The predicational sense captures what must be the case if one is to make a statement about what is. Her predicational sense of esti leads to her claim about Parmenides’ position, what she calls predicational monism. “Predicational monism is the claim that each thing that is can be only one thing: and must be that in a particularly strong way. To be a genuine entity, something that is metaphysically basic, a thing must be a predicational unity, a being of a single kind (mounogenes, as Parmenides says in B8.4), with a single account of what it is; but it need not be the case that there exists only one such thing.”26 What is F must be all, only, and completely F. “One-beings,” she calls them. ‘Is’ means to be a thing, and metaphysically basic. The later term for this is essence, ousia, and Plato’s theory of forms “has Parmenidean roots.”27 We will have occasion to note below the criticism that the linking of being a thing and being metaphysically basic may introduce some confusion into her argument.

26 Ibid., p. 5.
27 Ibid., p. 5, n. 7.
In a predicational sense of *esti*, since there are no degrees of F-ness what-is must be continuous and cohesive. “Continuous and cohesive” no doubt lends itself to the spatial/existential interpretations of Parmenides. But as an example of what I think she means by predicational monism, I would offer the following suggestion about Plato’s forms and one of Plato’s two models of the elements, the geometrical one, which one could argue has taken to heart such a predicational model in relation to the physical world. (He also offers a linguistic, syllabic model that one could argue resists predicational monism, hides the elements from clear distinctiveness). Timaeus theorizes that the elements are geometrical shapes constructed out of two different kinds of triangles, one kind for earth and a second kind, in various combinations, for the other three elements. The elements are modifiable in scale; they can be larger or smaller (57), but they retain a decisive identity, because of their geometrical structure. They do not admit degrees of F-ness, even when admitting degrees of size, so their identities are not a function of their spatial extension, which we clearly make them ideas. We can note that this independence of the essence of what is, the forms, from their spatial location seems to fit the model of the forms in Plato and falls within the Eleatic domain, though the syllabic model of the elements seems to pick up a different strand of the tradition. But in regard to his geometrical elements Plato could be interpreted as having satisfied Parmenides’ concern for predicational monism, though, as we will see in Chapter 3, he seems to distance himself somewhat from his own theory. In addition, Plato’s model of triangles seems able to accommodate the transformation of the elements (at least fire, air and water) into one another without relying on an Ionian kind of dyad in which one
side is defined only as not the other, i.e., without committing the sin of appealing to ‘what-is-not.’ Transformation occurs through recombination of these triangles.

One virtue of Curd’s argument, as she rightly insists, is that it makes historical sense, setting Parmenides neatly in place within one quite reasonable reading of the tradition. The main point for Curd is that predicational monism does not necessitate numerical monism, i.e. Parmenides is not talking about the whole of all that is, but what it means for something to be or to be primary in the way that Thales claimed water was, or Anaximenes did air. Thus the fact that Parmenides’ successors (Anaxagoras, Empedocles and Democritus) promptly put forth pluralistic models ceases to be a puzzle in need of explanation by modern interpreters, but becomes quite natural. To bolster her case she points out how these successors see no need to justify their pluralism, but do, in fact, spend time making the case that their various entities are basic entities of the sort that Parmenides called for. In fact, Curd’s interpretation of Parmenides seems to make Atomism a natural expression of Parmenidean thought rather than positing of impervious but rearrangeable entities in a somewhat disingenuous effort to hold onto the change that is so obvious to our senses while accepting Parmenides proofs against any kind of genesis. In Curd’s view Zeno comes after the first Pluralists (Anaxagoras and Empedocles) and possibly between Democritus and Leucippus, and he critiques their philosophies not on the grounds of pluralism per se, but the divisibility of their basic units. “The details of the arguments seem to indicate that Zeno is arguing instead that whatever is extended and divisible, yet still supposedly

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28 Curd acknowledges the problems of dating Melissus. See p. 206, esp. note 72.
one, actually turns out to have contradictory characteristics.\textsuperscript{29} Atomism follows up as a correction of pluralism in light of Zeno’s arguments. I say that Curd’s argument makes historical sense, but more so in terms of the tradition that follows than the tradition that precedes, since it explains Parmenides’ relation to his predecessors in terms of his rejection or Ionian logic, but not so much the origins of his own logic. Also, the nuance of senses of the verb to be always strikes one as assuming a more articulated linguistic sense than one would expect of Greek culture, unless one situates the issue in terms of the linguistic understanding of the language itself, the more Heideggerian approach.

In contrast to Curd’s interpretation, the standard view finds Parmenides to be proclaiming all cosmology false, a fruitless and misguided activity. This view seems highly influenced by Zeno’s logical puzzles, and perhaps depends too much on the model of philosophical schools, the impulse to create sets of thinkers. In addition to proving philosophical positions that, according to Curd, Parmenides never held, Zeno’s puzzles might be interpreted as actually leaving one with an Ionian physics. If discrete division leads to contradiction, perhaps continuous, dependent opposition is an option. In the traditional view, as mentioned above, the \textit{Doxa} portion of the poem becomes problematic, a difficulty that Curd does not seem to overcome fully, in spite of the changes of interpretation she introduces. She will say of the \textit{Doxa}, “although it is deceptive, it serves as a model for a successful account of the world reported by the senses.”\textsuperscript{30} A certain sense of the confusion comes through in the following: “I shall argue that, while there is deception in the \textit{Doxa} (though not in the goddess’s account of

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 175.

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it), nonetheless the *Doxa* does not in principle renounce beliefs about the sensible world. For, although Parmenides argues that the sensible world alone cannot be the source of knowledge, he does not reject it completely."\(^{31}\) She goes on to say, “Parmenides conceives the possibility of an explanation of the content of sense perception that is grounded in what-is. While there is a difference between appearance and reality, there is the possibility of a relation between the two."\(^{32}\) Here rather than a discrete opposition we see a more dynamic relation posited between the two halves of the poem. Mortals have a problem because they take the sensible world to be the only one, a claim that echoes the comments from Heraclitus about hidden attunements in the midst of flux and the ignorance of those who fail to recognize them.\(^{33}\)

Curd notes that one potential problem for her view is the void in Atomism. For such an entity, or non-entity, would be difficult to accommodate to the Parmenidean legacy of refusing what-is-not. Clearly the Atomists accept the Eleatic prohibition of coming to be and passing away, which is firmly grounded in the rejection of what-is-not. If this were true then one would expect to find Atomist arguments justifying the void. She claims to find two such arguments in Aristotle, Simplicius, and Democritus’ fragments. The first argues that the non-divisibility of atoms require a void, the second is “a version of an *ou mallon* (no more) argument” that shows that void has a claim to what is, “for atoms are no more real than void."\(^{34}\)

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\(^{32}\) *Ibid.*, P. 100, n 8.
\(^{33}\) See Fr. 54, LXXX; ignorance is a repeated theme in Heraclitus. As an example cf. Fr. 34, II.
\(^{34}\) Curd., p. 184.
She finds an argument for atoms that may be from Democritus in Aristotle’s *Gen/Corr* 316a13-b16. An entity continually divided would end up as nothing, and then the fact that we have existent things suggests that there exists some uncuttable body. To the extent that bodies are dividable they contain void and are therefore composite. The doxographers are unclear about exactly why atoms are uncuttable, which means that the Atomists did not make much of a case for it. But the absence provided by the void appears to be crucial to the theory. Void plays a second, related role of separating things from each other, keeping the universe from being merely one large atom. Void separates composite objects from each other, another aspect of “void’s divisibility function.” These arguments show that void is necessary to Atomism, but not that it is real. To show it is real they turn to the *ou mallon* argument of Democritus B 156. But how this argument is supposed to justify the claim that void is real is not actually clear, she claims.

The *ou mallon* argument gets reported by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* I.4. It is designed to indicate parity between what is and what is not. Void must have a genuine and positive nature if it is to be knowable, rather than being the mere negation of the qualities of atoms. “One can claim to know a thing just in case one can state or express or identify just what something is, that is, just in case one can express its nature.” Curd’s argument seems to depend on the fact that she rejects the existential interpretation of *esti*, for void may be more likely to violate the prohibition against

36 *Ibid.*, p. 188.
38 “Hence they hold that what is not is no less real (*outhen mallon*) than what is, nor void (*kenon*) than body (*soma*),” (985b4-9).
what-is-not if what-is refers to existence, in which case void becomes unthinkable. But if the issue is knowability then arguments that claim the void is no less knowable than the atom have more foundation.

Indeed, a fragment from Sextus Empiricus on Democritus describes Democritus as saying there are two kinds of knowledge (gnôseis), one through the senses (aisthesiôn), which he calls bastard (skotîè) and the other through the understanding (dianoias). The bastard refers to sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and the genuine knowing is separated from this. Skotîè means dark or hidden and finds a social context in relation to erotic relations outside of marriage, and apparently in the issue of such relations. In the Timaeus Timaeus makes much of calling his cosmological presentation bastard knowledge—though not skotîè gnôseis, but nothos logos (52b). Perhaps this expression invokes Democritus. Democritus describes this lesser form of knowledge, which seems to be sensory, as being of convention, nomos, and repeatedly opposes it to atoms and void, which are real, though beyond the senses. We see how Democritus has overcome complementary opposites in good Parmenidean fashion in his most famous fragment: “By convention (nomôi) are sweet and bitter, hot and cold, by convention is colour; in truth (eteêi) are atoms (atoma) and void (kenon) . . . In reality we apprehend nothing exactly, but only as it changes according to the condition of our body and of the things that impinge on or offer resistance to it.”

Unlike Democritus, Heraclitus seemed to prefer the senses (“Whatever comes from sight, hearing, learning from experience (mathêsis): this I prefer,” 55; XIV, though he also speaks of the superiority

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39 Curd, p. 198.
of the hidden attunement “The hidden attunement is better than the obvious one” (80; LIV)). Heraclitus was also called obscure (skotos). In light of Democritus’ labeling sensory knowledge skotie, this appellation for Heraclitus may derive not so much from his lack of clarity as from his empirical orientation, his preference for skotie gnoses. According to Curd this distinction between the real and the perceived runs throughout Pre-Socratic philosophy. The real for atomism is not perceptible and since neither atoms nor void persist on the level of experience (nomos) they are equally as possible, or we could say, one is no more (ou mallon) preferable than the other.

Curd’s analysis is quite persuasive. One leaves it with one question. All of Parmenides’ explication derives from what she calls the fundamental krisis or judgment he puts forth: is or is not. One could say that the krisis here might be trimmed down even further to the ‘or’ itself, the insistence on a discrete opposition in the first place. It perhaps represents the birth of the law of the excluded middle. Curd suggests at one point that Parmenides is working here with the principle of sufficient reason to deny coming to be and passing away, so ‘not’ is never sufficient. Perhaps Heidegger, who will suspend the priority of non-contradiction, would say we have run up against the

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41 In the words of an epigram on Heraclitus reported in Diogenes, IX16. Diogenes’ own word for Heraclitus’ obscurity is asaphesteron and he suggests it was intentional on Heraclitus part so that after he died the know-it-alls could not dismiss him easily. Kahn is suspicious of Diogenes’ reports on Heraclitus because of Diogenes’ feud with the Stoics, who saw Heraclitus as their founder. Art and Thought, p. 5.
42 Curd, p. 199. John Sallis will challenge this distinction, following Nietzsche. He will want to bring sense (meaning) and sense (perceptual experience) back together, which may be a return to Heraclitus and amount to a refusal of the separation of the predicational and existential senses of esti. See Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), Chapter 7.
43 I.M. Bochenski focuses primarily on Aristotle regarding the origins of this idea. See section 7D, but also 2B in Ancient Formal Logic, (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1968).
question of being, a question that remains unanswerable if to answer means to give sufficient reason why something is (here) instead of nothing, to give Grund (giving ground, one cannot resist the play on chôrein as yielding Sallis will seem to want to work with it, bringing it into relation to Abgrund and abysmal thought, sense that contains nonsense within it). And why emphasize the ‘or’? Equally in regard to the question of why there is something, one must consider the alternative it posits, as opposed to nothing, which was cast in terms of void, but the existence of the void, as opposed to mere apeiron, seems dependent on Parmenides’ ‘or.’

The question of the void will stay with us. Bergson will distinguish in Time and Free Will between the qualitative and the quantitative and change the priority between them. Insofar as the quantitative requires separation between entities, and uniformity between entities, it would seem that Parmenides’ thought is implicated in its ascendancy, whether he intended as much or not. Bergson’s claims might represent a modern reversal of the priority given, first by Democritus, to the void, but a priority perhaps implicit in Parmenides’ krisis. We must note that Bergson might be construed as rehabilitating a French tradition. For in spite of his commitment to what is clear and

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44 Curd, p. 77.
distinct, Descartes denied the reality of the void in any absolute sense. “It is absolutely inconceivable that nothing should possess extension.”

If Curd’s predicational monism is an accurate enough reading of Parmenides, and if Parmenides thought determines atomism and much of what comes after, then it seems that lineage is determined according to a linguistic model. It is not accident that Plato will make his *chôra* silent, that the same word (*stroicheia*) is employed in Greece for letters and elements, especially atoms, and that Plato says the descriptions we can give of the elements in the *chôra* hardly make it to the level of syllables, let alone letters. Lingis will push us to reject such a linguistic determination of the world, and Sallis will struggle to try keep together the two meanings of sense (sensory experience and meaning). It may be, too, that Heidegger’s Being of beings, if Being is read in terms of the sense or meaning of beings as gathered up in language, may be prone to such a linguistic distortion as well. The cancellation of Ionian physics because it did sufficiently resemble language, would then need to be reconsidered.

**Heidegger on Parmenides**

In treating Heidegger’s approach to *Parmenides* I will focus on three aspects. First his ‘global’ entry point—*alētheia*, which in terms of Parmenides’ poem refuses the opposition between truth and falsehood that many find in its opposition between *aletheia* and *doxa*. Second, the role of the nothing in the earlier text, “What Is Metaphysics?,” as an attempt to bring Parmenides’ ‘what-is-not’ into relation with

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Heidegger’s thought. The nothing draws along with it the uncanny (unheimlich), which is situated in relation to the nothing in “What Is Metaphysics?” and to the daemonic in Parmenides. The question of the nothing will also bring us into proximity to the void and especially the rejection of the void by Bergson, which seems so important to Levinas. The question will be whether the dominant role the nothing plays in Heidegger’s thought skews the questions of the social relations and whether the exclusion of talk of the elemental in Heidegger that seems effected by this nothing leaves out important aspects of our experience of the world. Third, since I have been concerned with the relation between cosmos and polis in Greek thought as being to some extent continuous with Levinas’ understanding of the ontological and the metaphysical, I will ask whether Heidegger’s treatment of polis in Parmenides and its apparent subordination to Being, might be called, following Rainer Marten, the parochial nature of Heidegger’s philosophy.\textsuperscript{49} This reading of polis is of a piece with the priority of the ontological for Heidegger over what Levinas would call metaphysics, of existence (Dasein) over the existent.

\textit{THE WHOLE TRUTH}

What is at stake for Heidegger in approaching Parmenides can be clarified by Gadamer’s remarks on his differences with Heidegger on the interpretation of fragment 3: to gar auto noein estin te kai einai, translated either ‘the same is for being and thinking’ or ‘being and thinking are the same.’ According to Gadamer, Heidegger came

late in life to question his own interpretation of Parmenides on this point, which would seem to imply a concern on Heidegger’s part for accuracy that does not fit with his suspicion of what he called the interpretations of historiography. Gadamer prefers to take *to auto* as the predicate in the fragment, which equates to what A. A. Long calls the identity reading (identifying *noein* and *einai*), whereas Heidegger reads it as the subject, the non-identity reading—making them separate attributes of the predicate, which is “the Same.” Gadamer says,

> I can well understand why Heidegger wanted to hold onto the idea that Parmenides’ main theme was identity (*to auto*). In Heidegger’s eyes, this would have meant that Parmenides himself would have gone beyond every metaphysical way of seeing and would thereby have anticipated a thesis that is later interpreted metaphysically in Western philosophy and has only come into its own in Heidegger’s philosophy. Nevertheless, in his last essays Heidegger himself realized that this was an error and that his thesis that Parmenides had to some extent anticipated his own philosophy could not be maintained.

Notice here we get an indication of what is meant by the Same when it is opposed by Gadamer to metaphysical thinking, apparently equivalent to fixing the whole of beings in relation to one kind of being, which violates the sameness of the whole of beings.

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50 Long has based his analysis of Parmenides on this fragment, and what he identifies as the two possible readings of it, the identity translation deriving from Diels/Kranz, (mind and being are the same) and the non-identity translation, beginning with Zeller and favored in the English speaking world, “the same thing is there for thinking and being.” (“Parmenides on Thinking Being,” in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. XII, 1996, John J. Cleary and William Wians, eds., pp. 132ff). Long views the preference for the nonidentity reading as based on an assumption that Parmenides’ being is lifeless and mindless, an assumption he puts into question. Long’s argument that Parmenides’ cosmos was divine bears a similar tone to Heidegger’s description of the daimonia whose looking into the cosmos makes things shine. The whole question feeds into Levinas’ charge of paganism.  
51 Gadamer, p. 111.
From the start it is clear that his approach to Parmenides will not be historical in the scholarly sense of the term. Heidegger’s attitude toward historical inquiry can be seen in the following:

If the beginning is inexplicable, it is not because of any deficiency in our knowledge of history. On the contrary, the authenticity and greatness of historical knowledge reside in an understanding of the mysterious character of this beginning. The knowledge of primordial history is not a ferreting out of primitive lore or a collecting of bones. It is neither half nor whole natural science but, if it is anything at all, mythology.52

His own interpretation of Parmenides, a ‘questioning after’ in both senses of the phrase (chasing after its object, occurring after the given event) is not by any means a ferreting, but feels much more like the kind of leap he suggest in various places.53 Leaps seem necessary because, as Parmenides says, Being is one. Heidegger accordingly refuses to dissect being into its components, and refuses to do so with Parmenides’ poem. Rather he enters through Alêtheia, searching not for places to cut but for directives, and he refuses a strictly programmatic approach or the inclusion in the text of the disruptive device of an index.54 Instead one gets waves of recapitulations and ongoing rethinking of definitions. What I will call the unified interpretive starting point in Alêtheia represents at least on the face of it a legitimate agreement between the content of the poem (what-is is one) and the form of Heidegger’s analysis.

In contrast to other interpreters Heidegger undertakes to read Parmenides in light of what he considers to be the poem’s subject, alêtheia, or rather that in the poem

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52 *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 155.
to which we are subjected, since we cannot step outside of the Same that is addressed by Parmenides. One implication of this Same is that *Alêtheia* has, like Being, ‘nothing’ ‘outside’ of it. Hence, *Doxa* cannot be its opposite, as most interpreters of Parmenides assume, but must be part of it. We will see this to be true, as he refuses the opposition that governs logic, viz. true and false as equal and opposite terms. He speaks of *Alêtheia* as a unity and seeks directives for speaking about it, like the signs the goddess promises to the *kouros* of Parmenides’ poem (8.2). This approach follows what Heidegger describes as essential thinking, thinking things “in relation to the whole of beings.”

This is how Being must be thought if one is to avoid metaphysics. For to begin with a being, for example by finding one being to be *archê* and interpreting all other beings in light of it, obscures Being. It remains in the realm of comparing beings, the realm of logic, of a highest being, which can be established as highest by calculations in relation to other beings. Expressed even just linguistically, here ‘is’ becomes a mere copula to link pre-distinguished beings in relation and its meaning and its resistance to being put into its own copulative relation remain unexamined.

The general outline of *Parmenides* proceeds in relation to four directives that guide the interrogation of *alêtheia* translated as unconcealedness. First, *un-concealedness* implies a fourfold: what is concealed, by whom, from whom, and when, where and how is it concealed. Second, *un*-concealedness, which shows that truth contains a struggle, not just in the path to an ultimately clear and unambiguous truth, but struggle resides in the essence of truth. Third, one comes to see this conflictual

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nature of truth as manifest in the history of being. Fourth, *αληθεία* indicates the open space or the free as the clearing of truth.

As we might suspect this whole interrogation is inherently beyond subjectivity, for a subject thinking the whole would not be part of the whole and would thus have to fall back on thinking being in terms of the substance of what lies before it rather than the whole. Here is the same situation that dictates as early as *Being and Time* and “What Is Metaphysics?” the need to access the whole not through the understanding but through the mood of anxiety. It leads to his claim that the nothing (which we are related to through anxiety) precedes negation. How else could we negate what we do not have complete access to as an external subject?

I have been using as a crude but useful way to grasp Heidegger’s thinking here Parmenides’ image of what-is as a sphere. This sphere is well-rounded truth (*αληθείας οικύλεος*), and the goddess describes what-is as not divisible, but all alike, homogeneous, full of what is (*empreon estin eontos*) unbeginning and unceasing, unmoving held fast in the chains of a limit by strong necessity, complete, not lacking, “From every direction like the bulk of a well-rounded sphere” (8.25-43). For Heidegger, however, the necessity that holds is not logical necessity but the necessity of fate (*Μοίρα*), of *Schicksal*. Since it is entirely uniform this sphere offers no determining characteristics that could be taken up as a starting point, one might know the beginning only through its ending, or at least the linear determination of beginning and end is suspended, as Heidegger often says about our relation to the beginnings of western

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55 *Parmenides*, 117.
Thinking then has no privileged beginning (not even the *cogito*) that could yield what we call metaphysics. Hence the only path to Being is via the nothing, which seems to prove to be both outside the sphere (as the Stoics believed) and within (as Atomism claimed). The nothing will prove to yield the all. But rather than any material emptiness inside or outside the sphere, the sphere’s lack of differentiation seems to work out in Heidegger’s thought to equate with *lēthē*, hiddenness, or more precisely with openness as the closest (at which point the image of the spatiality of the image of the sphere gets in the way a bit). Because of this uniformity one cannot arrive at the Same by following a causal chain of links between beings, which would be precisely such distinguishing features within the *monogenous* (only begotten or one of a kind), uniform sphere of the what-is.\(^{57}\) One can only leap into Being. One does not traverse a definable course or path to being, which would be the kind of calculating and logic that reduces ‘is’ to a copulative connector of beings; rather, one leaps.

Hermeneutically, an analytic approach would seem to be at odds with an essential reading of Parmenides, a reading according to the whole of beings.

Heidegger himself emphasizes this image of the sphere even as late as 1964, in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking.” Quoting fragment 1.28-30, about the *alētheiēs eukukleos atremes étor*, he say, “*Alētheia*, unconcealment, is named here. It is called well-rounded because it is turned in the pure sphere of the circle in which beginning and end are everywhere the same. In this turning there is no possibility of

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\(^{57}\) *Parmenides*, 117.
twisting, distortion, and closure. The meditative man is to experience the untrembling heart of unconcealment."58

Curd calls the traditional reading of Parmenides “numerical monism,” the claim that there is just one thing, that what-is, being (eon), is one. Heidegger’s emphasis on the Same takes up this numerical monism to a degree, though of course not with a strict existential, as Curd understands the term, reading of esti. She argues for a certain sense of the term ‘being,’ the predicational sense. Heidegger, of course, made a career on the claim that being is always a question, which may mean that he would not, like the numerous projects that have crashed against the Parmenidean shores, hoist the sail of the veridical sense of esti/eon, or the existential sense, or some other definition of being that would seem to want to assume a standpoint over against being, its object.

Heidegger discusses the ease with which we equate eon and einai with the equivalents in our own tongue. These formally correct translations comprise movement across a space somehow defined, but do not reach the experience of being in the Greeks and so do not think being but yield “being-talk” (Seinsgerede) which drifts about and deceives. The confusion is not a result of poor scholarship among historians and philologists. Rather, “it arises from the abyss [Abgrund] of that relation by which Being has appropriated the essence of Western man.”59 The groundlessness of history, the

58 Joan Stambaugh, trans. in Basic Writings, p. 387. We note here the notion of the turning of this sphere, which is picked up in Parmenides in Heidegger’s examination of polis/polos (pp. 88ff), considered below.
59 “The Anaximander Fragment,” p. 25. John Sallis picks up on the image of hovering to describe the imagination, and abyss as abysmal thinking that takes place between earth and sky. Force of Imagination, p. 127. What else can one do when over an abyss but hover, if one is able?
unpiercable sphere of meaning in which we find ourselves, which gives us our Being, seems to follow from the unified starting point in *alêtheia*.

**WHAT IS NOTHING**

Important in Parmenides’ thought is the question of the ‘not.’ Later, Atomism seems to produce a void that is not the ‘not,’ insofar as it satisfies the criteria of what is under Curd’s predicational monism. The void would seem to be a ‘not’ if *esti* is read existentially, but if it is read predicationally the void, oddly, becomes something that is, since one can indeed make meaningful statements about it. Such an odd ambiguity appears in Heidegger’s reading of the nothing, too, an ambiguity intentionally cultivated as a strategy for avoiding a lapse back into dualistic thinking about being and nothing. Regarding the matter of Heidegger and the nothing, one can turn to the essay “What Is Metaphysics?”[^60] This essay also sets Heidegger apart from Bergson, who influenced Levinas.[^61] Bergson receives several references in the “Introduction” to *Being and Time*, where Heidegger suggests that Bergson’s notion of time is not radical enough.[^62] In terms of the nothing, one suspects that this means Bergson’s has not conceived temporality as the horizon of Being, has not thought the historicity of Being. We suspect that Heidegger’s nothing will be linked somehow to the temporality of *Dasein*, a temporality derived from or synonymous with the nothing that gives being, from which Being arises.

[^60]: The essay was delivered as Heidegger’s inaugural lecture to the Freiburg University faculties on July 24, 1929.
[^61]: For Bergson’s analysis of the nothing as a derivative notion see *Creative Evolution*, pp. 272-298.
In this essay Heidegger directly interrogates the nothing, which he says science ignores, when it proclaims its subject as ‘beings and nothing else’ (sonst nichts, weiter nichts, hinaus nichts). Presumably science ignores the nothing because it does not satisfy the rules of predication, though as Heidegger observes they seem to predicate meanings regarding it anyway. So meta-physics, which the essay pronounces itself to be interested in, must go beyond sciences and take up that question of that nothing, the (no) more than beings. In this rather clever way of establishing the nothing as a subject of discussion, by making positive what science uses negatively to delimit its subject matter, the nothing seems to be functioning for Heidegger as Being’s ambiguous other, ambiguous because it is not Being but is Being’s source. Note that the nothing and Being share this recoil regarding predication, which might be read as a certain Sameness. Science would seem the target here, but actually logic is. His

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63 *Was Ist Metaphysik?* Fünfzehnte Auflage, (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1943), p. 28. Hereafter *WIM?*
64 Herman Philipse calls it illegitimate (p. 11) and sees “What Is Metaphysics?” as part of what he calls Heidegger’s Pascalian strategy, a cryptic theological agenda begun in *Being and Time*, which represented a destruction of the tradition along the lines of the judgment under the ‘law’ (understood in Luther’s sense). “What Is Metaphysics? then becomes the invitation to grace, for being to turn to humans, but an invitation that was ineffectual. Heidegger turned then to Nietzsche, which led to the infamous Rector’s Address and an enduring attachment to National Socialism that Philipse interprets as religious. *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 180-9, 229, 239-244.
65 It is this assumption Levinas questions in the opening of *Otherwise than Being*: “But negativity, still correlative with being, will not be enough to signify the other than being.” *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, Alphonso Lingis, trans. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), p. 9.
66 But cf. this comment made fourteen years later: “if man did not already have Being in view, then he could not even think the nothing, let alone experience beings.” *Parmenides*, p. 146.
67 Stephan Käufer has argued that when Heidegger attacks logic he has in mind the Neo-Kantian logic of the late 19th century. “On Heidegger on Logic,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 34: 455-476.
thesis is that the nothing precedes the fundamental maneuver of logic, viz. negation, a move that puts limits on logic’s starting point, non-contradiction. We know this nothing first, and therefore can negate in the first place, because we experience the nothing through the mood of anxiety. As related to beings and nothing else, a peculiar submission to beings, science represents a kind of breaking in to the whole of beings. Much like Being, the nothing is not a being, a thing to which one can relate oneself. So to take up the nothing involves a kind of inversion (verkehrt) \(^{68}\) in a question that deprives itself of its own object and therefore the possibility of an answer. Nothing determined as an act of the intellect is a negation of the totality of beings (Allheit des Seindes). \(^{69}\) Such intellectual negating would seem to be what Bergson sees to be the extent of the nothing. It preserves the Cartesian autonomy of the intellect. Bergson would seem to be acknowledging what Heidegger calls the formal impossibility of the question of nothingness (it’s lack of an object), but this negation of the totality of beings gives a hint of where we might encounter the nothing (Nichts), since to be negated in the first place the totality of beings must be given beforehand as the whole of Beings (Ganz des Seienden). \(^{70}\) Heidegger contrasts accessing this whole of beings with finding ourselves within beings as a whole (Sichbefinden inmitten des Seienden im Ganzen). \(^{71}\)

The distinction between Allheit des Seindes and Seienden im Ganzen, seems to be the difference between Cartesian philosophy or traditional metaphysics and Heidegger’s approach to metaphysics. The first assumes a transcendent subject capable

\(^{68\text{ WIM?}, p. 30}\)
\(^{69\text{ Ibid., pp. 30f.}}\)
\(^{70\text{ Ibid., p. 32.}}\)
of comprehending the totality of Beings. The second cannot access the all beings except from within Beings. Heidegger suggests that such access is accomplished not by intellectual comprehension (the word itself implies a grasp of some object) but through attunement, or mood, and the privileged mood for such access is anxiety.

This business of anxiety is difficult to comprehend, which of course is precisely what Heidegger says about it; in fact, it is impossible to comprehend. Does anxiety require such a central place? And does it disclose the whole of beings any more than an act of imagination would? Anxiety is not about the nothing’s lack of determination, but is about the impossibility of determination. In the last chapter, in discussion of Heidegger’s notion of ‘whiling,’ how beings come to pass away in what Heidegger calls the jointure of the present, I linked this notion with a critique of the metaphysics of presence, what in the language of Being and Time referred to temporality as the horizon of Being. One might read this idea of the impossibility of determination in terms of this temporal horizon. The nothing would then be the temporality of Being. In fact, in later editions, at the discussion of the importance of Dasein’s nature being transcendence for its ability to relate to beings, Heidegger adds the note: “d.h. Nichts und Sein das Selbe.”72 This note aligns with his observation that for Hegel pure Being and the nothing are the same, because Being is finite and reveals itself only in Dasein’s transcendence (its being held out in the nothing). In the added note the copulative ist is missing, of course, as it must be. But this note seems to equate being and das Nichts, or rather, like Heidegger claims fragment 8 of Parmenides does, link them both to the

71 Ibid., p. 33.
72 Ibid., p. 38, note c.
Same. They are the same but not identical (copulated), Heidegger might say. The nothing of beings might want to take over for the Being of beings.

But one has to ask regarding anxiety as the way of coming before the whole of beings whether the issue might be more mundane than an all out encounter with beings as a whole in anxiety? Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest a different possibility:

“Our point of departure shall not be being is, nothingness is not nor even there is only being—which are formulas of a totalizing thought, a high-altitude thought—but: there is being, there is a world, there is something; in the strong sense in which the Greek speaks of to legein, there is cohesion, there is meaning. One does not arouse being from nothingness, ex nihilo; one starts with an ontological relief where one can never say that the ground be nothing. What is primary is not the full and positive being upon a ground of nothingness; it is a field of appearances, each of which, taken separately, will perhaps subsequently break up or be crossed out (this is the part of nothingness), but of which I only know that it will be replaced by another which will be the truth of the first, because there is a world, because there is something—a world, a something, which in order to be do not first have to nullify the nothing.”

Here the emphasis is not on totality but continuity. One suspects that the diminished role Merleau-Ponty affords for the nothing is a implicit rejection of anxiety in Heidegger’s sense. In chapter eight we will see Lingis take an approach such as this to Heidegger specifically, attacking the global aspect of Heidegger’s thinking that is justified by the language of nothing and anxiety. To some degree this questioning goes to the heart of Heidegger’s project as Herman Philipse has criticized it, describing being as a mysterious non-entity, suggesting that “there simply is no phenomenon called ‘being’ in any logical sense of the word,” which (as Philipse knows) is precisely Heidegger’s point. Philipse simply refuses to accept the limitation Heidegger places on logic. In this regard Philipse points out contradictions regarding Heidegger’s claims.

about the relation between Being and beings among the fourth and fifth editions of “What is Metaphysics?” In one Being depends on beings, in the another it does not. The point is that as with Being one is inclined to ask as well whether anxiety and its ambiguous object are real phenomena. The built in counter-response to such a question, that asking it indicates our forgetfulness, somehow itself validates Heidegger’s claim, but seems, as Philipse argues, to leave the whole matter beyond the bounds of critical assessment, which, again, may be Heidegger’s point.

The nothing does not reveal itself separately, but in and through beings as a whole, as one with it (in eins mit), and shows itself, in turning away, and so itself is subject to itself (das Nichts selbe nichtet). Put in temporal terms, Heidegger says that we are jederzeit zu spät in negating assertions of the sort logic begins with; the nothing always rises to meet us beforehand. So it seems that temporality and the nothing adhere to each other.

From the start we can link this discussion to Heidegger’s treatment of the Anaximander Fragment. This sliding away seems to be akin to the linking of genesis and phthora by a hyphen Heidegger inserts between the two terms. This hyphen seeks to mirror the jointure that Heidegger talks of to describe whiling. Presence ceases to be linked exclusively with the present moment and the objectification of things that results.

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74 Philipse, pp. xii-xiii, 33, 386.
75 Ibid., p. 36.
76 “WIM?,” p.37. Later one gets the subjective/objective genitive (hence middle voice) Nichten des Nichts, p. 40.
77 “If Becoming is, then we must think Being so essentially that it does not simply include Becoming in some vacuous conceptual manner, but rather in such a way that Being sustains and characterizes Becoming (genesis-phthora) in an essential, appropriate manner (seinsgemäß im Wesen).” “The Anaximander Fragment,” p. 31;
Instead, beings appear in the whiling that is the hinge between the past and present, in a manner that could almost be compared to a photographic negative, or at least an inversion, of Being as presence. In fact Charles Scott picks up the notion of turning in his analysis of the Anaximander Fragment, where he goes even further than Heidegger and links *genesis* and *phthoron* as one word, omitting the hyphen entirely. “Beings belong to the dispensation, to the turning, of the hinge.”78 These turning beings have no longer the sense of presence, but rather their lingering is described as an accent.79 Of course, the notion of turning, that arises in the face of the nothing, represents movement that is not movement across a grid. It is more like a turning of a sphere, but if a sphere has not differentiation on it the turning does not yields itself to demarcation and measurement. Of course, this turning echoes the turning of the whole, like the *polis*, we will see, is described as such a turning. No doubt this turning repeats the turning of the day, or the sun in the sky that first marks time, or at least lets time shows itself. But this turning of the day in some way marks historicity as well, the historicity of the west as land of evening and Greece as a dawning of an epoch we live in.80 This turning is the tragic. Being is inherently tragic, the question character of the appearing disappearing that marks our being. This tragic character is, however, “beyond our sight.”81 Thus, much rests on this turning. Beings turn in the nothing, and Being turns, both might be said to have the motion of sameness. How do we encounter this turning?

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79 “Anaximander Fragment,” p. 44; Advantages, p. 65

80 Ibid., p. 17.

81 Advantages, p. 63.
In “What Is Metaphysics?” the relation of beings as a whole comes through in the interplay of two verbs, *abweisen* (turn from) and *verweisen* (refer to). The two together seem to describe something like averting referral as the way beings in themselves and the Being of beings hold in anxiety. The notion of turning toward comes through. The nothing of beings would certainly account for all the talk of astonishment that Charles Scott feels before beings, perhaps the same thing Heidegger meant by beings turning toward us in their departing, or averting referring, the giving reck to one another that was the relation between beings whiling in temporality described in “The Anaximander Fragment.” In his peroration to “What Is Metaphysics?” he speaks of the total strangeness (*volle Befremdlichkeit*) of beings that comes over us. Attunement is an event in which beings slide away from us, cease to occupy our attention. But in this sliding away they turn (*kehren*) toward us. Scott speaks of “wordless experiences of wonder in which a mountain or a human face or an infinity of other things stands out with awesome singularity and power and escapes conceptual grasp.” Astonishment is such a feature of the encounter with beings that it extends all the way to “a plastic spoon, litter in the street, a McDonald’s sign, or a pimple.” Quite the unlike Irigaray’s complaints that Heidegger loses substance, the astonishment Scott speaks of has a “physicality, contingency and worldliness.”

Beings, says Heidegger, in anxiety are the strange, the other par excellence, and so at least potential objects of ‘ethical’ regard. This ethics comes not from an infinite but

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82 *The Lives of Things* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2002), Ch. 1.
83 “WIM?,” p. 44.
84 *Lives of Things*, p. 3.
85 Ibid., p. 4.
86 Ibid., p. 6.
from the encounter with nothing in anxiety. This strangeness comes from the fact that it is a being and not nothing, which would seem to be astonishing. So nothing becomes the original openness in which beings stand out, perhaps by the kind of inversion that the jointure of “The Anaximander Fragment” spoke of. We see with the mention of original openness (ursprüngliche Offenheit) the intimate connection with Heidegger’s analysis elsewhere, especially in Parmenides, of αlētheia. In what one might call, in conventional speech, were it allowed, an ethical moment such beings in the open become the supreme other (schechthin Andere) in the nothing. Beings stand out in their Being in the nothing, so that Being and the nothing seems the Same.

I must say that the description here is compelling, so much so that it can lead one to look at even a pimple differently. Things do have a certain, to borrow language from the tradition, haecceitas or sense of tode ti, which at the same time arises only because they are a part of a world, or to put it in Heideggerian terms things do thing

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87 Derrida, who is mounting in effect a defense of the Same (not even the face is beyond language), questions whether one can distinguish the infinite and the nothing so absolutely. “Violence and Metaphysics,” in Writing and Difference, Alan Bass, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 113f.
88 “WIM?,” p. 37.
89 Ibid., p. 37.
90 Note that in the “Introduction to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’” (279; WIM?, p. 10) of 1949 the nothing seems to give way in favor of the image of ground and Being itself displaces the nothing. One no longer interrogates but recalls (andenken). Also here the distinction between philosophy, for which metaphysics is legitimate object of concern, and thinking, which goes beyond metaphysics to recall Being itself (Sein), or the Ground in which the root (metaphysics) of Descartes’ tree grows (Pathmarks, p. 279; WIM?, p. 9). A root in the soil seems to replace Dasein as Being dangled in the nothing, later modified to be non ground (Nichtgrund, Grund) (Pathmarks, p. 279, note a; WIM?, p. 9, note b. The double strikethrough serves for Heidegger’s device of crossing words out with an ‘X’). Now in 1949 the nothing seems to become the unthought. Metaphysics, from which the truth of being is hidden, has become something to be moved beyond and the Western tradition of metaphysics is now fixed as beginning already with Anaximander (Pathmarks, p. 280).
This sonority may apply to elements as well as to plastic spoons. But again, is the nothing and anxiety essential to this sense of graced individuality? And does this formulation, as many we will shortly discuss have suggested, sacrifice important phenomena, like the plenous continuity of existence, and the uniqueness of beings called human, uniqueness for purposes other than letting beings come to light? Heidegger seems to think it is, for he claims that without this structure of transcendence (Dasein held in the nothing, the placeholder of the nothing) Dasein could relate neither to beings nor to itself.92

One of the questions here for Heidegger has to do with the nature of the attunements or feelings/moods that come to bear in his thought. He speaks first of the attunement of boredom, where whatever we are bored with becomes secondary and the boredom rules, then of love. He speaks of joy, which might make our ears perk up in anticipation of a discussion of jouissance in Levinas. However, joy finds second place, or lower, to angst as the attunement par excellence. Later he will make it clear that anxiety stands alone, above joy and enjoyment. “The anxiety of those who are daring cannot be opposed to joy or even to the comfortable enjoyment (Vergnügen) of tranquilized bustle. It stands—outside of all opposition—in secret alliance with the cheerfulness and gentleness of creative longing.”93 Enjoyment in this formulation sounds like something to be linked with the stultifying domain of das Mann, which seems precisely to rule in the forgetfulness of anxiety. The public (öffentliche) domain

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91 See “The Thing,” in Poetry Language Thought.
92 “WIM?,” p. 38. This point represents what Philipse has called the transcendental, Kantian leitmotif of Heidegger’s thought, an early motif. Philipse, pp. 121-51.
seems, for Heidegger, to be inauthentic, a turning away from the nothing.\textsuperscript{94} Similarly, in \textit{Being and Time} the most acute encounter with the human other occurs in the they, in the moment of comparison between oneself and others that seems to constitute the conditions of the phenomenon of das Mann. Again, the phenomenon of death, the “ownmost non-relational possibility” of Dasein that calls one out of one’s inauthentic dispersal in the public realm, seems in play here.\textsuperscript{95} As Heidegger says in \textit{Being and Time}, “Everydayness confines itself to conceding the ‘certainty’ of death in this ambiguous manner just in order to weaken that certainty by covering up dying still more and to alleviate its own thrownness into death.”\textsuperscript{96}

As was made clear already in \textit{Being and Time}, section 40, in “What is Metaphysics?” angst is not anxiety over something determinate, but is precisely not determinate. Anticipating what he will say almost twenty years later about the \textit{daimones}, the lookers, Heidegger then says that in their sliding away from us things turn to us, in a different way, where one has no hold on things. These things would seem to become non-possessable in their turning away. Concomitant, says Heidegger, with this slipping away of beings, we who are in being slip away from ourselves. “You” and “me” dissolve here, leaving only someone, the \textit{einem} for whom \textit{es} (the slipping away of beings) is \textit{unheimlich}.\textsuperscript{97} Death is of course non-relational. It seems to even destroy our everyday relations to or understandings of ourselves—“me.” Levinas might say the dialogical context has been neutered. This primordial experience

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{WIM?}, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 299-300.
\textsuperscript{97} “\textit{WIM?},” p. 103; \textit{WIM?}, p. 35.
depersonalizes you and me, makes to dissolve the difference between the first and second person pronouns that defines the infinite relation for Levinas.\textsuperscript{98} In being toward death, Dasein is “face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concernful solicitude, but of being itself, rather in an impassioned \textbf{freedom towards death}—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious.”\textsuperscript{99} No wonder that anxiety suspends ‘you’ and ‘me.’ For Levinas, death plays a significant role, too, but the death of the you. If face is the ‘thou shalt not kill,’ then the ethical moment before the death of the other is the fundamental human experience—you and me (precisely the accusative ‘me’ rather than ‘I’). As in anxiety over the nothing beings stand out in their being for Dasein, so death singularizes Dasein itself. Which experience marks the human, or the mortal? Does anxiety individualize,\textsuperscript{100} or responsibility? Is Levinasian responsibility what Nietzsche might call pathological guilt, or a continuing immersion in everydayness or metaphysics in Heidegger’s sense of the word? This moment would no doubt mark Levinas’ most significant difference with Heidegger, indicative of how ontology, concern with existence, loses individuals, existents, the other, not to mention his contentious implication that Heidegger’s approach itself is somehow murderous. In chapter six I will discuss the fallout of these questions among several current thinkers.

We can see in “What is Metaphysics?” a difference between Heidegger’s treatment of the uncanny and his treatment in the later lectures on Parmenides. Here things turn to us and become uncanny to reveal the nothing. In \textit{Parmenides} the uncanny


\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Being and Time}, p. 311. Emphasis original.
is associated with the daemonic looking into the world and thus causing things to look back at us. Even if we acknowledge that the gods have flown, as does time, something different than the nothing understood strictly temporally seems in play here. Jeff Malpas has suggested that Heidegger moves at a certain time in his career from an emphasis on temporality to an emphasis on place as the horizon of Dasein.\footnote{101 “Heidegger’s Topology of Being,” Lecture presented at Murdoch University. November, 2003. See also Otto Pöggler, Martin Heidegger’s Path of Thinking, Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber, trans. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1987), pp. 227ff. Pöggler’s description, I think, highlights the continuing decisiveness of historicity for the ‘emplacement’ that defines topology of being. See p. 230.} In “What Is Metaphysics?” Dasein’s transcendence as its relation to the nothing is still bound up with temporality as the horizon for Dasein’s being. In Parmenides two emphases suggest such a turn away from temporality. First the emphasis on polis as the topos of being would be in accord with a shift away from temporality and nothingness. Second, the uncanny seems to move from being a result of beings slipping away into nothingness to being associated with the looking in of the lookers, the gods, who look at us through the things of the world. Of course, time pervades the distinction between gods and humans, in so far as humans are defined as mortals. And the shift of emphasis from temporality to place would seem to be of a piece with a change from the nothing as disclosing beings in their uncanniness to the daemonic, disclosing the uncanniness of things in the world. Heidegger even refers to the open as “the unconcealedness that first releases objects into an objectivity as the free, without which not even the nothing could rise up in its excessiveness and brandish its menace.”\footnote{102 Being and Time, p. 310.} Perhaps what Heidegger sought to accomplish by means of temporality he could later achieve instead with the
combination of the gods who look in and the definition of humans as mortals, the play of the fourfold. David Farrell Krell comments, “Heidegger’s preoccupation with ‘the holy’ is indeed discomfiting. I too get dizzy in ‘the mirrorplay of the Fourfold,’ which is a bit like being ‘Lost in the funhouse.’ Yet it is wrongheaded to confuse Heidegger with holy pictures. For him the holy has to do with the daimonic, the nothing which finite transcendence must confront in anxiety.”

Heidegger will later come to talk of time-space and say, “The attempt in Being and Time, section 70, to derive human spatiality from temporality is untenable.” If there is a shift in Heidegger from fixing the nothing strictly in relation to Dasein’s projective temporal character to a focus on topos and the gods as the uncanny looking in to a place, a shift that made Levinas celebrate Gagarin’s flight beyond place, then the polis as Heidegger reads it (linked with pelein, to be) would be such a place.

The end of this chapter will raise a different attunement, trust, and in chapter six Irigaray will suggest that Heidegger omits the human (and cosmic) force of love. In light of this notion of love, one last observation arises about “What Is Metaphysics?” before we turn to Heidegger on the polis. In “What Is Metaphysics?” Heidegger says,

No matter how much or in how many ways negation, expressed or implied permeates all thought, it is by no means the sole authoritative witness for the revelation of the nothing belonging essentially to Dasein. For negation cannot claim to be either the sole or the leading nihilative behavior in which Dasein

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102 Parmenides, p. 161.
remains shaken by the nihilation of the nothing. Unyielding antagonism and stinging rebuke have a more abysmal source than the measured negation of thought. Galling failure and merciless prohibition require some deeper answer. Bitter privation is more burdensome. This passage appears to be a bit of an outburst, and the temptation arises to treat it in terms or Bourdieu’s sociological analysis, which discusses Heidegger’s feeling of social stigmatization due to the class structure of German universities in his day, his feelings of difference as a student in Constanz and his resentment over his financial dependence on the Catholic church for his education.\textsuperscript{105} If one were to think of Philipse’s claims, mentioned above, that Heidegger’s inaugural lecture was an effort to provoke a religious event among his German listeners that never happened, one might even want to point out the resentment in Germany at this time about what were regarded as the betrayals of the First World War and the treaty of Versailles. These kinds of questions, which we seem forbidden to ask by Heidegger’s own method, remain speculative. But nonetheless the tone of the negative experiences described, almost like Greek eponymous deities, is startling.\textsuperscript{106} Be that as it may, most interesting is that Heidegger moves to the domain of social relations to describe an “authoritative witness for the revelation of the nothing.”\textsuperscript{107} It is interesting to note in passing here the description from \textit{Being and Time}, of how ‘the They’ arises. ‘The They’ seems constituted by similar kind of negative social relations, a nervous care over the way in which one differs from others that causes one in turn to be subjected to others.\textsuperscript{108} Krell says that in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[106] “Introduction to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’” it itself ends on this same note, remarking on the manifold attacks (\textit{vielfach bekämpfte}) the original lecture has been subjected to by 1949 (\textit{Pathmarks}, 290; \textit{WIM?}, p. 25).
\item[107] “WIM?,” p. 107.
\item[108] \textit{Being and Time}, Section 27.
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the end “Heidegger offers little constructive insight into matters of human
community.” It does seem that much of Heidegger’s opinion about community is
negative.

Levinas suggests speculatively at several points in interviews that the face to
face relation might be the origin of the idea of a straight line—a mathematical idea
derived from a social experience. In this quote from Heidegger, the nothing as
disclosed by “nihilative behavior—forces in which Dasein bears its thrownness without
mastering it,” are not mere negations but evidence of the priority of the nothing.

“The saturation of existence [Dasein] by nihilative behavior testifies to the constant
though doubtlessly obscured manifestation of the nothing that only anxiety originally
reveals.” This saturation seems to go beyond ontological tragedy to a social
pessimism. It is at this point that he goes on to claim the greater perspicacity through
anxiety than joy and enjoyment. Anxiety stands outside all opposition. Enjoyment we
would expect does not, which means that for every enjoyment there is a frustration,
rather than as with Levinas frustration is not possible without the prior reality of
enjoyment.

Perhaps we can, with Caputo, who wants to supplement anxiety by pain and
kardia, without necessarily rejecting the analysis of anxiety outright, like Levinas
seems to do, add other fundamental feelings, if not moods, such as the trust that I will

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109 *Intimations of Immortality*, p. 142.
110 *RtB*, pp. 127, 135.
111 “WIM?,” p. 108.
113 “Suffering is a failing of happiness; it is not correct to say that happiness is an
absence of suffering.” *TI*, p. 115.
suggest at the end of this chapter, through attending to Alphonso Lingis’ reading of it, is
the starting point, a social plenum like the material plenum that is elemental. Heidegger
would probably say that trust is not of the same domain as anxiety, but rather is more
like fear. Trust taken ontologically might put one too far into a theological orbit along
the lines of a Schleiermacher. This is not my goal here. Anxiety and trust may be
incomparable with each other and to introduce an attunement that takes an object may
violate the Sameness of beings as a whole (Levinas’ goal indeed!), but if that is so, it is
ture because of a prior philosophical diminishment of the realm of human sociality.

Heidegger ends “What is Metaphysics?” with a quote from Plato’s *Phaedrus*,
aimed to make the case that humans are always already metaphysical in their very
existing. “For by nature, my friend, man’s mind dwells in philosophy.”

Perhaps it means nothing that this quote is taken out of context and for want of a definite article it
distorts Plato’s meaning away from a particular existent to existence. Socrates is
speaking not about humans (*anthropoi*) but about Isocrates, whom he claims is a better
speechmaker than Phaedrus’ lover Lysias and who may even turn to philosophy,
because “by nature some philosophy is in the mind of the man (*tou andros*, 279a).” The
man in question is a particular man who, apparently *unlike* other humans, including
Lysias, has philosophy in his mind. The difference may be in accord with Heidegger’s
criticisms of Plato, but then why quote Plato? Heidegger seems to substitute for this
one existent the human as existence, as transcendence, always already exposed to the
nothing. One might ask if this textual divergence cannot really be entitled by talking

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114 Demythologizing Heidegger (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 69f. Also see pp. 128f.
115 “WIM?,” p. 112.
about the address of Being through the text. This philosophy Plato sees in Isocrates’
mind, mentioned now at the close of the dialogue, after Socrates and Phaedrus have
completed in their own discursive way the circle about the perimeter of the heavens, has
something to do with what they saw there—justice, temperance, and beauty. From what
we can tell, Heidegger would see nothing in the hyperouranion, which is to say that
ethics, justice, politics follow after the question of Being and even are ethos, culture,
usage, or as Democritus said, nomos, convention.

**PELEIN/POLIS**

I have suggested that Heidegger works very hard to present an essential reading
of Parmenides, taken in light of the whole of beings. The reading is unified in terms of
what we might call the content of reading insofar as it does not seek to understand
Parmenides’ descriptions of what-is by way of decomposition but rather questions
alētheia as a single twofold. I turn now specifically to the question in Heidegger of
what I am calling the social chôra and its relation to Being, which would seem
effectively synonymous with chôra for him. Heidegger seeks to offer a unified
reading as well by his comments on our relation to Parmenides, a relation understood as
the history of the occident. Parmenides is at the beginning of this history, and we
latecomers are still trying to catch up to that beginning (Heidegger’s task), which has
now become the end (goal) which we are beginning to approach. This historical sweep
of Heidegger’s reading is what he seems to be getting at with his analysis of polis. The
history of the west, including the political history happening around him in 1942,

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116 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 66.
happens according to the dictates of Being, the third directive he finds in Parmenides’ thought. But perhaps we can strive for a more unified interpretation of Heidegger by taking into account the political context in which he is speaking.

Under the curious heading “A Technical Remark,” Manfred Frings points out the situation in which Heidegger delivered his Parmenides lectures in the Winter Semester of 1942/1943. “This was a time when the odds of World War II had turned sharply against the Nazi regime in Germany. Stalingrad held out and the Germans failed to cross the Volga that winter. Talk of an impending ‘invasion’ kept people in suspense. Cities were open to rapidly increasing and intensifying air raids. There wasn’t much food left.” Frings concludes, “it is amazing that any thinker could have been able to concentrate on pre-Socratic thought at that time.” Note that the situation is one of suspense, which should make it seem quite natural to Heidegger, since the Schweben describes situations appropriate to the metaphysical human in Was Ist Metaphysik? Perhaps if it was a time of suspense and these decisive events have their beginning in Greece it would seem ideal for treating Pre-Socratic philosophy, assuming that Heidegger is really doing so.

On the face of it Heidegger’s treatment of polis in Parmenides seems to want distance from the war, which one might expect, since polis drifts loose, in Heidegger’s analysis, from the political. In fact Caputo proclaims, “Heidegger left the question of Being in a state of utter mystification about ethico-political matters,” though Caputo

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117 Frings, p. 15.
118 P. 45.
119 Caputo, p. 6.
certainly keeps a loose grip on tradition issues of ethics and politics. For Heidegger, *polis* makes the political possible but is not the political. War would seem to include the political, whether one accepts Clausewitz’s definition of the relation between war and politics (war is politics conducted by other means), or Foucault’s reversal of it. Heidegger derives *polis* etymologically from being, in the more obscure Greek verb for being, *pelein* (to be). So moments in history, such as war and the current war do not reach the heart of *polis*, read through *pelein*, which means, as he will say shortly, the question under which he and his audience lives is not one of the political fate of an historical people but a primordial decision between Being and not-being. Perhaps the confusion of politics with *polis* arises, first, from the fact that one of the features of *alêtheia*, the second directive that Heidegger highlights, is *alêtheia*’s connection with strife, and, second, from the Heraclitean undertone of the lecture, insisted on by Frings, that causes one to read this strife in light of Heraclitus’ famous pronouncement *polemos pantón patēr*, war is the father of all (Fr. 53; LXXXIII). We might link *polemos* and *politeia*, war and politics, with *polos* and *pelein* in Parmenides’ fragment.

I call Frings’ heading “A Technical Remark” ‘curious’ because, having invoked the context of the war, the heading seems to want already to execute a dual action by then separating off the political setting from the lectures, marveling at Heidegger’s

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120 Cf. pp. 187ff. I have pointed out Scott’s embrace of this drift, captured in the title of his book, *Advantages and Disadvantages*.
122 *Parmenides*, p. 162.
124 Frings, p. 16.
obliviousness of the war around him. But Heidegger’s writings do not seem unequivocally indifferent, if not oblivious, to war, or at least the climate of war around him. It would make an interesting study to contrast the somewhat biting, snarling tone in 1935 of *Introduction to Metaphysics* and its talk of the centrality of violence with the contrite tone of the post-war *What Is Called Thinking?*, that begins with images of the inclining toward one another of what is thought and what is to be thought.⁴¹²⁵ In the former, lectures from 1935, the human is called “the violent one, the wielder of power.”⁴¹²⁶ In 1935 all violence is uncanny,⁴¹²⁷ a term that in 1929 was linked with the nothing, but is given a theistic sense in *Parmenides*, where the uncanny is linked to the daemonic and the gods. Thus given the fact that the uncanny can be violence and the divine, *Ares* may lurk in the background in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, which would seem true to properly Greek thought. Yet after the war, in *What is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger says, “Any kind of polemics fails from the outset to assume the attitude of thinking.”⁴¹²⁸

These somewhat tentative observations do not set Heidegger in the chariot with the war god. But they do suggest that he was not oblivious to the tone of the community, the polis, around him. In his favor, it is worth noting in these lectures on Parmenides what seems to me to be a clear differentiation from the Nazi rhetoric of Volk when he claims that this idea is not possible without Cartesian subjectivity. “As

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⁴¹²⁵ E.g., “Only the tired latecomers with their supercilious wit imagine that they can dispose of the historical power of appearance by declaring to be ’subjective,’ hence very dubious,” *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 105; *What Is Called Thinking?*, p. 3.
⁴¹²⁶ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 157. Violence is only apparent in the Anaximander fragment, a function of the nature of the translating of thinking poetizing and the fact of how we are “bound” to our language. EGT, p. 19.
long as we know with insufficient clarity the proper essence of subjectivity as the modern form of selfhood, we are prey to the error of thinking that the elimination of individualism and of the domination of the individual is ipso facto an overcoming of subjectivity.”¹²⁹

While Frings sees these lectures in Parmenides, which take place in the very significant time between Introduction to Metaphysics and What is Called Thinking?, proceeding with little acknowledgement of the political circumstance, various statements ring with tones that are political in a broader sense, such as his comments about the way in which Being gives itself to be understood more primordially in the third (current) epoch of the occident. “This more original beginning can only occur as the first beginning to a historical people of thinkers and poets in the West. These statements have nothing in common with a swaggering missionary consciousness; quite the contrary, they have to do with the experience of the confusions and the difficulties with which a people can only slowly fit itself into the place of the destiny of the West, a destiny that conceals a world-destiny.”¹³⁰ Already he is talking about polis, as the site (topos, lieu, Platz) of a people’s being. If we remember the context described by Frings, Heidegger’s words here could be read almost pastorally, as a moment of reassurance to any in the audience who had confused the destiny of Germany with the swaggering missionary consciousness of Aryanism and German military expansion and were now seeking to make sense of the impending confusion. This would no doubt be a

¹²⁹ Parmenides, p. 137.
¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 77. John Caputo refers to these lines as an example of how “Heidegger left the question of Being in a state of utter mystification about ethico-political matters . . .
generous reading and would fit with the cheerfulness and gentleness mentioned in “What Is Metaphysics” as qualities of those who are daring in that anxiety which is outside all opposition.\textsuperscript{131} Perhaps Heidegger was also seeking to reassure himself. The way to victory for this historical people who in the previous decade were only figuratively caught in the pincers between Russia and America\textsuperscript{132} is to remain thinkers and poets, a comforting realignment of German destiny to an ancient history rather than the troubling current history. Heidegger will explicitly interject the current situation into these lectures when he notes that the ministry of propaganda has declared thinkers and poets nonessential compared to corn and oil.\textsuperscript{133}

In his analysis in Parmenides, Heidegger interprets \textit{polis} in relation to \textit{polos}, a term that means pivot or pole, the axis around which the earth turns, but also can mean the bowl of the heavens. One senses then a link to the sphere of Being’s disclosure or, perhaps the same thing, the fourfold whose horizon is earth and sky. Heidegger says \textit{polos} is that around which beings turn in their peculiar way of showing themselves. What turns around this pole if not the ‘sphere’ of being, as the day turns around the earth bringing the dawn and the evening, such as defines that place called the Abendland. This turning of the sphere of Being is history, \textit{Geschick}. As such “The polis is the essence of the place [\textit{Ort}] or, as we say, it is the settlement [\textit{Ortschaft}] of the...” 

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 216, n. 16
\textsuperscript{132} Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{133} See Parmenides, p. 125. In the ensuing discussion in Parmenides of philosophy and the careless one’s who have no need for thinkers and poets, the war around him intrudes. Heidegger observes “in recent days it was announced by the ministry of propaganda in a loud voice that the Germans no longer need ‘thinkers and poets’ but
historical dwelling of Greek humanity.”134 The site of the settlement of humanity will become a theme in the next chapter on the *Timaeus* but particularly in regard to the question of Athens as a *polis* and its own military expansion and colonialism. With the notion of *Ort* we have an important link to Heidegger’s critique of modern humans as placeless.135 *Polis* is primordially related to Being because of the way it lets beings come to appearance as a whole. Then Heidegger connects it with the verb *pelein*, used repeatedly by Parmenides (6.8, 8.18f, 8.45), the original sense of which was ‘to be in motion,’ a notion closely related to the turning of the pole/sphere. *Pelein* carries a sense of continuance or being wont to or used to, hence customary, a sense not irrelevant to Heidegger’s discussion of *polis* in terms of the Greek way of being, or its historical humanity. The context of his discussion is Plato’s *Republic*, *res publica* in Latin terms but really not about politics at all. He is discussing Plato’s *polis* here, which we will address in my next chapter as the context of the cosmology given in the *Timaeus*. Here we can note that both Heidegger and Plato have drawn *polis* and *kosmos* into proximity. Given the setting of these lectures on Parmenides, it could almost be seen as willful naïveté to say that *polis* has nothing to do with politics, or it could be an attempt again to reassure his listeners in the face of the German situation that is being revealed to have been a failure of politics.

‘corn and oil.’” p. 121. Heidegger’s academic talents indeed turned out to be inessential to the nation as he was called up for service in the *Volksturm*, Safranski, p. 332.
134 Ibid., p. 90.
“The nature of power is alien to this polis,” he says, referring of course to the Greek polis.\textsuperscript{136} Polis is “neither city nor state, but indeed the abode of the essence of this humanity.”\textsuperscript{137} This turning away from politics as power seems of a piece with his earlier words against swaggering missionary postures, conceivable as a response to the situation of these lectures. He suggests that just like alētheia, polis has its pair of counteressences, which he identifies as hupsipolis and apolis, the highest in the city and the one without a city, the homeless one, which Sophocles calls humans.\textsuperscript{138} Heidegger seems to equate the interpretation of polis as city with the transformation of truth into certitude, each a function of a kind of Roman power that is alien to polis,\textsuperscript{139} a power that seems to mirror the dominion implied by treating beings as standing reserve. He says that Burkhardt’s interpretation, so influential on Nietzsche, moves within the notion of the history of culture, which is bound by “essentially Roman, Romanic, and modern concepts.”\textsuperscript{140} We can note here that his comments about the Latinization of Greek insight produces the imperium, seemingly reducing the polis to empire, conveniently serve to differentiate Greece, but also the other term in the Greco-German axis, the historical people of thinkers and poets, from being soiled by the messiness of empire and power. He thus exempts his polis from having to do with the essence of power, which was judged evil by Burckhardt. Such a judgment, claims Heidegger, remains within the conception of truth as certitude and its concomitant, the subjectivity

\textsuperscript{136} Parmenides, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p. 90.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid. But rather than dispersing (or mystifying?) the terms into Dasein, one is tempted to provide existents from the time to fill these counteressences of polis: Fuhrer and Jew.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p. 91.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
of consciousness, and so does not reach the Greek view of truth and power. Heidegger concludes, “no modern concept of ‘the political’ will ever permit anyone to grasp the essence of the polis.”

Interestingly, he is drawn into a discussion of the difference between void and nothing. He is interpreting Plato’s myth of Er, which is as myth a reversal disclosing the there of lêthic withdrawal. The warrior in that story, comes to the last stop on the journey of the dead before they are reincarnated into the mortal world again. It is this field of lêthê, which is described, in accordance with lêthê’s status as the counteressence of phuein, as void of any plant growth kenon dendrôn, without any phusis, which, of course Heidegger reads as emergence. Void, understood not botanically, but phenomenologically, refers to “the away” of the withholding that is lêthê. The away of lêthê, which would seem to correspond to the there that is brought to bear on the here in myth, is void, kenos, which is not nothing. We note here what seems to be an agreement with Curd’s reading of void as distinct from “what is not,” a point essential to her case that Atomism seeks to be consistent with Parmenides criteria of predication. “The void,” Heidegger says of the field of lêthê, “is precisely what remains and what comes into presence there. The barrenness of the void is the nothing of the withdrawal. The void of the place is the look that looks into it and ‘fills’ it. The place of lêthê is that ‘where’ in which the uncanny dwells in a peculiar exclusivity. The field of lêthê is, in a preeminent sense, ‘demonic.’” What kind of filling this is remains a question. Frings comments, referring to the fullness of what is in Parmenides,

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141 Ibid.
142 Ibid., pp. 118-9.
143 Ibid., p. 119.
line 8.24 (*empleon*), “Heidegger nowhere mentions the ‘pleon’.” Implying perhaps a connection between fullness and sociality, Frings links this silence about the *pleon* to the absence in Heidegger of “the ‘life-community’ as distinct from a ‘society’ of modern city life.”

If there is a change in this reference to *pleon* from 1929 it might be reflected in Heidegger’s claim that without the openness of the open even the nothing could not arise and assert its menace. In the end we can return to the situation again, of 1943, as described by Frings. Heidegger concludes,

> “Our attempted reflection has been accompanied by *one* insight. It is this: we may think the essence of truth only if we tread upon the most extreme edges of beings as a whole. We thereby acknowledge that a moment of history is approaching, whose uniqueness is by no means determined simply, or at all, on the basis of the current situation of the world and of our history in it. What is at stake is not simply the being and non-being of our historical people, nor the being and not-being of a ‘European culture,’ for in these instances what is at stake is only beings. In advance of all that, a primordial decision must be made concerning Being and not-being themselves, Being and not-being in their essence, in the truth of their essence. How are beings supposed to be saved and secured in the free of their essence, if the essence of Being is undecided, unquestioned, and even forgotten?”

Here in 1943, Heidegger appears rather Stoic, in the sense one must always keep in mind the ‘whole’ and one’s own place in it, to not presume to a self-importance not granted by the Being of the ‘whole.’ Now when his own sons are on the front, he can displace concern for beings in favor of the all important question of Being. Perhaps this is a kind of non-religious trust of the type that Parmenides ascribes to truth, *eupeithos*, though Heidegger prefers *eukukleos*, well rounded.

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144 Ibid.
145 Frings, p. 33, n. 8.
146 *Parmenides*, p. 161
147 Ibid., p. 162
Power is a relation between beings. So this Roman moment is when politics becomes a matter of power, which, Heidegger will say, it had not been for the Greeks. This critique by Heidegger of the Latin will figure in the discussion of *polis*. Power seems here a function of subjectivity and dominion, the separation of *einai* and *noein*, which is also a loss of the Same in relation to which *einai* and *noein* relate, and already the Greeks (spoken non-subjectively—the same is for *einai* and *noein*) seem above power, as thinkers and poets are above concerns for mere corn and oil, or housing, and even, if we accept Levinas’ complaint, hunger. The Greeks in Plato’s Athens also seem to consider themselves above power in their designs on Syracuse, and I will argue that in the *Timaeus*, Plato is trying to help them remember the already-‘Roman’ nature of their actions. One could also add Heidegger’s words of ontological ‘comfort’ to a grieving mother that the deaths of German soldiers were “the most beautiful fate.” These all seem to be moments when Heidegger’s ontological poetry eclipses ‘real’ pain among individual existents (‘only beings’). We might recall here Caputo’s references to pain above. Power presumes a relation between beings and so is not attuned to the question of Being. But human sociality also describes a relation between Beings, whether Caputo’s kardia, Lingis’ trust, or Irigaray’s love. In this light it certainly appears that Heidegger’s focus on the Same at least renders his philosophy vulnerable to the interpretation that human community has no significance.

If there is a lie in Heidegger, (Caputo says ‘mystification’) as implied by the title of this chapter, it is this oversight, aroused by his attempt at a direct look at the

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148 “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in *Poetry Language and Thought*
luminosity of being as a whole. Some might say this Being-quest turned into a lie about power to which the raw imperium of the Roman and the Latin (are they the same thing?), might be preferable or which led Heidegger directly into the embrace of a worse kind of imperium. That question about Heidegger is difficult and inescapable. Heidegger might argue that in Rome noein becomes res cogitans, and einai becomes res extensa and the same is lost, so that their relation becomes a matter of correspondence, and controlling tyranny becomes the issue. Levinas responds that the rule of the Same is a tyranny and conceals a great lie about power itself that remains heedless to the call of ethical responsibility. This tyranny begins with Parmenides; Levinas seems to accept Heidegger’s interpretation of Parmenides. Indeed Levinas cedes the whole of Pre-Socratic philosophy to Heidegger. One need not cede this interpretation of Heidegger to Levinas. One could make the case that Heidegger’s separation of polis from politics opens the way for an awareness of how language provides the condition of politics, how regimes and imperia are first and foremost discursive. How the Heideggerian lineage that leads to Foucault got lost in this matter is an interesting question. But one must admit Heidegger seemed unable to hold on without fail to this line as well.

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IS ALÊTHEIA ALL?

In concluding this section on Parmenides, I would like to imitate Heidegger, by reading Parmenides poem through one word, but a different word than Heidegger singled out. Whatever qualifier, if any, fits in front of chôra for Heidegger, the treatment I am about to offer wants to highlight a possible reading of Parmenides in light of social chôra, understood as asserting that human sociality is in some way a primordial component of reality. I will undertake this interpretation with some help from Alphonso Lingis.

In line 1.29 of the proem the goddess greets the youth and says, “And it is right that you should learn all things, both the steadfast heart of persuasive truth (alêtheiês eupeitheos), and the beliefs of mortals, in which there is no true trust (pistis alêthês).” Simplicius records, rather than eupeitheos, persuasive, eukukleos, well rounded. Diels and Kranz follow Simplicius, against the majority of citations, and Heidegger (and Gadamer) follows Diels and Kranz. Heidegger translates alêtheiês eukukleos ‘well-enclosing unconcealment,’ and tais ouk eni pistis alêthês, which refers to Brotôn doxas, mortal beliefs, he renders ‘where there is no relying on the unconcealed.’ So ‘persuasive truth’ becomes ‘well-rounded unconcealment’ and ‘true trust’ becomes ‘relying on the unconcealed.’ The very human qualities of persuasion and trust have been removed by this variant reading in favor of the neutrality of roundedness and unconcealment.

152 Parmenides, p. 4.
Heidegger’s treatment of Parmenides pursues the wholeness of thought of Parmenides’ ‘what-is.’ Heidegger’s treatment of Parmenides integrates the mythical context of the thought into Alêtheia, truth as unconcealedness, governed by necessity and necessity’s strong bonds. But I wonder if Heidegger has attained Parmenides’ whole thinking. To put the point into the images used by both Heidegger and Parmenides, the kouros does not gain his unique perspective by means of a leap but by means of a persuasive conversation. If we remember for a moment that the whole poem is a dialogue (albeit one-sided), meant to persuade, then it might be possible to see persuasion and trust as missing from Heidegger’s interpretation. It may not be pure psychologizing to recall how Heidegger himself lifted up social suffering as evidence for the priority of the nothing. Heidegger interrogates Parmenides, or rather the whole of Greek thought, through Parmenides’ alêtheia. But these other words arise in Parmenides’ poem. Later, in fragment 8, trust again is invoked, precisely in relation to the wholeness that Heidegger lifts up. In describing esti as indivisible, homogeneous, continuous, the goddess adds that it is also changeless, shackled in what is, since genesis and olethros have been driven far off, and “true trust (pistis alêthês) has thrust them out” (8.28). Here, as in 1.30, alêtheia comes as an adjective, to modify the substantive, trust. So we have a word that seems to command alêtheia itself, viz. pistis, trust. The nature of this trust that commands truth and holds at bay destruction and generation seems to go unremarked by Heidegger. Emphasis goes instead to necessity (anagkê, 8.30) reinforced by the geometrical image of a sphere, which finds its necessity from the clean precision of a definition. Necessity may mean such a logical necessity or Heidegger’s translogical necessity that functions something like the fate
(moira) to which all beings, including gods, are subject. Both permit no disruption of the well-rounded sphere, permit nothing outside of fateful necessity. But persuasion has already broached the sphere, opened the gates of the path of night and day, whose doors opened with great detail of description and whose entrance formed a yawning gap (1.15-21).

I would like to explore this notion of trust through an essay by Alphonso Lingis entitled “Trust.” Such a concern may seem far removed from discussion of elementals, but it pertains directly to what I have called the social chôra, a reality which becomes the object of the cosmic chariot ride in the Phaedrus and which supersedes the cosmological narrative of the Timaeus. The setting deals with foreigners and strangers with trust and welcome, a welcome similar to the welcome given to the youth in Parmenides’ poem: chair’ (1.26). In addition, as I will suggest in chapter six, the trust might also describe the relation to the elemental.

Lingis’ essay parallels the structure of Parmenides’ poem in a curious way. He begins by recounting a journey with a friend to the remote areas of Madagascar. The friend selects paths inaccessible to loggers, much as Parmenides’ kouros has traveled a path not well-worn by humans. Lingis struggles to keep up with his friend. One day on the path Lingis encounters a young native man, who indicates he will carry Lingis’ pack for him, even though the two of them could not communicate. Lingis consents. When Lingis decides not to continue with his friend, the man turns back with him, carrying his back pack, often far ahead of Lingis, sometimes waiting and letting Lingis proceed, then catching up, barefoot though he was. “When the path forked I could only wait for him
to arrive, or come back, to indicate which branch of the path to take.”¹⁵⁴ Lingis observes that the man, whose name turned out to be Javalson, could have easily stolen the money and camera in the backpack or done injury to him, but did not. He instead escorted him, not to the gates of night and day to meet with dikê, but part way to who knows where, and then back to society, keeping Lingis safe, in a trustworthy way that might be described as just, from the dangerous necessities familiar only to him.

Lingis continues: “A few weeks later I was in London. I explored its gracious streets, flabbergasted as one always is after a prolonged stay in destitute countries by the material abundance, in a spring sunshine that had not welcomed me there before.”¹⁵⁵ He tells of how a series of bombings, at first apparently race-related, shook London during his visit. Hate groups, the assumed perpetrators, were profiled on the news. Civic leaders called for an examination of the whole, for a national self-examination on racism and “for a national commitment to the rule of law and to multiculturalism.”¹⁵⁶ The villain turned out to be a solitary individual, a nice young man who kept to himself, but since the authorities had assumed racism they could not properly see the situation. In a way curiously like the misguided manner of those who assume opposition, who decide what a thing is by means of opposition, what it is not, the police had decided that since the first two bombs had exploded in the vicinity of large concentrations of racial minorities, the bomber was racially motivated and the opposite of the races injured, hence a white supremacist. As if to emphasize how this way of negation failed, Lingis

speaks of fear and hate being without reason, being indifferent to reason, using contrived reason to fabricate their justifications. “Opposition can be measured and counteracted, but hatred is feared. Fear is fear of what is unknown; it is not simply a reaction to the manifestly dangerous.”\(^{157}\)

Lingis describes the spread of fear and hate, fueled by the unknown, throughout the city under terror; here are the dynamics of the *polis* more sharply defined than Heidegger’s *polis* in *Parmenides*, a people dwelling in their being/destiny. The civic leaders, Plato’s *Timaeus* will call them the ‘guardians,’ find themselves seeking a terrorist, but also need to control the hatred of the community. For as Heraclitus knew, “one must quench violence (*hubrin*) quicker than a blazing fire.”\(^{158}\)

This is the point we reach through what might be called Lingis’ proem, of his travels on paths not well-trod, and through the habitations of fearful mortals (*brotai*) who wander double headed (*dikranoi*) about wielding oppositions. Lingis begins the next section, “Trust, Confidence, Faith,” by saying,

“Although we do rather improperly speak of trusting a set of knowledge-claims, or distrusting them, more properly let us say that we believe statements, believe them to be true, or probably true, or doubt them, do not believe them to be true. What we trust is someone. We trust someone who affirms something though we do not see or cannot understand the evidence or the proof he or she may have. We trust someone in action: we trust someone to do what he or she says or to do what is best. Trust is not based on what we think we know about human causality; we trust someone to help us, guide us, save us, though we and he know that to do so is not in his self-interest.”\(^{159}\)

Rather than truth being the translogical, trust is. In the introduction Heidegger divines metaphysics in Leibniz’ “why is there something rather than nothing.” ‘Why?’ asks

\(^{158}\) Kahn, *Art and Thought*, (43; CIV).  
\(^{159}\) *Encounters*, p. 178.
about efficient causality. The nothing shocks this why. Lingis suspends causality as well, though not to the shock of nothing, but of our ever persistent need to trust.

Lingis goes on: compared to Descartes, who initiated a tradition of philosophy built on suspicion of everything he had theretofore taken on trust, “Today philosophers understand that truth cannot be determined by an individual thinker for himself. What can be true is a statement that can be integrated into the common discourse.”\(^{160}\) Truth is mediated by public institutions, and these public institutions function on the basis of trust. Granted institutions embody coercions, as Foucault would point out, but they also involve consent.\(^{161}\) Margaret Thatcher famously proclaimed there is no such thing as society, only individuals and families. Here is atomism in the *polis*, void as prior to plenum, and a theory that it seems would be unable to explain the motives or the effects of a bomber loose in London.

What happens in Parmenides’ poem, taken as a whole happens because the *kouros* does not jump off the surging wagon, but trusts the *Hēliades* who are guiding him, the same beings who hitched up the wagon up for *Phaëthon* before his disastrous ride. It happens because *Dikê* is persuaded by these same *Hēliades* to open the gate and allow the *kouros* through. Is the first moment of Parmenides’ poem trust a social plenum that actually defines itself by refusing its own negation? Trust has no sufficient reasons, Lingis says, since every act of loyalty but potentiates a greater act of disloyalty, and each truthful moment could set up a greater deception; but rather trust leaps.\(^{162}\) Of


course the leap is Heidegger’s image and would seem to require some trust, or perhaps, just daring, but the leap is also Kierkegaard’s image.

“There is always the necessary question: Is trust here warranted? Since trust is an attachment to something that is not known, there never is a demonstration of trustworthiness. All there can be are evidences of untrustworthiness.”¹⁶³ Note that trust cannot be demonstrated, only its absence. Trust would seem to be inaccessible to any way other than the way of negation that Parmenides rejects, though the relation between trust and mistrust is not of the dependent opposition (symmetrical equivalence) that he is attacking. Is there some other opposition required? Trust is a relation to the unknown. Heidegger misses this trust, if we accept Levinas’ critique, and perhaps Irigaray’s.

Lingis describes various experiences that, like trust, have what he calls immediacy. An individual addressing us has motives and standings analyzable across a wide variety of ways of knowing—economic, sociological, psychological—but a person addresses us there who is indeterminable by any of these ways of knowing. He describes the experience of being addressed in a way that cuts to the heart of himself, a “hey, you,” that is not about any of the roles or externals that might determine other social interactions. This directness is immediacy. We are perhaps a long way from Parmenides’ path, have traveled down a different path.

Consider for a moment, however, the analysis, of the more traditional sort, of Parmenides’ poem by Mackenzie. Mackenzie recognizes that the dramatic structure of Parmenides’ poem is not limited to the proem, but continues throughout the extant

pieces in the form of dialogue, albeit a weak dialogue, but one preserved in the tone of direct address in the second person. Descartes cogito, she says, is first person, ‘I think,’ and is self-validating: to state it makes it so. Parmenides’ first basic thesis is “you think,” which is similarly self-validating so long as a dialectic context is assumed. Though Mackenzie is arguing for a strong (numerical) monism and existential reading of esti, she points out that the dialogical context together with strong monism is inherently contradictory.\footnote{Mary Margaret Mackenzie, “Parmenides’ Dilemma,” in \textit{Phronesis}, 1982, 27, pp. 1-12.} It would seem that it does not come to rest in a uniform and complete sphere. The ‘hey, you’ forms a resistance.

Lingis goes on to describe how courage, laughter and lust share in the immediate nature of trust. As relations that “are not attitudes with regard to images and representations.”\footnote{\textit{Encounters}, p. 183.} They have immediacy. Laughter has immediacy in that it arises with a disruption of sense, of aims, wherein the only thing that remains is what is present, “the raw and meaningless thing . . . and the excess energies of those who laugh. The energies ricocheting off the raw things fuels the peals of laughter.” Laughter is also contagious, “a force that passes through the boundaries of individual identities.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.},.} Here laughter becomes a spontaneously rising milieu. To cast Lingis social speech into cosmic terms, laughter disproves the aseity of atoms in a void. Laughter assumes, or even creates, a plenum. So too the erotic, which is aroused by images and pantomime, but erotic excitement, \textit{pace} Baudrillard, is not held in the fascination with images and simulacra, it unleashes lustful desires which crave to break through the images to palpate and penetrate the anonymous animal body behind them. And while the sexual craving that torments us shuts us off to the projects and

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textit{Encounters}, p. 183.
\item \textit{Ibid.},.
\end{footnotes}
solicitations of the common and practicable world, it is also anonymous and spreads by contagion making us transparent to one another.167

Or as he puts in another setting, “the lust that disconnects the body from its tasks and its seriousness and releases it on the languorous and agitated body of another is nothing but the laughter of that body.”168

Putting trust beyond language—as communication if not necessarily as world forming169—Lingis claims that one knows another much more through trust than through knowledge about him or her. “Upon watching Javalson leaving me at the edge of the river, how I felt I had known him so much more deeply than if I had listened to someone who had, the length of an evening, recounted his life to me in a language I could understand!”170 Parmenides may not have said things in this way, but it is difficult to imagine the persuasion that opened the gate without this kind of trust that does not amount to a collection of some kind of knowledge. What is comes before what is not. Whether Parmenides, who spoke of trust, perhaps a trust born by the first embrace or welcome (chair’!) of what is, meant this is unlikely. The references to pistis as well as pelein are so remote and tenuous.

One wonders here if we do not have something not precisely of the nature of noein. If so, then Parmenides’ formula stating that noein and einai are the same means either that it is not einai either. Or if we take the same as the subject of the sentence, the same is for being and thinking, and take this same to be pictured via the image of the well-rounded sphere, which refuses the leverage of reasons because it admits no

167 Ibid., p. 184.
168 Trust (Minneapolis, Minn.: The University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 120.
169 Derrida claims face is not beyond language, “Violence and Metaphysics,” p. 113. I take this to refer to language as world forming—the house of Being.
point of differentiation, in Anaximander’s language has no inclination due to its symmetry, no obvious starting point, then necessity remains outside the circle holding fast its indifference, rather than within the circle, linking elements in such a way that the whole can be made necessary from within, by reason and logic, rather than merely given. The history of metaphysics is at stake here, whether the gods themselves are subject to fate (within the circle) or directing fate as providence, from outside.

Parmenides’ expression, true trust (pistis) might be a loose thread, or a lance that pierces the well-rounded sphere and provides an an-archē, like the face, the human, will for Levinas, though an archē not to be validated by reasons that begin prior to it. In this way the language of eupeithos (persuasion), pistis (trust), and the direct address by the goddess to the kouros, commenced with a handshake, a ritual so important to Levinas,171 overtakes the rigor of what-is, so rigidly held in its bonds by necessity. That Dikē, who governs necessity, might also be persuaded and extend a handshake in trust could just indicate mythological remnants, which must be swept away and our whole notion of a breach of the sphere disappears along with it. Or perhaps trust invokes the other who is the means of passing through to the holy, whether this otherness cancels or occludes the domain of existing, or even just forms a complementary myth, as Caputo suggests.

If the circle is breached, if the universe might have inhaled, taken in something beyond its indiscernible circle of the same, then the circle, if we can trust that image to carry us this far, has been breached and has survived, like a living cell membrane does,

170 Ibid., p. 185.
is permeable but also closes itself again after each rupture. Put in other terms truth may be a conflict, but it may arise as the expectation of honesty, not as a hovering over groundless ground, as an expectation afloat on a sea of trust. *Pistis* may govern *alētheia* and letting the same lie may not be all that is called for.
Chapter 3
Strangers, Bastards, and Roots: The Beginning of Plato’s *Timaeus*

The people must fight for the law as for their city wall.¹

And the beginning, as you know, is always the most important part.²

‘It is neither through fidelity to a tradition, nor by traveling in a foreign land that
the path of dialogue will be discovered.’³

The recollection necessary for nature to be able to be represented and worked
over, for it to first take form as a world, is accomplished as the home.⁴

In the previous two chapters I have tried to indicate the possibility of reading
certain parts of the Ionian and Eleatic traditions with a view toward the human domain.
Heidegger’s evocative readings are suggestive but those readings may overlook the
issues of justice as having its strongest sense first in the human domain, and that truth
might somehow be dependent on a social origin, such as trust—an affirmation of what I
call the social *chôra*. I want to turn now to a reading of Plato’s *Timaeus*, the dialogue
that contains Plato’s ‘cosmology,’ or cosmogony, or even more accurately
cosmofaction. For in this dialogue the social and elemental are drawn consciously into
relation with each other through the interplay between the setting and the dialogue
proper. In it a predisposition to the public domain, the *polis*, determines how world
shows up, not just as the interpretation concealed in our *ethos*, or the Athenian *ethos*
into which the city wants to educate its young, but as responding specifically to an

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¹ Heraclitus, 44; LXV. (*machésthai chrê ton demon huper tou nomou [huper tou
ginomenou] hokos huper teicheos*). Translations of Heraclitus are from Charles Kahn,
Initial numbers refer to Diels and Kranz’ ordering. Roman numerals refer to Kahn’s.
³ Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček, trans. (London:
importance on the social relation as such. To expose these two types of chôra, I will conduct a careful analysis of the opening of the Timaeus.

I have already remarked how the physical elements within Plato’s cosmology seem to conform to what Patricia Curd has called Parmenides’ predicational monism, with the effect of delinking being from extension, an effect one might suggest is also the case in Democritus, insofar as his atoms are uncuttable and individually invisible and so have only a virtual extension. Plato’s elements also draw a discussion in terms of the notion of stoicheia or letters of writing, a notion from which Plato backpedals, apparently seeking to bury the elemental out of view, not as atoms but more like roots sunk into the earth. Plato adds another aspect to the elements, describing them in the language of technê, saying they are not decomposable by anyone but their compounder (32c).

These aspects of the elemental in the Timaeus are interesting. But what of the soil in which these elements find their place? Regarding Descartes’ image of the tree of human knowledge, where the roots were metaphysics, Heidegger asked what soil these roots grew in. He considers the soil to be the opening itself, the free clearing of being. John Sallis draws Plato’s Timaeus back to the earth. For him, and for Charles Scott, the chôra refers to a kind of excess to nous that resists appropriation into an exhaustive ordering.5 It is continuous with earth in the Heideggerian sense of the ground that conceals and in its concealing defines the open. But remembering Levinas’ image of

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place and strangers in his comparison of Gagarin and Heidegger, we might want to ask again about the ‘soil’ in which Plato’s elements are grounded. Heidegger defines space in relation to concealment and unconcealment, which still depends on Dasein. So in a reversal of cosmology, he speaks of time-space. Here time defines space, rather than time being gridded analogically in a spatial model. Time here, I take in the sense of the historicity of Dasein. But one must ask if space can be defined by the human in another way. Space can be defined by the human, by trust, even by justice. Perhaps this question is also a question directed toward Dasein, more specifically to the characterization of Dasein as Mitsein and the quite ambiguous portrayal of intersubjectivity in Heidegger’s work, an ambiguity that seems to grow out of Heidegger’s suspicion of subjectivity.

In some way Plato may be placing his cosmology in a different soil than earth or in a different kind of earth. One might even say that, Gagarin-like he suspends the earth (in space), or manages to pierce its claim to being the ultimate horizon. We will see this theme of home and sojourning made explicitly in the dialogue. Solon, like Gagarin perhaps, ventures forth from his place. He finds a middle ground between the placeless profiteering represented by the sophists on the one hand, and the hubris of place (and of biological generation) represented by the birthright festival of Apatouria depicted in the beginning of the dialogue and perhaps also the hubris of the Athenian empires attempts at expansion into Sicily. So while Sallis and Scott focus on Timaeus’ speech and its repeated beginnings as evidence of Plato’s non-Platonism, I will focus on another beginning, the beginning of the setting of the dialogue, the ‘soil’ in which Timaeus’ speech itself is planted, which reflects a concern for citizenship, which in turn requires a
growth that is not strictly phusic, whether one interprets this word biologically as nature and reproduction or ontologically as Being’s excess to noesis that Scott and Sallis find there, an excess that seems present in Heidegger’s description of chôra as what withdraws. Plato’s elements want to have their significance from the broader context of justice. Plato’s cosmological project, the Timaeus, tries to see strangers, as does Levinas when he challenges Heidegger’s focus on place. Indeed, Timaeus himself is a stranger. In the Timaeus, just as Heidegger also recognizes in relation to Descartes’ tree of knowledge, the setting is all important and is in some ways the more lively part of the discussion. So I will focus on the dialogue’s beginning and the counter-theme of the good state and the good citizen, which draws us not necessarily back to the earth, as Sallis suggests, but to silent and receptive Socrates, the very image of the chôra. In the Timaeus the cosmos and the polis are in dialogue, and one can argue that the soul also has a voice in the conversation, insofar as the role of Socrates in Athens and his fate at the hands of his polis are in question too. So we are not necessarily caught in the sphere of continuous re-beginning represented perhaps by Timaeus’ speech. Might we even say that by focusing on the setting of the Timaeus and the numerous allusions Plato includes there, we might find something an-archic, to use Levinas’ phrase, something more important than nous’ limits. In the previous chapters I have emphasized Heidegger’s reading of the Pre-Socratic tradition, a tradition he considered to have much in common with his own philosophy. But I also sought to bring out in Pre-Socratic thought and in Heidegger’s thought certain political undertones. In this chapter, and even more so in the next, I will be using Levinas as a lens, taking what I claim is a political emphasis in Plato’s thought to be continuous with the Platonic notion
of the good beyond being, so important to Levinas and precursor to his “humanism of the other man.”

I have to some extent been influenced by John Sallis’ evocative reading of the Timaeus, in Chorology, but would for reasons I hope will become clear prefer to emphasize recommencement instead of beginning. Beginning seems linked to Heidegger’s notion of the Same as discussed in the previous chapter, a Same which does not yield archai. An example of the difficulty can be seen when Sallis, in discussing the first line of the dialogue, says that when Socrates’ asks where the fourth person from yesterday’s discussion is, the ‘where?’ implicates place as already present, which means chōra for him. Place/chōra comes to be interpreted along the lines of spacing as discussed above in the introduction. More important to me is the fact that this ‘where?’ refers to a person, rather than as an interrogation of the nature of space/place/Da. Chōra seems better understood ‘socially,’ in line with Levinas’ frequent trope of ‘giving way’ to another human or substituting oneself for her or him.

In reading the Timaeus, the tendency has been to leap-frog over the beginning section, dismissing it as a mere remnant of Plato’s waning interest in the dialogue.

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7 Chorology: On Beginning in Plato’s Timaeus (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1999).
8 Ibid., p. 10.
9 For some examples, see Is It Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas, Jill Robbins, ed. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001) pp. 47, 98, 99, 106, 164; the last reference suggests that it can occur even as the action of an entire culture.
format,\textsuperscript{10} as if Plato had some need to keep up the pretense of dialogue, or was of two minds on the matter. Plato may have shifted away from the dialogue format, but this fact would not render the dialogic section, the introduction, of the \textit{Timaeus} meaningless, but quite the contrary. That Plato would still bother to include it might indicate its importance. Yet commentators move quickly to deal with what they see as the meat of the work—the cosmology. Placed as Plato is, between the Pre-Socratic \textit{phusikoi} and Aristotle, we assume Plato was compelled to take up such ‘scientific’ matters in order to be a Greek philosopher, and that the \textit{Timaeus} is ‘his cosmological dialogue.’ The concurrent tendency to approach the Greeks as the originators of science cements the \textit{Timaeus} into that physical tradition and draws the focus ineluctably to Timaeus’ long speech. One suspects such a focus is more about us as scientific humanity than it is about Plato. As a result, commentators tend to see little of interest in the beginning of the \textit{Timaeus} beyond a few historical puzzles to be solved, often half-heartedly.\textsuperscript{11}

A.E. Taylor defines the \textit{Timaeus} from the start as “early Greek science,”\textsuperscript{12} even though he acknowledge Plato/Timaeus’ own warnings about its provisional nature.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{11} For two exceptions see Warman Welliver, \textit{Character, Plot and Thought in Plato’s Timaeus-Critias}, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977, and Laurence Lampert and Christopher Planeaux, “Who’s who in Plato’s \textit{Timaeus-Critias} and why,” \textit{The Review of Metaphysics} Vol. LII, pp. 87-125. Welliver’s interpretation focuses on Critias, depicting him negatively and concluding that the pair of dialogues is not unfinished but in fact ends as Plato intended. Critias ambushes Timaeus like Atlantis ambushed ancient Athens in Critias’ tale. Welliver assumes a straightforward (non-ironic) reading of Socrates’ assessment of his partners and uncritically lumps Hermocrates in with Critias. Lampert and Planeaux pick up on Plato’s critique of empire and hinge much of their argument on the assumption that the missing fifth character is Alcibiades. Both essays are valuable in many ways, though Welliver tends to indulge in assumptions that seem overzealous.

\textsuperscript{12} Taylor, \textit{CPT}, p. vii.
Of the introduction to the *Timaeus* (17a-20c), Taylor says, “There is not much on which we need make any comment.”\(^{14}\) The Atlantis story “has no logical connection with the special theme of the *Timaeus.*” Its real function is introductory to the *Critias*, the *Timaeus*’ unfinished companion dialogue.\(^ {15}\) This conclusion, of course, sacrifices the integrity of Plato’s dialogue for the sake of some important assumption on the part of the interpreter, who then must function as a cut and paste editor of Plato to get at what Plato ‘really’ meant. Cornford acknowledges (without naming Taylor) that some have seen this opening material of the *Timaeus* as prefatory to the *Critias*, but he sees its purpose as Plato’s effort “to indicate that, now as ever, his chief interest lies in the field of morals and politics, not in physical speculation.”\(^ {16}\) Cornford expands this insight primarily on the cosmological plane, arguing that Timaeus’ cosmology, unlike the random cosmos of Democritus, will show the world order justifies the moral order.\(^ {17}\) While this observation does seem to attend more fully to Plato’s purpose in the introduction, it may overemphasize the earnestness of the description of the world


\(^{14}\) A.E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (London: Methuen, 1926), p. 438. See also CPT, where the *Timaeus*’ introduction has significance primarily in relation to external matters, such as dating.


\(^{16}\) F.M. Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, C.K. Ogden, ed (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1937), p. 20. Cornford is responding to Taylor’s commentary, contesting from the start Taylor’s claims about how invested Plato was in this science espoused by Timaeus. The tussle between Taylor and Cornford is about how much of the cosmology laid out by Timaeus is Plato’s own thought. Taylor says Plato is consciously representing Pythagorean cosmology, not his own. Cornford insists the cosmology is Plato’s and is not Pythagorean but rather draws on the range of prior traditions, (p. 3). Both may be right, if one questions the assumption that Plato was engaged in serious science, then as Taylor says, Plato is not fully invested in this cosmology, while at the same time it may represent the work of Plato himself, integrating various inherited ideas.

\(^{17}\) *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 30.
order, and it ignores the structural importance of the introduction, the particular political themes involved. The title of his commentary on the *Timaeus, Plato’s Cosmology*, seems to reflect his focus. He sees the whole cosmology of the *Timaeus* as prefatory to the ideal state to be summarized in the unwritten third dialogue of the trilogy, the *Hermocrates*.\(^{18}\) So the opening of the *Timaeus* merely dies of the vine when Plato never finishes the trilogy. While Cornford draws closer to what seems to me evident about the beginning of the *Timaeus*, both he and Taylor miss the force of the introduction because they are hamstrung by a dogmatic-systematic reading of Plato.

I will seek to describe how the opening of the *Timaeus* establishes and focuses the themes that are to follow and even could act as a key for interpreting the rest of the dialogue. With careful attention to the language, we can discern a political/historical theme of strangers and how one reckons proper standing within the *polis*, the Greek city-state. The fulcrum of the matter is a critique of Athens, first for its imperialism, second for its injustice to Socrates. The themes of the political and the cosmic meander along separately but are in fact joined, a joining that is accomplished by the dialogue format itself, which, far from being a political remnant, has the capacity to allow meanings to point in two or more directions at the same time. In this view it may be possible to ask whether the monolithic nature of Timaeus’ oration on cosmology, rather than indicating its importance, may indicate that it is lifeless and provisional, much like Socrates says the description of the city they have agreed upon is lifeless, like a picture.\(^{19}\) Timaeus hints at as much when he calls his cosmology a bastard discourse


\(^{19}\) Although John Sallis has shown that the cosmology is not without its seams and fissures. See *Chôrology*.
(nothos logos) and repeatedly compensates by resorting to the principle of likeliness, whereas the opening is described as pure logos, a feast of logos. Far from tagging on the beginning to stay consistent with himself, the life of the Timaeus may reside in the beginning itself, though this claim may leave us in a situation similar to those who claim that Parmenides’ Doxa is not possible for Parmenides thought: the question obtrudes, then why did he write it? It would be a bit much to suggest that Timaeus’ speech is pure caricature and critique of physical thought. Certainly Plato was aware of the cosmological speculation of those who preceded him and obviously takes up such thought in the speech he gives to Timaeus. But in the wake of Socrates, whom Euthyphro compared to Daedelus because he makes arguments come to life and run away, like Daedelus made statues come to life (Euthyphro 11c-d), such thought becomes provisional. Heidegger recoiled at the label “Pre-Socratic,” speaking instead of ‘the Greeks’ collectively. Levinas, on the other hand, claims that Pre-Socratic philosophy only becomes intelligible with Socrates.20 It is possible that in the Timaeus, too, the presence of Socrates is indispensable, and the portion of the dialogue in which Socrates functions, inserted in between the long, straight-forward discussions, just as the chôra is inserted suddenly mid-speech between the model and the copy (48e-49),21 bring the whole thing to life. This model would make the opening function in relation to the cosmology in the way Socrates does to the arguments, and Daedelus to statues, and, like the chôra, Socrates’ presence allows things to come to life.

Here is a snapshot of the overture to Timaeus’ speech. 1) Socrates counts his guests and discovers one who was present yesterday is absent today. 2) He recounts for

20 Is It Righteous to Be?, p. 138.
his companions the features of the ideal state that they discussed the day before. 3) He
announces that this model (this idea!) is too lifeless to do the job, like a mere static
picture. 4) He asks who can bring it to life and concludes that this task is beyond the
competencies of himself, the poets, and the sophist, but not his companions, who are
statesmen and philosophers. 5) They promptly remark how to their astonishment a
possible story to fit the bill sprang out whole from Critias’ memory between yesterday’s
conversation and the present moment, and Critias gives the details of how this forgotten
story of ancient Athens expelling Atlantis made its way from Egypt, via Solon and
Critias’ family, to the present moment. 6) The three develop a plan for sharing the story
with Socrates. It will be nested in a cosmogony. Timaeus will give an encyclopedic
account of the origins of the universe down to the creation of humans. Timaeus will get
them up to the human but not as far as the human. On this count we might keep in mind
Socrates’ famous description of his discontent with the materialistic philosophy of
Anaxagoras (one of these natural philosophers) (*Phaedo* 99ff) that led to his “second
sailing.” There Socrates’ condition (being in prison) could not be explained by talking
about his bones and joints. It is a matter (*the* matter?) of *polis* and justice, just as in the
first two chapters here, on Anaximander and Parmenides, *dikê* comes to stand out as
unique. But bones and joints will be about as far as Timaeus’ speech will get. Critias
will follow with the description of this great, ancient Athenian state as a model of how
human life should be arranged. We can see that the success of this plan will at the same
time be the measure of the stature of Socrates’ three companions as true statesmen and
philosophers, and the test of whether Socrates’ description of them as such will turn out

\[21\] See Cornford, 177ff.
to be completely transparent. The measuring stick, one suspects, will be Socrates, but also Solon, who is soon to be insinuated into the conversation.

In stark contrast to the linear and progressive description of Timaeus’ cosmology, and the categorical account of the ideal state from the previous day, the overture of the *Timaeus* resists simple delineation. It is in some way ‘alive’ and dissection would seem likely to kill it. Various themes and backgrounds anticipate what is to come and echo what has already been said. Consequently we must expose ideas that form the context but which at the same time do not gain their full import prior to the descriptions they anticipate. This difficulty (*chalepon*—with this word Timaeus repeatedly bemoans the difficulty of his task) arises from the dynamic nature of the overture, an animation that occurs away from the action, in resonances and harmonies, even overtones, and many of which sound in questions of history, to which we must carefully attend.

**GUIDING TERMS—Chôra, xenia, trophê**

The demiurge creator in Timaeus’ cosmology fashions the cosmos with its world soul. The site of this activity is the *chôra*, the space/receptacle of cosmogony. *Chôra* lets what is come to be. So, first a quick word about this word. I will address it by way of contrasting it (too sharply, no doubt) with *topos*, the main Greek term for space, and *kenos*, void, made famous by the atomists’ use of it in opposition to *plêres*, the fullness of atoms.  

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22 These definitions are derived from *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. Compiled by Henry George Liddel and Robert Scott, augmented by Henry Stuart Jones, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). Keimpe Algra (*Concepts of Space in Greek Thought*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995)) sees a bit less divergence between *chôra* and *topos*, but is approaching the question in regard to what has become an automatic interpretation of the former as
Topos is more directly space as we use the word. It is general in its sense. Topos is geographical space, the whole earth, a region in a country. It is architectural space, the site of a building, a room in a house. It is generic space or position, the place one holds for someone else, hence substitutable space. When topos indicates anatomical orientation, it can refer to any place on the body or part of the body. Topos can be textual space, a space left in a document (a kind of kenos), a place or passage in an author. It is a place of burial or can be a position on the zodiac, or the whole space of all things held together by a god. To make topos specific requires adding terms to restrict its sense. For example, chthonos pas topos is ‘the whole earth,’ while ho topos têς chôras--meaning the local circumstances of a district--actually uses chôra to refine topos. Finally, topos can indicate a commonplace of rhetorical style. The verbal form of topos, topazô, in the active voice form, means to guess at or aim at, indicating lack of specificity and that something is directed toward the topos in question, which has at least a neutral relation to the subject of the verb, the one doing the directing. In the passive voice the verb means to put something or someone in its/his/her place, still maintaining the sense of an agent and its object. This construal fits typical philosophical modes of the subject and its relation to objects. Topos suggests place upon which one exerts control, space as ‘over there’ or out there, or else a more socially neutral space.

Kenos, when used of things means ‘empty’ and contrasts with pleös (full, filled, complete), plêrês (full, infected, satisfied, solid, whole) and mestos (sated, full).
Regarding aspirations of any sort, *kenos* means fruitless or destitute, bereft, empty-handed. It describes a person as devoid of wit, vain and pretentious. Kenotic space is barely space; it is deficient or empty space. It links with *topos* in so far as *topos* can refer to empty space in a text. It can be a blank page. The *stoicheia* as elements and syllables and even letters would fit into this sense of *kenos*. The atomists, according to Diogenes Laertius, taught that the cosmogenesis transpired in a *mega kenon*. The verb *kenoô* means to empty something in the active voice, and in the passive voice, to be emptied. It can mean to vacate a place and thereby leave it empty. It can mean to expend, waste away, or be without effect.

In contrast to *topos* and *kenos*, *chôra* may imply a less conventional sense of space. While *topos* in reference to the body has a general anatomical function, *chôra* can be a euphemism for the sexual organs, a specific, highly potentiated part of the anatomy. Like *topos*, *chôra* can refer to the country but with reference to dwelling, referring to an occupied land, like an estate or a country town, or the country in general as opposed to the *polis*. In this latter sense, Socrates and Phaedrus’ walk outside the city walls in the *Phaedrus* might have been a walk in the *chôra*. In contrast to *topos* and *kenos*, *chôra* has a more social and political tone. *Chôra* is a place occupied, where relation to its surroundings,” (p. 34). Thus *topos* is fully integrated into its surroundings and as such would have a high degree of apparentness or visibility.

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24 The *Phaedrus* works with a medical motif, drawing into consideration the Hippocratic tradition, for which the qualities of a city’s location affect the qualities of its inhabitants (See *Airs, Waters and Places* in *Hippocrates*, Vol. 1, W.H.S. Jones, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1923). Similarly, in the *Timaeus*, the Egyptian Priest describes how Athena, the true founder of Athens, chose its location (*topos*) so as to produce citizens most like herself (24c). The bond of the human, a
a thing is, a soldier’s post (and thus a crucial spot on which much hinges, including questions of defending the city and one’s character), or, metaphorically, one’s place in life, one’s fate. This is space where something is at stake. *Chôreô* indicates, not a motion toward a place or aiming at it, such that that motion can be measured across a grid of space or in relation to some other space, but rather leaving one’s own place, but instead of a simple vacation, one gives way, recedes, makes room for something else. Hence *sugchôreîn* can mean to yield or submit, to assent, forgive a debt or to come to an agreement. *Chôreô* can mean to contain something in a sense directly opposed to void. *Chôreô* means to pass away or be near an end, as in the ending or departure of night, an ending that brings something new. As leaving one’s place *chôreô* can take the concrete meaning of traveling abroad, to lands other than one’s own, where one is an alien or stranger, as we will hear Solon did when he went to Egypt. Two of the four participants in the *Timaeus* were foreigners visiting Athens in the way of *chôrein*. In the *Cratylus* (402a), Socrates sums up Heraclitus’ doctrine as *panta chôrei kai ouden menei*, all things move/pass and nothing remains the same. With a view toward cosmology such an opposition between *chorein* and *menein* contrasts nicely with the atomistic division of the world into plenum and void (*kenos*). *Chôrazô* means setting up an inscription.25 *Chôrizô* means to separate or exclude or go away.26 *Chôris* functions as an adverb meaning separately, differently, otherwise, and also as a

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25 Hermocrates describes Critias’ efforts as setting up a trophy (*tropaion*, Critias 108c), though this action generally seems to draw the verb *histêmi*, rather than *chorazô*.  
26 Heraclitus says, “Of all those accounts (*logous*) I have heard, none has gone so far as this: to recognize what is wise (*sophon*), set apart from all (*pantôn kechôrismenon*, D 108).
preposition meaning apart from, separate from, hence withdrawal, removal, yet still a relation defined vis-à-vis another. *Chôra* may be the dominant motif in the *Timaeus*. So the cosmos, founded in *chôra* must be a place where something is at stake, a spot upon which forces bear down. One might say that *chôra* indicates a more political space.  

Elea saw only being or nothing. Atomism opted for a *mega kenon*. Plato placed his cosmos not within *topos* or *kenos*, but in *chôra*, relegating the space of *topos* to the domain of simple, everyday becoming (52a-b). Plato certainly had the model of letters on a page, of plenum and void as a way of depicting his cosmogony. He explicitly rejects the letters analogy for the elements (*stoicheia tou pantos*) or even an analogy to syllables (48b). That his choices are conscious ones could be indicated by the amount of space Aristotle spends in his *Physics* arguing with the Atomists. The atomistic arguments were certainly current in Athens. Plato had the geographical or

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27 T.M. Robinson compares *chôra* to space as described in contemporary physics. *Chôra*’s most interesting feature is, he says, its tensile nature. “Methodology in the Reading of the *Timaeus* and *Politicus*, in *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies*, Francisco Gonzalez, ed. (Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Md., 1995). One might also consider Stuart Kauffman’s argument that unlike the random *kenos* of the atomists, which has dominated modern science, the laws of space-time have contours (defined in terms of self-organizing, complex-adaptive systems) that predispose the cosmos to the development of creatures such as humans, and thus space-time is neither neutral, random, nor empty. See *At Home in the Universe: The Search for the Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). In fact, Kauffman’s thesis closely follows the agenda Cornford sees in Timaeus’ speech of proposing a viable alternative to a random cosmos (p. 30). These comparisons are interesting. But I hope the analysis to come will justify a more political reading of *chôra*.

28 Algra contends that all subsequent philosophical uses of *kenos* are determined by Elea, (p. 32).

geometrical possibilities implied in *topos* or the general and all-encompassing sense of *topos* as what is held together by a god, which we might expect him to choose for pure cosmology. But he chose the politically charged space of *chôra*, fully loaded with dwelling.

In relation to the pre-Socratic philosophers, Cornford says that Plato’s use of *chôra* is closest to Heraclitus’ view. While *kenos* and *topos* seem to imply fully visible and fully exposed reality, *chôra*’s evasion and silence picks up some on the implications of Heraclitus’ claim that nature loves to hide and Empedocles’ image of the elements as ‘roots.’ Roots disappear into the unseen and draw nourishment (*trophê*) from the depths, and in examining them one risks killing the life of what they nourish. So, too, Timaeus explains the *chôra* by way of the elements, which are dependent on this *chôra* that remains unseen (49-50).

A second theme of importance in the dialogue is *xenia*, which Plato uses to characterize the interactions between the participants. The practice of *xenia*, giving elaborate gifts to visiting nobles, was common in early Greece. The gifts were a matter of honor for the giver and so *xenia* was an important part of the aristocratic honor/shame ethic. Plato seems to play on this practice on two counts. First, the language of *xenia* is employed among the participants in the dialogue, but *xenia* is qualified by *logos* (27a). The exchange is not of gold but of *logos*: understanding,

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30 Cornford, p. 178.
31 This theme of hiddenness is also present in Heraclitus (LXXVIII, LXXX, LXXIV, X).
32 Xenia in Homeric times was a social means of building loyalty among aristocrats. The exchange of gifts solidified political associations called *hetairoi*. The gifts were generally luxury items, especially metalwork, and individuals could actually enrich themselves by traveling abroad and collecting xenia. See Oswyn Murray, *Early Greece*, 2nd ed. (London: HarperCollins, 1978), pp. 47ff.
words, reason. This shift from wealth to wisdom conforms to the description of the perfect state, where the guardians have no wealth. Solon, who figures in the dialogue, eliminated birth as a criterion for public office, but not wealth, which brings us to the second point about xenia. Solon, famously, established his new constitution then left Athens to travel abroad. He visited Croesus in Sardis, who asked him, while showing Solon all his treasure, who Solon deemed to be the happiest of men. Croesus fully expected himself to be named by his guest, but was disappointed. In the end Solon said that until a person is dead one cannot call that person happy, only fortunate. For one has not come yet to the end of the story. This speech “brought him neither largess nor honour. The king saw him depart with much indifference, since he thought that a man must be an arrant fool who made no account of present good, but bade men always wait and mark the end.” It would seem that Solon’s honesty meant he left Sardis without xenia. Whether or not Solon collected xenia of gold in Egypt (Critias tells us Solon was highly honored (genesthai entimos, 21e) by the Egyptians), he did collect a kind of xenia from Egypt, a xenia of logos. The xenia in question was the story of ancient Athens’ rebuff of Atlantis (peri tôn archaión eis logous, 22a) which seems to fit perfectly into the economy of xenia that the dialogue assumes, a xenia which has as its currency logos. In the Timaeus one encounters the famous notion of the demiurge creator. At least early in Greek social arrangements the demiourgoi would likely have included many non-citizens. They would possibly have been welcome as xenoi—received strangers, as were the statesmen friends of Socrates (i.e. Hermocrates and

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33 Herodotus, 1.30-33.
34 Murray, pp. 55, 82.
Timaeus), whose gift, a propos of true guardians, was not gold but wisdom and knowledge.

The third theme to be highlighted is the theme of paidopoia (18c) or trophê (18a). In Timaeus’ speech he refers to chôra as tithenên (52d), the nurse who nourishes. Trophê means nourishment or upbringing and Socrates uses it to refer to the breeding that makes his companions uniquely able to address the questions at hand (20a). I suggest it contrasts with mere phusis (phuseôs kai trophês, 20a), the simple biological production of children to produce a genei, the legitimacy of which is validated by the festival of Apatouria, which plays a role in Critias’ story of the transmission of the tale of Solon in Egypt. In his speech, Timaeus, having just argued that no one is wicked by choice, but that it is the fault of the begetters (tous phuteuontas) and the nurses or nourishers (tous trephontas), says that nonetheless it is always each one’s responsibility, so far as he is able, to seek to flee evil in favor of the good, through self nurture and by his pursuits in study (dia trophês kai di’ epitedeumatôn mathêmatôn, 87a-b). Poiesis was the standard model of education, indicated by the recitation of poems at the festival of Apatouria. This poiesis was validated by the prize awarded. But the true trophê for producing the right citizens will turn out to be Socratic trophê.

Like most of Plato’s dialogues the Timaeus is complex. Let us begin by laying out the essential elements of the structure, the characters, and the setting of this dialogue, which, if not entirely a drama, is at least not to be described as not drama.
STRUCTURE

The more general structure of the *Timaeus* has three parts, each linked to one of the characters:

1) **Socrates** summarizes the previous day’s conversation about the ideal state (17a-20c).
2) **Critias** announces how the description of that ideal state the day before reminded him of an old story once told to him (20c-29d).
   - Content of the story: a now forgotten Athens of old stood up to an aggressive Atlantis
   - The transmission of the story:
     1. Obliterated from memory in Greece due to natural disasters
     2. Preserved in writing in Egypt
     3. Told to Solon by an Egyptian priest
     4. Told to Critias’ grandfather by Solon
     5. Told to Critias by this grandfather on the third day of the feast of Apatouria when Critias was a youth
     6. Now the story of Athens defeating Atlantis is summarized to the participants in the dialogue by Critias.
3) **Timaeus’** cosmology as a framework within which to consider this ideal society. This third section constitutes the bulk of the dialogue (29d-92c).

Two points in this structure are worth noting. First, while within cosmology, the heavenly movements yield time (and philosophy), the whole dialogue is oriented temporally by historical time rather than cosmic time, by a time that is more like *chôra* or *kairos* than like *topos* or *chronos.*\(^{35}\) It is lived time, historical time, marked by events significant to human hopes, dreams and fears. The motif in the dialogue of feast days (Apatouria and Panathenaea) reinforces this sense of time as *kairos*. The alternative sense of time, as *chronos*, appears in the cosmology with the creation of the heavenly bodies, which mark out time as regular and measurable by something other than events of human history. The question is which of these senses of time has priority (*archê*).

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\(^{35}\) *Kairos*, of place, refers to a vital part of the body; of time it is an exact or critical time, a season or opportunity. *Chronos* indicates a definite time or period, time in the
The second to note in the structure is that this cosmic history is one that has somehow removed the Greeks from themselves, has erased human history (except as preserved in the written record of all great human events in the temple in Egypt. The elements of fire and water have been the agents of this oblivion (22c). So, fire and water have already made their appearance, shown their force and done so in the realm of human history. Earth, too, in the sense of a site of human cities and their transactions, has, like chôra, also been intimated. The elements are already political, too. Envoys from a foreign power requested earth and water from the cities they have visited. These were traditional symbols of submission on the part of the city handing over its native soil and water.36 Regarding these cataclysms, the Egyptian priest tells Solon that the Greek myth of Phaëthon, son of Helios, who drove his father’s chariot (and thus the sun) across the sky, lost control of the horses and set the earth on fire, is a feeble effort at accounting for the cataclysms the priest is describing.37

**SETTING**

Not surprisingly for a text where kinds of space come into play, the setting or site of the dialogue is complex. In fact there are four interwoven settings in the narrative, linked by the transmission of that archaic story (palaias akoês, 20d) from its original source to the present, a complex interplay of moments in time, all joining to abstract, or an equatorial degree (hence in reference to measured space), or, finally, a lifetime.

36 See Murray, p. 267.
37 We might note, as Heidegger points out in Parmenides (118f), that in the myth of Er from the Republic, in the underworld the elements themselves take on counteressences, water that cannot be contained in a vessel, air that asphyxiates, earth that yields not
form the density of the dialogue. The third setting, the discussion presented by the text, defines the setting in the strict sense. One could say that the thematically most important setting is the second, the festival of Apatouria.

1) Solon’s visit to ancient Egypt, where he hears this story of the forgotten greatness of an ancient Athens. Note that given Solon’s dates (he was elected Archon in 594\(^{38}\)) his visit to Egypt would have been at the least 150 years prior to the supposed date of this conversation.\(^{39}\) The story of ancient Athens is transmitted by an Egyptian priest, based on written records kept in the temple.\(^{40}\)

2) The Festival of Apatouria, where Critias, as a boy, first heard this story.\(^{41}\) At the festival of Apatouria, youths were enrolled in the Phratreia, the clans by which Athens was organized. Originally military leagues, they evolved into networks of support for various influential families (\textit{genê}).\(^{42}\) But after the reforms of Cleisthenes, the \textit{phratreia} functioned for the religious and social organization of all of Athens. At the festival of Apatouria the father would swear to the legitimate conception of the child in question, thus witnessing to the purity of the phratreia’s bloodlines.\(^{43}\) Walter Burkert phuein, fire that consumes everything, and the myth must end with a cataclysm of earthquake.


\(^{39}\) Taylor says 421, CPT, pp. 16-17.

\(^{40}\) Note that the stories Plato has Solon offer to the priest (seeking to prime the pump) are about famous founders of cities (22a-b), further entrenching the theme of polis-building.

\(^{41}\) Taylor suggests a time just after the expulsion of the Pesistratidai from Athens, which would explain a revival of interest in Solon’s poetry (\textit{Plato}, p. 437f). This date is 512/1 (Buckley, p. 124).

\(^{42}\) Murray, 53f.

says that Apatouria was an Ionian festival. We will see that one of the appeals that the historical Hermocrates makes to the Camarinans against the Athenians during the Sicilian expedition is tribal. The Athenians, he says, are Ionians, while the Camarinans and the Sicilians are Dorians. While his argument would appear to be tribal, its point is in part an a fortiori criticism. The Athenians’ actions in the Delian league showed no respect for their fellow Ionians. How much worse would they treat non-kin? In the context of the dialogue, we see that not only is Hermocrates a stranger to the city. As a Dorian he is also a stranger to the festival of Apatouria, which is the means of access to proper citizenship. For the Athenian reader of the Timaeus, the festival of Apatouria reminds them of the notions of phratreia and clan, but also a tribal differentiation, such as Dorians and Ionians. When the dialogue finally gets there, Timaeus repeatedly describes his account of cosmology as a bastard discourse (tini nothôn, 52b), illegitimate. In the context of the oaths of legitimacy at the festival of Apatouria this would mean he could not swear to its truth, its origins (genei), its beginnings, even though he speaks about beginning itself and does so as logos, not muthos.

Apatouria bore religious and military overtones as well. Greek has no special word for the immediate family, using either house (oikeia) or hearth (hestia)\textsuperscript{44}; the banquet metaphor introduced by Socrates uses the word hestiatorôn (17b, 27b) pertaining to receiving a guest into one’s home, symbolized by the hearth (hestia). Genos referred to extended family, and dictated which gods one sacrificed to. “In Athens, when the archons-to-be are examined for their eligibility, they have to prove


\textsuperscript{44} Burkert, p. 255.
their full citizenship not only by naming their parents and grand-parents but also by stating ‘where they have their Zeus Herkeios and their Apollo Patroos and their family graves’. These places of cult are not transferable and thus indissolubly bind the man to his polis.”

In addition to calling into proximity leadership in the polis on the one hand and earth, place and bloodlines on the other, this information puts a fine point on the role in this dialogue of Solon, the archon par excellence, and on the question of Critias’ relation to Plato, the would-be philosophical archon of Athens (and of Syracuse!) in the mode of Solon. The testimony about where archons have their deity may inflect the observation by Timaeus at the start of his cosmological speech that anyone with the least bit of sense calls on the god before beginning any project (27c), a call that apparently rooted one firmly in one’s polis (and chôra).

For older boys, Apatouria led to the responsibilities of citizenship—military training at the barracks in the Piraeus and guarding frontiers. That Athenian youths, in coming of age, would be involved in guarding the city forms yet another level of valance between the content of the Timaeus and the setting. In the opening summary of the ideal city discussed the day before, the leaders of the city, the philosophical archons, are called guardians.

3) The setting presumed as the present by the text of this dialogue, a meeting between the characters involved that Taylor sets at about 422/1. The time would seem to be the feast of Panathenaea. Panathenaea celebrates Athenian victories over the

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46 Ibid., p. 263.
47 Lambert and Planeaux are quite precise, placing the event in “in mid-August 421,” p. 95.
48 Cornford, p. 5.
Persians and Socrates himself makes the connection between this theme of the festival and Critias’ story of the Athenian victory of Atlantis (26E). The sacrificial procession during the festival involved, after religious and military note worthies, victors in immediately preceding contests, festival embassies of other states, especially colonies, and finally alien residents in Athens. Regarding Plato setting this dialogue on cosmology in the midst of the festival of Panathenaea we might consider Walter Burkert’s words regarding Athena, the goddess celebrated in this festival. Her domains of patronage were military, crafts, and handicrafts. “What unites these divergent spheres of competence is not an elemental force, but the force of civilization: the just division of roles among women, craftsmen and warriors and the organization wisdom which achieves this.”49 This is worth keeping in mind as we read about Timaeus’ cosmology and his creating demiurge (craftsman). For Plato’s topic may be as much about the task of civilization as what we tend to regard as an Ionian style cosmology of elements. The Panathenaea festival is regarded as Athena’s birthday and the birthday of the city.50 Here the theme of birth ingredient in the festival of Apatouria as legitimate births comes together overtly with the whole matter of the city and we see what most probably constituted the thematic reason for including both festivals in this dialogue.51

4) The setting implied by the presence of this text, viz. Plato, the author, and possibly his intended audience, the citizens of fourth century Athens. Taylor and Cornford both place this in the twenty year period prior to Plato’s death in 347. Lee

49 Burkert, p. 141, emphasis added.
50 Ibid., pp. 232f.
51 Though it is not an absolutely obvious conclusion, there is no reason to reject Lambert and Planeaux ‘s assertion that the dialogue transpires in Critias’ home, p. 88.
sees it as one of Plato’s later works.\textsuperscript{52} The date of 367-347 seems to place the dialogue’s composition after Plato’s efforts at state-building in Syracuse.

5) A fifth, if we indulge ourselves a bit, and get caught up in the genealogy of transmission so far described, and the opening left by the missing fifth character, is the setting implied by the reading of this text, another evasive fifth, just like the unknown fifth character who disappeared between yesterday and today. Texts become an issue in the \textit{Phaedrus}, as stand-ins for absent persons. At the very least, 1-4 must all be intended. Their interconnection is, I would suggest, Plato’s way of trying to bring the models to life, and thus perhaps create or animate setting five.

\textbf{CHARACTERS}

Pierre Hadot claims that “in the Socratic dialogue, the real question is less what is being talked about than who is doing the talking.”\textsuperscript{53} Understanding the identities of the characters involved is also a necessary step in gaining access to the \textit{Timaeus}. For, as I have indicated, the dialogue unfolds as several different speeches, linked with the various participants. The characters are four—or five. We meet Socrates, Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates, but Socrates asks about an unnamed fifth member of the previous day’s discussion who for some reason is absent from the conversation contained in this dialogue.

Regarding these characters, Socrates is Socrates, though note that once we get beyond the initial setup he is not the agent of the conversation, but is rather the

\textsuperscript{52} Taylor, CPT, pp. 8-9, Plato, p. 436, Lee, p. 22.
audience, the one who receives the story much like chôra, Timaeus’ description of the medium of all becoming, receives all things (dechetai te gar aei ta panta, 50b) in Timaeus’ telling of the story of the creation of the cosmos. This link of Socrates, Plato’s ideal Athenian, to the chôra is important for to the relation between city and cosmos. The parallel between Socrates and the chôra is not as far-fetched as it might seem at first. Socrates describes himself as expecting a feast of the hospitality of words (ta tôn logon xenia, 20c). Consequently he is all dressed up (kekosmêmenos (20c) from kosmeô, to be adorned or put in order) and most ready to receive (pantôn hetoimotatos ón dechesthai (20c)) the hospitality that the three will now return to him in response to Socrates’ hospitality of the previous day (his speech about the ideal state). That Socrates would be dressed up seems unlikely, though it is a festival day. More likely he is poking fun at himself, but in a dialogue about cosmology the connection with ton kosmon, combined with the description of him as ready to receive, dechesthai, just as the chôra does, cannot be accidental. Accordingly, Socrates remains silent through most of the talking, just as chôra is inarticulate, indiscernible in and of itself. Thus Socrates and chôra constitute another parallel, like the parallel festivals, and the parallel models of citizenship we will hear about. We can also remember that Socrates, who is most eccentric or out of place (atopôtatos, Theaetetus, 149a), does not fit with regular space as topos. If he does fit it may be choratically, ironically, with self-

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54 Regarding Socrates’ reputation for being sartorially challenged, see Aristophanes, “The Clouds,” where Socrates and company are described as “palefaced, barefooted vagabonds” and his dress, indirectly, as “squalid” (100, 920). Five Comedies of
effacing/withdrawing (chôrein) claims of ignorance. The chôra is called tithênên (52D), which in its masculine form can refer to a step- or foster-father, one who raises another. Given the importance of the image of trophê (nourishment-rearing) in the discussion and this linking of Socrates with chôra, plus the double sense of chôra as cosmic site and the site of public life, one could reasonably wonder if Plato is not alluding to Socrates’ role as step-father to the young, the true nourisher of good citizens. At stake in such an indication is the legitimacy of the city, whose court found Socrates’ teaching not true nourishment, but corrupting (junk food).

Timaeus is a visitor from Italy, which might cause one to think of the Pythagoreans or possibly the Eleatic school of Parmenides and Zeno. Indeed, when he finally gets to his cosmology we find much that sounds Pythagorean in it. Furthermore, Timaeus is described as second to none in terms of wealth (ousia) and birth (genei) (20a).55 He has what many consider proper credentials. Ousia here means what belongs to one, or a bit more generally, one’s household, or more generally still, what is proper to someone or something, its properties. Aristotle expands this latter sense when he takes ousia as an entity’s ‘being,’ ‘substance,’ or ‘essence.56 Ousia as wealth, specifically the wealth usually requisite for political status, will be called into question, indeed has already been called into question, with Timaeus’ consent, in the description

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55 Compare the system in Sparta. “The chief agent of Spartan equality was not so much economic as the existence of the agogê and the syssitia as the centres of Spartan life, in which birth and wealth counted little; the Spartan term for full citizens, the homoioi, catches this aspect of equality exactly: for it means not so much ‘the equal ones’ as ‘the uniform’, ‘those alike’. The system achieved equality through conformity.” Murray, 175.

56 Metaphysics 1028a15; 1029b13
of the ideal city from the previous day’s discussion. The practical intent of this proscription of wealth may be that with no material possessions and overt familial ties, susceptibility to self-interest or external influence in judging lawsuits is removed, and indeed grounds for political leverage in general. We must wonder if Socrates’ application of *ousia* to Timaeus means he is being ironic when he calls him a statesman and a philosopher, and that he could not be a true guardian. Perhaps his speech is suspect, too, bastard, just as he himself says. For the guardians of that city are to have no personal property (18b, *ktêma* is the word used here). In addition to this political plane, one sees on the cosmic plane that *chôra* also has no visible properties, and one could detect a formal parallel between this lack of possessions, *chôra*’s lack of properties, and Socratic ignorance, the defining attribute of Socrates’ *psuchê*. The wise person does not claim to ‘possess’ knowledge but has only his/her person. So again, Socrates’ celebration of his companions’ virtue would carry irony. Perhaps Socrates is the true guardian, who in fact was harshly (*chalepon*) killed at his post by the city he was guarding.

57 “We can see at once that a society cannot hold wealth in honour and at the same time establish a proper self-control in its citizens. One of the other must be sacrificed.” Republic VIII 555, translation from *The Republic of Plato*, F.M. Cornford, trans., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 280.

58 On this point see Republic 416c-417. At 416c the reference is to *tus oikêseis kai tên allên ousian*; at 416d *ousian*; 464b-c, neither *oikias*, *gên*, nor *ktêma*. For the leaders to touch gold is *ou themis*. In earlier forms of dispute resolution the disputants gathered before the elders to present their case, each placing equal quantities of gold before the council. The elder whose suggested resolution was accepted received the gold (Murray, 59ff).

59 Again we can turn to Heraclitus. “All things are requital for fire, and fire for all things, as goods for gold and gold for goods” (90, XL). “It is hard (*chalepon*) to fight against passion (*thumô*); for whatever it wants it buys at the expense of soul (*psuchês*) (85, CV).
One might say that in some ways Solon is a character in this dialogue as well. In addition to doing away with *ousia*, these theorists gathered around Socrates also eliminated birth (*genei*) as a basis for leadership, as we will see. While reforming the Athenian constitution in the early sixth century, prior to leaving for ten years on his world travels, Solon eliminated birth (though not wealth) as a basis for holding political office. Of course, Solon enacted his reforms more than a hundred years before Plato was writing. But by writing Solon into this dialogue, Plato is no doubt introducing this history and the issues it involved to frame his own project, not just of cosmology, but of *politeia*-building. Plato’s feeling of continuity with Solon may be more than thematic, for Solon was an ancestor of Plato.

The third character, Critias, shares the name of an ancestor of Plato who had been active in politics, possibly in the reign of the thirty tyrants that occurred when Plato was a young man. To bring this into conjunction with Socrates, we note his claim in the *Apology* (32d) that he had refused to carry out the orders of these tyrants and would have received some penalty but for the sudden change in government. Taylor, Cornford and Lee accept him instead to be Plato’s great-grandfather. Such a fact could be very interesting, given the role that we will see genealogy and blood lines play on
many levels. Also, such a connection would link Plato to the setting of his dialogue. Beyond the allusions to Plato’s family, we can at least say Critias, like Plato himself, comes from established Athenian stock.62

The fourth guest, Hermocrates, brings us to the most crucial point of this examination of characters. Like Timaeus, Hermocrates also was not Athenian, but hailed from Syracuse in Sicily. Cornford says of Hermocrates, “since the dialogue that was to bear his name was never written, we can only guess at why Plato chose him.”63 Here is a guess that seems quite reasonable to me.

Stepping out of the dialogue and into history, we find Hermocrates there. By means of his stirring speech in the assembly, Hermocrates motivated Syracuse to defeat an Athenian military invasion of their land known as the Sicilian Expedition (415/4).64 Note the parallel in the forgotten story, retold by Critias, in which ancient Athens itself is said to have repelled such an invasion by the nation of Atlantis. Athens invades Syracuse in real time, if you will. Atlantis invades Athens in some time we must insist is make believe but which Critias insist with great noise is true (alēthōs, 21a). The story is unrecorded (ou legomenon, we assume this claim is restricted to the Greek context, since the Egyptians seem to have records) and authentic (ontōs 21a) repeatedly referred to as logos rather than muthos. By writing Hermocrates into the Timaeus, Plato alludes to this actual invasion of Sicily less than ten years before Plato met Socrates. Thus one could say the speech eventually assigned to Hermocrates within the dialogue, which is

62 (Cornford, p. 1; Taylor, Plato, p. 437; Lee, p. 28).
63 Plato’s Cosmology, p. 2.
64 Plato’s own disapproval of such expansion might be indicated by the description of the luxurious state in a conversation between Socrates, who seeks a moderate state, and Glaucon, who wants a luxurious one. Republic (372ff).
never defined or accomplished, has in fact already been delivered as the dialogue opens, in real time, in the Sicilian assembly some ten or twenty years earlier, just as the elements have already intruded, just as time has already interrupted, just as philosophy, as we will see, has already burst on the scene as *thaumazein*. Are we to take Hermocrates’ speech urging his fellow citizens to the defense of their city against *Athens* as the sought after example of the ideal state in action?

If Plato is playing this Atlantis tale off of actual history, the tale of Atlantis and ancient Athens then functions as a critique of Plato’s Athens. Thucydides records another speech by Hermocrates, at Camarina, as the Sicilians and the Athenians vie with each other for the assistance of the Camarinans in their conflict. He says, “there is plenty of scope for attacking the record of a city like Athens.” The criticism, in sum, is one of empire, and Athens’ gradual subjugation of its partners in the Delian league, the alliance Athens formed in the fifth century with cities recently freed from Persian hegemony, the original aim of the alliance being defense against Persian re-encroachment.  

So, with the character of Hermocrates we find ourselves in a matrix of interconnected situations, a matrix that links the real or historical, with the mythical and legendary. And just as natural disasters obliterated the memory of how Athens repelled Atlantis, leaving the Athenians like simple children telling tales (*mythoi*, 22b-c), one wonders if perhaps Plato felt that Athenian society remained oblivious, as we know many nations can, to the nature of their own aggression and expansions (as well as to

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65 Thucydides, VI, 72.  
66 See Buckley, Ch. 10. Hermocrates says of the Athenian coercion, “what Athens wanted was to substitute her own empire for that of Persia.” (Thucydides, VI 76).
the corruption of justice in the courts). In the dialogues Hermocrates never gets to make his speech. But by his mere presence he ‘speaks’ what may be the most salient message of the text. Pierre Hadot argues that the *Hermocrates* is superseded by the *Laws*.67 Cornford agrees with this view, arguing that the climax of the trilogy became too unwieldy for its format and so the trilogy was abandoned and Plato wrote the *Laws*.68 Taylor denies the trilogy was *Timaeus-Critias-Hermocrates* and sees the proper logical arrangement of works as *Timaeus-Republic-Critias*.69 The *Laws* theory then seems to put a certain claim on Hermocrates’ role in the dialogue based on the content of speeches. I cannot say why Plato never finishes the trilogy (if indeed there were to be three). But such a speech could be given by anyone. We still need to remember who Hermocrates was and that what he was to say was left unclarified in what did get written. Furthermore, that he is to speak at all is not directly indicated in the *Timaeus*’ outline of the plan (27a-b), but rather finds open acknowledgement in Critias’ nervous procrastination when his turn arrives (Critias, 108a-d).

Consider also what Socrates says of Hermocrates as he is extolling the character of the philosophers and statesmen at this banquet of *logos*. He says that regarding Hermocrates’ nature (*phuseós*) and breeding (*trophê*) it is necessary to believe the testimony of many witnesses (*pollôn marturountôn pisteuteon*, 20b). Welliver sees this ‘weak’ description as evidence of Socrates’ limited esteem for Hermocrates, as opposed to Timaeus. But Plato may mention witnesses in order to draw attention to Thucydides’ account. If Plato intends to refer to Thucydides here, the basis for judging  

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67 Hadot, p. 10.  
69 CPT, p. 440.
Hermocrates’ character would be the anti-Athenian speeches that Thucydides recounts. In affirming what he has heard of Hermocrates via Thucydides, a witness with which the dialogue’s first readers would have been familiar, and that his character is counted as good, Socrates is thus condemning Athens, which would, between the time of his meeting with these three statesman and the time of the writing of the dialogue, condemn him. Such a resonance also highlights the ‘dynamic’ quality of the introduction as opposed to the more wooden nature of the cosmology. Such an affirmation by Socrates would seem to patriots to corrupt the youth.\(^{70}\) That this affirmation occurs in the context of xenia that exchanges not the wealth and gold that empires seek, but rather wisdom/logos, reinforces the implied criticism of empire.

Hermocrates gets only one line in the text (20c-d, and another in Critias). In it he first proclaims the intent of his friends and himself to supply the hospitality of discourse Socrates has announced himself prepared for. Then he tells how while returning to the guest quarters (xenôna) in Critias’ house, Critias mentioned the story Socrates will soon hear about Atlantis. Finally he asks Critias to tell (lege, hence it is part of the feast of logôn) the story so that Socrates might help them scrutinize (xundokimasêi) whether it is fitting or not to the assigned task (epitaxis) they are pursuing. Xundokimazein refers to the process of examining a new elected official to see whether or not he has the right credentials.\(^{71}\) This means that he is of age, has not held office more than one other time and not in the preceding year, and that both parents

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\(^{70}\) Cf. Thucydides: “The result of this excessive enthusiasm of the majority [for the Sicilian expedition] was that the few who actually were opposed to the expedition were afraid of being thought unpatriotic if they voted against it, and therefore kept quiet.” VI, 24. The translation is Rex Warner’s, (Hammonsldworth: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 425.
were Athenian citizens. *Nothos*, the term Timaeus will describe to his cosmology (52b), his *logos* on the *kosmos*, means, bastard or base-born and refers to offspring of a slave or concubine and in Athens to a child of a citizen father and alien mother. So Hermocrates is asking Socrates to help them see whether the story of Athens is a *nothos logos*, or whether it might be legitimate model for the state, the way the forms are the model for the cosmos, though with the alien mother, *chôra*, so their offspring is, like Timaeus’ account about it, somehow bastard as well. Of course, the festival of Apatouria was designed to guarantee such lineage. The story being vetted here is one of Solon in Egypt and the Athenians defeating Atlantis. It has its own laboriously articulated genealogy of transmission involving Critias’ grandfather (perhaps Plato’s great-great-great-grandfather), though this transmission is not what may make it legitimate. One suspects the legitimate story will be the one implied by Hermocrates’ speech pertaining to Athens and Sicily.

Like Hermocrates’ relative silence, absences are not gratuitous in Plato. The anonymous fifth character lingers here like a ghost. It is worthwhile to speculate on the question. It could indicate Plato himself.\(^7\) The conjecture is that this missing person is ill (*astheneia*, 17a). Similarly note that in one of the few direct references to him in the dialogues, Plato is mentioned as absent in the *Phaedo* (absent from Socrates’ death) due to illness (59b, the word used is *êsthenei* to be weak, sick, needy, unable)—a curious

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\(^7\) See Buckley, Glossary and p. 252ff. On the Athenian Citizenship Law of 451, see pp. 250-1.

\(^7\) Cornford harshly rejects this view on chronological grounds (p. 4). Such a criticism is hard to reconcile with Cornford’s assertion when discussing the dating of the dialogue, that by this stage in his career Plato had given up trying to convince his readers that the conversations recounted had really taken place (p. 5). For his part,
fact given the importance of the motif of illness in the *Phaedo*. Socrates’ famous last words, ‘I owe a cock to Asclepius’ (the god of healing, 118a), indicate that he regards his death as the return of his soul from illness to health, though his healing is not biological/cosmological (liberation of the soul trapped in the tomb of the flesh) so much as it is social and political (the fact that he has made the right choice in regard to his fate: to live within the realities and laws of the *polis* rather than fleeing his death, which would have been to live duplicitously, or according to what is convenient, rather than to live perspicuously, the examined life). In the Apology (32a) Socrates says, “Listen then, to what has happened to me, that you may know that there is no man who could make me consent to commit an unjust act from fear of death, but that I would perish at once rather than give way.” And referring to his resistance to the Thirty (32d-e): “But then I again proved, not by mere words, but by my actions, that, if I may speak bluntly, I do not care a straw for death; but that I do care very much (*toutou de to pan melei*) indeed about not doing anything unjust or impious.” Socrates refuses to flee and become detached from his place, a wanderer like the Sophists. He does this from respect for the law, his law. He is firmly rooted in his place (his post) and so a true guardian of the law (*nomophulakos*, see below).

Perhaps Plato is again, admittedly anachronistically, absent from this story due to illness. If Plato wants to hint at himself with this fifth character, then the *Timaeus* becomes a recounting of a story told that is only likely in its accuracy because of the absence of first hand report. Plato, of course is the teller of this story. Yet again, Cornford speculates that Plato may have wanted to leave open the option of writing a further dialogue (p. 3). This conjecture makes Plato seem a bit haphazard.
perhaps, given the importance of Socrates in all of Plato’s work it is meant to hint at the absent one par excellence, Socrates—here yesterday, gone today. Perhaps both of these can be true.

Or could this blank space rhetorically align us with Socrates and the question of living a just life? The empty space created by indicating this absence would represent a rhetorical blank to be occupied by the reader at the same time as Socrates’ other three companions are told they must fill in the part of the missing one (oukoun son tôn de te ergon kai to huper tou apontos anaplēroun meros, 17a).\(^74\) Socrates describes these other three characters as the only living people (monoi tôn nun 20b; lit. only ones of those now) capable of dealing with the matters in question. Amid discussion of great historical leaders like Solon, the expression ‘the only ones of the now,’ those of the current era, points to the ever-recurring task of wise political leadership. It may be a tacit summons to leadership in current times, whether the times of Plato’s contemporaries, or the times of any other readers. For as we begin to read, barely having settled into our chairs, Socrates says, “is not the work of these to you and filling the place of the one who is away?” It is a question, and the question may be rhetorical, but Lee, Cornford and Bury translate the sentence as indicative.\(^75\) If we retain the question, then a negative reply would be at least conceivable, thus implying the question of whose responsibility it is. Granted, in questions oukoun invites assent. But


\(^{74}\) Son tôn de seems to have ambiguous enough to create a dispute. Cornford sees the missing person’s role passing on to all three remaining (p. 3). In line with his view that the cosmology is Pythagorean, Taylor seems to make this out to be only Timaeus’ task (p. 45), in part for reasons pertaining to his belief that the cosmology is Pythagorean and not Plato’s.
perhaps a difference in tone is called for, to extend the sense of invitation among these
guests and hosts. The tone of hospitality would replace that of assignment. These
speculations on the fifth character may appear reckless, but an effort at such a ‘living’
text would not be a surprise coming from a writer with reservations about writing, who
employs the dialogue format, who seeks to blur the line between text and conversation,
and whose main character gets restless with two dimensional, theoretical models never
activated.

THE DIALOGUE

As the text begins, it describes itself as, or, more accurately, acts like the
resumption of a conversation from the previous day, an ongoing event that we step into
midstream, again after the beginning. It is not, as John Sallis’ emphasis suggests, a
beginning so much as a recommencement. It is carrying on what went before, a
beginning with continuity. Missing the thematic significance of the division into
yesterday and today, most commentators think first of the Republic to account for the
previous day’s conversation. Cornford and Lee point out how the festivals of each
dialogue cannot be reconciled and so dismiss the possibility of any intended continuity
of setting. Taylor equivocates on the matter.76 Elsewhere Taylor sees the recapitulation
of themes from the Republic as indicating temporal priority of the Republic to the
Timaeus. The doctrinal continuity and the dramatic displacement in the Timaeus of this
material into yesterday are taken to indicate Plato footnoting himself about politics.
This very systematic Plato may reflect the image of his commentators. The continuity

75 Lee, p. 29; Cornford, p. 9, Bury, p. 17.
may merely be a function of Plato’s ongoing and ever-resuming concern with the state, and the *Republic* and the summary in the *Timaeus* merely two iterations of Plato’s ongoing obsession.

The very first words in this dialogue about beginning indicate an ‘after’ the beginning. Later Timaeus will fix beginning in relation to the cosmos, when he tells how the celestial bodies mark out time, how time comes into existence with the creation of the heavenly bodies (37e), and he will tell how the observation of the order inherent in the heavens gives rise to philosophy. On a dramatic level, the resumption indicated by the dialogue’s beginning, a resumption defined by the interruption of the previous day’s conversation by the order of night and day, places the dialogue, firstly, in the order of time, the realm of becoming, of birth and death, and, secondly, as beholden to the object that gives rise (*gignesthai*) to philosophy, viz. the heavens that mark night and day. With the division of the conversation into yesterday and today, we could say the cosmos is present already, prior to the forthcoming account of its origin. What the dialogue gives in terms of content, it qualifies by means of its own style as dialogue. As a result, while we have not yet reached the discussion of elementals in Timaeus’ speech, the geometrically defined entities that compose the world, we have reached the site of composition, the ordering of human days by the rhythm of living, of day and night, of the welcome of friends and strangers into one’s home with whatever results that might produce. The relation between the human and the cosmic seems to be an interplay of prior moments, but not moments divorced from one another, rather

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76 Cornford, p. 4; Lee, p. 23, Taylor See Plato, p. 437, esp. n. 2.
moments continuous with one another and so recommencements rather than fresh beginnings.

The previous day’s conversation was about the way of the ideal state and its citizen and the kind of constitution (politeia, 17c) involved in such a state. Murray says, “the word ‘constitution’ is an inadequate translation of the Greek politeia, which refers to the complete political, social and educational organization of the state.”77 This description sounds very much like what the dialogue’s participants have been discussing. Timaeus asks Socrates to help them fix that conversation again in their minds if it is not too difficult (chalepon). Timaeus repeatedly uses chalepon to characterize his task of cosmologizing. Socrates will soon reiterate this them of difficulty on the social level when he indicates that the guardians of the state must deal gently (praös) with those over whom they govern (tois archomenois), yet be fierce (chalepos) with those coming to battle the city (17e-18a) The ability to be gentle or severe when appropriate does not occur automatically. In spite of Socrates’ description it is not as simple as measuring within or without (endothen/exothen, 17e). The soul (psuchês, 18a) of each guardian must be spirited (thumoeidê) and philosophic at the same time (hama), yet variably (diapherontôs), thus like the cosmic medium of Anaximander and Heraclitus, opposite qualities united in the same being yet governed by some higher capacity of governance or discernment that holds them in balance. On the cosmic level this governing force may point to Plato’s world soul, cousin to the Empedoclean principle of Love, that along with Strife governs the cosmos. The link between matter and this cosmic Eros might be suggested by Luce Irigaray, who says, in

77 Murray, p. 173.
the context of suggesting that Heidegger’s philosophy is driven by deathly hatred that focuses so singly on the nothing, that “Love reunites what is dissimilar: the dry loves and attracts the wet. Hatred brings about the attraction of like to like: the dry returns to the dry. Love of the other and love of the self order the world.”\(^7\) Here is yet another social theme that will find a cosmic reiteration, this time when Timaeus speaks of Same and Different as cosmic principles (37). Of course, the kind of soul the Socrates seeks in the guardians requires training (\textit{trophên}, 18a); athletic exercises, music, and appropriate learning would be necessary. As we have mentioned, such souls must have no possessions, perhaps as \textit{chôra} has no properties, and so require support from those they guard so they can be free from all worries beyond their duties.

It is worth pointing out that the description of these duties of protecting from external threats with severity and gently dealing with those within the state is described within a context of hospitality (in the persons of the dialogue’s participants) that works off of notions of the foreigner/stranger, for Timaeus and Hermocrates are staying in Critias’ \textit{xenôna} (20c) and Socrates and Timaeus speak of \textit{xeniois} (17c, the gifts of hospitality), and \textit{xenisthentas} (hosting a stranger, 17c). The fact that this hospitality is being offered to strangers and—at least by the time Plato wrote the dialogue—an enemy in the person of Hermocrates, indicates that the guardianship in question, which surely must be embodied, if not by Socrates, then by Critias and his guests, who are the only one’s “qualified” in these matters, is not simply about going to war, in spite of what Socrates says about the ideal state in action. The tacit affirmation in Plato’s writing

\(^7\) \textit{The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger}, Mary Beth Mader, trans., (London: Athlone Press, 1999), p.76. I will consider more carefully Irigaray’s criticisms of Heidegger in Chapter 6.
may be that, by the Socratic way of guarding, Hermocrates is no enemy of Athens, but rather a true statesman. The question then becomes “Who is the true enemy of Athens, and why is Athens confused about this matter?”

Socrates briefly summarizes yesterday’s conversation: The ideal society is run by a guardian class of the best men and women, treated equally. The word for guardian is *ho phulax*. As we noted in discussing Apatouria, coming of age into citizenship meant spending time at the garrison (*hoi phulakoi*—the guardians). The guardians are separate from the farmers (*georgoi*) and the craftspersons (*technai*).79 One of the roles of the Aeropagus, the aristocratic body of emeriti archons, was to guard the law (*nomophulakein*). This responsibility was formally assigned in Solon’s constitution.80

Given the quite specific requirements of temperament among the guardians, the place of children and their education also figures heavily in the discussion of this guardian class. Rather than having fathers stand up and take oaths over legitimacy—an oath that, of course, only the mother (*chôra* in the cosmic iteration of this theme) could take in truth, but she has no voice in the testimony—the parentage of those guardians in this ideal state should be concealed by those in power, with all persons counted as kin. They are *homogenēs* (18d). But in a kind of virtue eugenics, breeding is to be secretly manipulated (*lathrai, mēchanasthai*) to produce the best effect for the state.81

By way of comparison, the Spartan system of *paidopoia* was a much harsher *trophē*. At birth the elders of the tribe, not the father, decided whether the baby was

79 In Sparta the former role was forced on the helots, whose enslavement allowed the Spartan military the freedom required for its thorough professional development. See Buckley, pp. 65f, 224f.
80 Buckley, pp. 243f.
healthy enough to be reared or should be cast into ‘a specially designated mountain ravine.’ From age seven (Buckley says six, see below) all children were involved in the state-run education system. Boys were enrolled in ‘packs’ supervised by the older boys, intentionally fed inadequately, and educated in music, military skills and gymnastics. At twenty, those who made it through this agoge were admitted to the dining clubs (syssita or andreai). Because of the state system women were freed from childrearing and so could pursue training similar to the men. The sexual practices were what Murray calls group rights. Wife-sharing was acceptable, adultery no offense.\textsuperscript{82} The state sought “to develop the ideal qualities of a first class soldier-citizen: patriotism, obedience, loyalty, comradeship, community spirit and uniformity.”\textsuperscript{83} Though Socrates does not mention Sparta, Plato’s readers probably have this comparison in mind.

The summary is at an end. That was the discussion of yesterday, says Socrates. His companions describe his account as exhaustive, the whole feast, and Socrates promptly describes himself as unsatisfied with it. He is still ‘hungry.’ Or he feels as if he is looking at a mere picture, rather than the real thing, a representation (mimeisthai, the domain of poets). But he would like to see the ideal city in action. Yet Socrates exempts himself from the task of describing this state in action because, he says, he lacks the proper experience. Again, he takes the position of one who is aware of his own deficiencies, who steps aside (chôrein). His friends, being statespersons and philosophers, must carry out this task of description. For they have the necessary experience (trophê, 20a), nurture, nourishment, or, more generally, upbringing. At 18a

\textsuperscript{81} Here we have a distinct, yet unsurprising departure from democracy, which aimed at making leader’s accountable to those ruled. See Buckley, p. 258.

\textsuperscript{82} Murray, 174-176.
trophên refers to the upbringing of the guardians in Socrates’ perfect state. At 20a, regarding his three companions, Socrates uses trophês in a pairing with phuseós—nurture and nature. Also, the dialogue commences with the image of a feast (hestiatorôn 17b), an excess of trophê. The chôra at one point is called the nurse (tithenên, 52d), the one who nourishes an infant. But also, given the generalized sense for trophê of upbringing, tithenos can mean a foster father. Given the beginning with a concern regarding the proper trophê for growing citizens, the chôra as nurse must draw chôra as Plato uses it toward the question of a site for creating a city. The theme of the site of the polis, which we say Heidegger bring forth in the previous chapter in regard to Parmenides, draws the social and the cosmic together once again, and in the following chapter on the Phaedrus we will see this relation between site and city explored from a more external vantage point. For colonizers the sight for building a new city had to be defensible, be well situated on trade routes and have arable land nearby. For Plato’s city a different kind of defense (nomophulaka), intercourse (xenia logôn) and source of nourishment (trophê) were required for its citizens. We are led to believe by these references to trophê in the Timaeus that the coming discussion will contribute to the nourishment of all concerned, including those of us reading the text, to our quality as citizens, though who will swear to our legitimacy remains uncertain.

As the Timaeus further unfolds we learn the plan for a threefold response to Socrates’ request to hear of the perfect state in action, a plan which reiterates again the themes of cosmos and polis, proposing to engage them analytically, though here again the question of the incompleteness of this analytically conceived project emerges. The

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83 Buckley, p. 79.
plan: Timaeus will set the stage by describing the origins of the cosmos from its beginning, down to the creation of humans. We get this account in the dialogue named after Timaeus, the one we approach here. Critias will then follow with a description of the Athens of old. This account is begun in the Critias, a companion dialogue to the Timaeus. But Critias’ account is never completed. The dialogue ends mid-sentence. Hermocrates will give some speech of unspecified character. What he would have said remains a question mark.

As we ponder this matter of the ideal state, Critias introduces the story he heard from his grandfather about the confrontation with Atlantis, the recollection of which so astonished him. Of course, we should not be surprised by such out of place speech. In another context Socrates says people consider him atopotatos, literally “most out of place” (but not utopic, without place), the strangest of mortals who perplexes (aporein) people (Thaetetus, 149). Note that the word used for story is logos, not mythos. It is not strictly regarded as a fiction. In fact, Socrates explicitly says it is not a fiction (muthon) but a true history (alêtheia logon) (26e), although one could ask if he does not say so with a sense of irony, given the emphatic sound of alêtheia logon. The word muthon does occur later as a description, placed in the mouth of the Egyptian priest, of the genealogies and histories the Greeks tell about themselves (22c, 23b). The Greeks are called, by this Egyptian priest, children (22b), an important linkage with the festival of Apatouria that provides the setting for Critias first hearing this tale and with the generativity images of Timaeus’ cosmological story. This story of Atlantis was relayed to Greece by Solon. Just as fathers swear to the legitimacy of their children on the third

84 Murray, p. 105.
day of the festival of Apatouria, Solon swears to the legitimacy of the story, as does Socrates swear that the story Timaeus tells is a true logos; a midwife would swear the legitimacy of a child’s birth, though of course not its conception.

The story of Atlantis came back to Critias from out of the blue, as something stumbled over unexpectedly because it was not in its proper place. Critias says, “When you were describing your society and its inhabitants yesterday, I was reminded of this story and noticed with astonishment (ethaumazon) how closely, by some miraculous chance, your account coincided with Solon’s” (26). Similarly, Solon is astonished (thaumasai, 23d) at what the Egyptian tells him. Both Aristotle and Plato quite famously say that philosophy begins in wonder—thaumazein (Metaph. 982b12; Thaetetus 155d). So as astonished wonder, philosophy has already begun here, prior to the formal speeches. Perhaps we might say philosophy has interrupted the dialogue.

While we wait to begin the cosmology here, thauumazein disrupts. The Egyptian priest said that the Greeks were ignorant of their own past because the Greek country was prone to periodic destruction from cataclysms. The means of these disruptions are fire and water, two of the elements that later will be so calmly parsed by Timaeus into various combinations of triangles. Here nature (cosmos) has disrupted history. The disruptions pile up. Critias was told the story on Children’s Day of the festival of Apatouria, the third and final day of the festival when, in addition to officially enrolling 85 Knowledge was lost to the Greeks because of ephanismena hupo chronou kai phthoras (20-21). The Greek topos being wiped out or obliterated, the story (logos), by existing at all, must exist out of place: atopos in quite a literal, geographical sense. The geometrical topos is too rigid to withstand destruction. Tensile, flexible chôra, that within which the destructive elements are rooted, gives way and endures. If attuned to Anaximander’s language of arising (genesis) and destruction (phthoron) one cannot
youth into the *phratreæ*, school boys came forth to recite poetry, thereby demonstrating the fruits of the preceding year’s pedagogy. Solon, who brought the story back to Greece, in addition to having reformed the clan system which the festival celebrated, also wrote verse, some of which in fact, according to the story, received a recitation on this third festival day (21b). This recitation perhaps reassured the parents that their money was not being wasted, that something resulted from the education. The ability to recite poetry (*poiesis*) meant something was produced (*poieïn*). In the summary of the previous day’s conversation they discuss *paidopoiia* (18c), the practices of procreation, literally ‘making children.’ In disqualifying himself from bringing life to yesterday’s picture of the ideal state (his inability, he says, is *ouden thaumaston*, no surprise), he also disqualifies poets and sophists (19d). The *poieïn* of poetry is a mere mimesis, a reduplication that does not venture out into outer regions, or beyond their training (*ektos tês trophês*, 19e), so they have difficulty (*chalepon*) representing anything in deeds (*ergois*) let alone words (*logois*). If this production approximated normal Greek pedagogy, then Socratic pedagogy, which involved asking questions such as “What is the good?,” often without producing answers, provides a contrast. The sophists, on the other hand, have wandered so much they have many beautiful things to say, but no public life for experience, no investment in any place. Rather, the sophist extracted gold from the places he visited, exchanging *logos* for gold, rather than any kind of *xenia logôn*.

help but wonder if some allusion exists in the various cataclysms described in the Timaeus’ elaborate prelude to the work of this cosmological pioneer.

86 Contrast Socrates’ reference to his own behavior during the time of the Thirty, which was not just in word but in deed (*Apology* 32d).
Socratic legitimacy is not purely of the realm of the natural (phusis), of breeding legitimate children, not even of production (poiesis) of marketable skills that will land the graduate a good job. More accurately Socrates, who for most of his adult life searched for a wise person, seeks out those with the trophê to make good decisions, what Socrates claims his friends have and, strangely, he lacks. Socrates here is the midwife, not the mother or even the wet nurse. How does one raise (trephein) good citizens? We must remember, at the point of contrasting Socratic citizenship with existing pedagogy, that Athens executed Socrates on the charge that he corrupted the youth. He did not nurture the kind of citizens the Athenians desired, true citizens rather than bastard citizens. The whole motif of pedagogy then becomes, like the comparison of the Athens of legend with the Athens of the Sicilian expedition, a critique of the current situation in the city, now not for empire building but for blindness in its treatment of its best (aristos) citizens, which is surely the point of all of Socrates’ self-deprecation and glorification of his companions. No doubt these different views of legitimacy also give significance to Timaeus’ repeated comment that his cosmology is only a bastard discourse, for cosmology may in the end be only interesting information compared with wisdom. Perhaps all of Socrates’ life was a bastard discourse, at least as judged by his fellow citizens (who may not have been peers). Bastard in what sense? Perhaps in so far as the Socratic story is outside (atapos) of the city’s view of

87 On this point compare Heraclitus: “In Priene lived Bias son of Teutames, who is of more account (pleôn logos) than the rest” (D39, LXII). “One man is ten thousand, if he is the best (aristos)” (D49, LXIII). “What the Ephesians deserve is to be hanged to the last man, every one of them, and leave the city to the boys, since they drove out their best man, Hermodorus, saying ‘Let no one be the best among us; if he is, let him be so elsewhere and among others.’” (D121, LXIV). “It is law to obey the counsel (boulê) of one” (D33, LXVI).
legitimacy, in fact most outside (atopotatos). Justice could be defined in a society as each being finding its right or proper place. The two means of ordering the polis represented in the Timaeus have contrary notions of how to define proper place, and therefore justice. Perhaps justice, like wisdom, is always contentious. It occurs in choratic space, in so far as this is space where something is at stake and the measurements are made only with wisdom. This conflict comes to a head in Socrates’ execution, which one could suggest, figures in all of Plato’s dialogues. The demos cannot be wise and is subject to demagoguery, whether in landing an invasion or eliminating an irritating character. 88

So perhaps the Timaeus, at least in the beginning it enacts (the dialogue), if not in the one it recounts (the cosmology), deals not so much with primitive astrophysics and biology, or even metaphysics, as with the difficulty of nourishing citizens who can discern the just. 89 Indeed the participants sense the difficulty. The speeches are made under compulsion and with repeated reservations, nearly Socratic professions of ignorance. So one finds a continued sense of hesitation, uncertainty and reserve, as if each of the speakers is out of his element, standing on ground that is more like the continually disappearing chôra than like kenos, empty space waiting to be filled, or

88 Cf. Buckley on the rise of demagogues and the consequent shift from political influence by way of networks (philia) to the direct appeal to the masses, pp. 346-350. 89 Of course we are left with the question of why Plato spent so much in on a cosmology he was not invested in and the task of reading the rest of the dialogue in light of the above interpretation. In addition to the comments about the resonance between chôra and the uniqueness of the element of earth among the elements, its non-commutability into the other elements, one could refer at this point to Carlos Steel’s claim that the physiology described by Timaeus decisively privileges moral action as an example of how one might see the continuation of the priority of the public/moral emphasis and the scientific even into the cosmology itself. “The Moral Purpose of the Human Body: A Reading of Timaeus 69-72,” in Phronesis, Vol. 46, 2001, pp, 105-128.
mere *topos*, space over which one can rule like a tyrant ruling a city and upon which one can project stable, mimetic images or forms, the kind of forms we always attribute to Plato. The dialogue unfolds on ground like *chôra*, and the speakers seek to construct on that ground the best public life possible.

*Chôra* might be the place that nurtures one, the place that nourishes one, the place that has such depth one cannot plumb it. Indeed, Socrates does not wish to abandon his place even in the face of his death, but not just because his people are there, or his gods are there, but because of the laws of that place, the laws that seek to embody in a place a cosmic justice. He is neither immersed, nor detached. He welcomes strangers, even those like Hermocrates who question the actions of Athens, for after all Socrates spent his whole life questioning Athens. So elemental *chôra* seems to open onto social *chôra*. We have seen Socrates in the city, welcoming the alien. Next we will see him in an alien setting, in the country, another instance of *chôra*, discussing the life within the city.
Chapter 4

Phaedrus: Soul in Place

Objectification proceeding somehow from the center of a thinking being manifests, upon its contact with the earth, an eccentricity.¹

A *daimonos topos* is an ‘uncanny district.’ That now means: a ‘where’ in whose squares and alleys the uncanny shines explicitly and the essence of Being comes to presence in an eminent sense.²

Justice is such an elusive thing of which to get any kind of concrete idea. In fact it seems to be a notion only hovering on the horizon, almost never at the center of any discussion.³

John Sallis finds in the *Phaedrus* a certain anthropocentrism and a bifurcation of experience into human and non-human in the face of which he seeks a return to “wild nature and the elemental” that is more “pre-Socratic.”⁴ In that dialogue Socrates expresses his preference for the society of humans over the natural world. The latter quite obviously unsettles Socrates. He lifts the human world into prominence over the natural world, the city above what is beyond the wall, *polis* above *phusis*. Sallis considers this a neglect of the kind of wild nature, apart from concerns for ordering human affairs, that he describes in the opening quote to this chapter, and he suggests that the fruit, or rather the product, of this Socratic recoil, the famous ‘second sailing,’ is the elevation of *noêton* over *aisthêton*. This elevation is ‘metaphysics,’ a priority

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Nietzsche inverted. Nietzsche turned back to the world in all its materiality. Accordingly, Sallis seeks to reclaim the language of sense. He wants to bring the two meanings of sense (sensation and meaning) back together, reorienting the relation between ideas (which carry a sense) and the perceptible world (embedded in senses). Sallis sees the *Phaedrus* as too metaphysical and seems to think that this kind of separation between experience and meaning, rooted in Socrates’ preference for *logoi* rather than *phusis*, cannot do justice to the elemental. Does the *Phaedrus* really justify this opposition he seeks to overcome? Or is the relation between city and nature more complicated? I think it is.

In the last chapter the two senses of *chôra*, the social and the cosmic, were in tension with each other, even dancing with each other in a way. In this chapter we examine a conversation in a natural setting about matters of the city. But the conversation takes place in the elements, the heat of the day, the cool of the water, upon the bare earth in the sultry air. These elements, furthermore, are evoked (under the guise of Hippocratic theory) as agents shaping human being, its dwelling, its community and its character. All of these factors, along with the profound sense of embodiment conveyed by the setting and the allusions to Hippocratic theory make the elemental a forceful, though silent (again) character in this dialogue. So whereas before we were on the inside of the city, in so far as the *Timaeus* was set in the city, in so far as it took as a theme various festivals of the city, including that for the birth of the city and its patron deity, in so far as it contrasted the rearing of citizens from merely rearing offspring, in so far as the ideal city defined the whole project of that dialogue and its

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fractured or even unwritten companion dialogues, now we begin outside the city, since the two figures meet outside the city wall, since the elemental cosmos is an intensely present third, since the force of the elements in the hours depicted is stark. In the *Timaeus*, the concerns of the city, the public *chôra* framed a conversation about cosmology, here the natural cosmos is the setting for a conversation about public life.

The *Phaedrus* is the only dialogue from Plato where Socrates leaves the city. At play in the *Phaedrus* seems to be a dynamic of inside and outside. Kept at bay in other dialogues by the secure embrace of the city walls, in the *Phaedrus*, nature reasserts itself, takes place away (both in the sense of displaces and occurs at a remove) from the *dia-logoi* that would ignore it. Plato uses the natural environment to amplify this dynamic. This framework of inner and outer plays out on three levels. First, the placement of the action outside the city walls, in the natural world, a setting that is to some extent literary, but which by bringing the city wall into play also draws into focus the political questions that are present in Plato’s work, usually bound up with the question of Socrates and his fate. This theme is the question of political exteriority and interiority. Second, the effect of this alien place on Socrates and his ensuing ecstasy, his being drawn outside of himself. This sense is the subjective or psychological side of the question. Third, there is a reference, though mythic, to a beyond the heavens, which is associated with the forms, in particular, the forms of *dikaiosunê* (righteousness or justice), *sophrôsunê* (moderation or self-control) and *kalos* (beauty).

The dialogue transpires in an abnormal location, outside the city walls of Athens. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Plato’s concerns are heavily dominated by the question of the city and its life. Socrates, the gadfly, concerns himself
with affecting by his little sting the life of the giant horse called Athens. But only in this dialogue Socrates appears outside the wall of the city. Is he a gadfly with no horse since he is no longer in the *agora*, the domain of *logos*, where his sting has effect; or is he only now finally outside of the physical Athens, in a position to make his move? He is drawn away from the city, drawn out by the tempter Phaedrus with the promise of *logoi*, but *logoi* not from other humans directly, but from a text, which is external to its author much like the location of the dialogue is external to the city. The location becomes an explicit theme in the conversation in various ways. Phaedrus comments on its strangeness for Socrates, who replies with his comment that he has always believed one can learn more from another human than one can learn from a tree. As the dialogue continues, Socrates continually observes that he feels he is being bewitched by the spirit of the place. It is as if the place has taken over the dialogue. *Phusis* ‘dictates’ *logos*.

Another feature of the *Phaedrus* to point out is the correlation of the myth of the chariot ride of the soul with the opening of Parmenides’ poem. Whether or not this is intentional, the similarities with Parmenides are striking, though the demands of space require that we rely for the most part on the discussion already given in the second chapter. One can keep in minds also Levinas’ positive comments about Gagarin’s modern trip into the *hyperouranion*.
A final issue is the question of writing. The dialogue enrolls only two characters, Socrates and Phaedrus, but also includes two virtual third parties. One is Lysias, a famous speech maker. He is a person, but not present with Socrates and Phaedrus. The other is a text of a speech by Lysias, the speech under discussion. It is not a person, but it is present, standing in for Lysias, concealed for a time inside Phaedrus’ cloak, then exposed, brought out by Socrates. Location therefore plays an important role in the dialogue, both the location of the dialogue in the sense of setting, and the location of words (logoi), whether in a written document or in the voice of another person. What follows is a condensation of a much more detailed treatment of the _Phaedrus_, focusing on the four points raised above, 1) the saturation of the scene by Eros, 2) the nature of the speeches and 3) the chariot ride of the soul, and 4) the strange dynamic of the text in relation to the person.

**What Kind of Place?**

The _Phaedrus_ begins with Socrates encountering Phaedrus, who lures him out into the country, beyond the city walls with the promise of logoi, speeches. Phaedrus is looking for a chance to impress Socrates by pretending to give a speech that comes from Lysias, which he is actually carrying a written copy of under his cloak. While he is hiding the speech he is also preparing to hide himself behind the speech, much like Socrates will hide his face when making his first speech. The two men carry out an extended conversation, beginning just outside the city at a spot beside a river under a tree on a hot afternoon. The topic is _eros_ and what seems to be one of its instruments,

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6Walter Ong and Eric Havelock have made much of the effect of writing on thinking in ancient Greece. See Ong, _Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word_ (London: Routledge, 1982); Eric A. Havelock, _Preface to Plato_ (Cambridge, Mass.):
rhetoric. Indeed, several speeches are given about eros, in the manner of a rhetorical competition. Eros is perhaps also not a bad description of what happens to Socrates in this setting. Socrates takes one of his speeches to have offended Aphrodite, Eros’ mother, and so the daimon that often checks him in his actions calls him to come back and repent of it by giving a palinode, lest he, like another Greek poet, be struck blind by the offended goddess. Eventually he offers the myth of the chariot ride of the soul, which flies up to view the forms of justice, wisdom and beauty.

As we found with the Timaeus, it seems wise when reading Plato to pay attention to the opening lines. In this case the first voice in the dialogues belongs to Socrates. He calls out to Phaedrus, as if encountering him just now, “Friend Phaedrus, where are you going and where have you come from?” (poi ðê kai pothen; 227a, to where indeed and from where). One finds here the question of direction and purpose introduced in the most basic spatial terms—to where, from where. As the dialogue progresses we learn Phaedrus has been with Lysias, with whom he seems to have some sexual relationship (236b). Lysias has been making a speech about how the young man should take a lover whom he does not love, rather than one he loves. So Lysias is revealed as dikranos, of two minds, like the mortals described by Parmenides. He does not have a clear direction or path. His speeches are asteioi, of the city, that is, urbane, witty. Describing Lysias’ arguments as asteioi might explain why he is absent from this dialogue. He is urbane, and out of place in the countryside, as, however, is Socrates. Urbane might well suggest that he remains pretty much on the well-trod paths of the

sort Parmenides’ youth has wandered far from. If so then the setting of this dialogue would seem to hint at this Parmenidean theme.

Next the dialogue introduces certain themes that serve as an interpretive context, much like the invasion of Syracuse, the festival of Apatouria and the idea of Xenia do in the *Timaeus*. One theme is health, another is the mysteries, and a third is the triadic structure: god, human and beast.

The beginning of the dialogue commences like a contest of rhetoric, with Socrates competing against the absent Lysias, who is represented by Phaedrus. Such contests were common in Athens and were associated in Plato’s mind with the sophists, many of whom took pride in being able to make the weaker argument seem the stronger. This accusation was eventually leveled at Socrates (Apology, 18b) and may be the gist of the comparisons discussed in chapter three of Socrates to Daedalus, who makes statues, dead arguments, get up and run, have life. Lysias’ speech is an *epideictic* speech, in which the speechwriter demonstrates his skills by arguing impressively in favor of the most unlikely position.⁷ Hence we have method detached from any concern for truth, an issue raised later in discussion of dialectic, which is different from rhetoric, it seems, in that truth is precisely its concern (272d-e). In terms of Parmenides’ concern this practice reflects a certain indifference to the distinction between what is and what is not.

The matter of direction is pressed further. When Phaedrus offers to relate to Socrates the content of his conversations that morning with Lysias, if only Socrates has the time to accompany him, Socrates replies enthusiastically that he will consider it
more important than the most pressing (ascholias, 227b) engagement. This notion of having time sets up another theme in the text, one of leisure (scholē) and urgency. Socrates continually is aligned with the side of urgency. Socrates replies to Phaedrus’ offer by politely inviting Phaedrus to speak (legois an), and the dialogue, as well as their journey, is underway. Chôra, the region outside the wall, was available in peacetime, but in war the city was confined by the wall. The fact that they are outside the wall means Socrates’ sense of urgency does not come from any factor external to the city. The implication of this theme of urgency is that the matter at hand is not, like rhetoric or the therapeutic medical regimens that will soon be discussed, a casual, leisurely matter, but instead most urgent, perhaps even a matter of life and death. Socrates’ concerns, the just polis and the examined life, are not casual matters. One must never let go of one’s responsibility to the city. Indeed, in the Crito Socrates invokes precisely this argument when explaining why he must not flee the sentence of the courts against him.

The theme of health is not uncommon to Plato either and is not unrelated to this issue of urgency. Plato employs the motif of health in the Phaedo, where the famous line, ‘I owe a cock to Asclepius’ occurs (118a). In these last words, Socrates invokes the god of the physicians, implying that his death is a healing. I suggested in the previous chapter that for Socrates this healing means that he has done what is right by the city and himself, viz. acted justly. In its theory of health, the Hippocratic tradition placed an emphasis on the whole organism, whole insofar as it includes the temperament of the person as well as physical characteristics. The Hippocratic tradition

emphasizes the effect of place on the health and character of its inhabitants. Socrates, who will find this place he and Phaedrus come to having quite an effect on him, will also be concerned about moral health.

An exchange ensues between Phaedrus and Socrates wherein Socrates, who will soon reaffirm that his quest in life is not to explain myths or pursue regimens of physical health but to fulfill the Delphic prescription to know himself, demonstrates that he knows Phaedrus quite well by seeing through his ruse of hiding the text of Lysias’ speech (228d), and that he knows even this alien countryside better than Phaedrus by pointing out the correct location of an altar Phaedrus mentions (229c). The revelation of the presence of the text of Lysias’ speech interrupts the *peripaton*, walking conversation, and forces the two men to sit down. “Where (pou) would you like to sit while we read (*anagnômen*; 228e)?” One senses that Plato’s famous uneasiness with written texts is already in play. No longer is it a question of whither and whence (*poi kai pothen*), but *pou*, a ‘where’ that is stationary. One thinks of the difference between Daedelus’ statues and real humans. Whereas Daedelus made statues get up and walk, the presence of a text ends their walk and places them in a spot, much like the text itself situates language in a voiceless locale. Phaedrus had answered Socrates’ initial question (*poi kai pothen*) by saying he was on a *peripatous*, ‘a walk around,’ as advised by a mutual friend who is a physician (227a). *Peripatous* has the sense of an aimless walk, but also is a word for a conversation, sometimes a specifically philosophical conversation, something that might be quite urgent. The sitting ends the *peripatous*, and what provokes the sitting is the presence of a written text, an object that occupies

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one’s attention. Thus what they are prone to do together has changed with the presence of this text. One might even go so far as to say that the nature of their relationship has changed as well. Phaedrus’ eyes will no longer look on Socrates, but on the text. A third party is implied now by the written text. Furthermore, *anagnômen*, ‘to know accurately,’ ‘to recognize’ as well as ‘to read’ might refer to the place they will stop (*pou*) as much as the text they will read. Indeed, they will discuss the features of the spot including its mythological legacy, a heritage that comes not from texts but from stories.

As they search around for a place to sit, Phaedrus makes some comments about the charms of the surroundings. It is lucky he is barefoot, since they can walk in the water, which will not be unpleasant. (Socrates, he observes, is always barefoot, 229a.) Lead on (*proage*) replies Socrates. He points out a tall plane tree and suggests that it will be shady there with a breeze and they can sit or lie down in the grass. Lead on (*proagois an*), 229b), Socrates says again. Again we note that Phaedrus singles out the presence of all the elements, heat, breeze, water and grassy earth.

Next Phaedrus turns the focus to the spot itself. This may be the spot, he guesses, where Boreas abducted Oreithuia while she was playing with the nymphs. ‘No,’ Socrates replies, it is two or three hundred yards further downstream. There may even be an altar to Boreas there, he says. Note here that Socrates, who is a stranger to the world outside the city, knows this particular area better than Phaedrus. Robert Graves offers an expansion of the explanation for this temple. “The Athenians regard Boreas as their brother-in-law and, having once successfully invoked him to destroy
King Xerxes’ fleet, they built him a fine temple on the banks of the river Ilissus.”8 Boreas would seem to be a guardian of Athens, which would explain the construction of an altar on the city’s perimeter. In the *Timaeus* we saw this theme of the guardians of the city as well, though they were citizens, and the quest in that dialogue was for the best way to nurture them.

Phaedrus asks Socrates if he believes this story to be true. The story of course refers to the abduction, but could also, given the reference to the altar, refer to the assistance from Boreas (the north wind and therefore cold air) in defeating Xerxes. Socrates replies that, while he would not be out of place (*atopos*) in asking these questions, as some of the wise (*hoi sophoi*, 229c) among us do, he does not have time to worry about finding reasonable explanations for fantastic stories, hence the theme of urgency again. People who start down that path find themselves with all kinds of absurdities, with monster stories of some nature (*atopiai teratologôn tinôn phuseôn*, 229c) to deal with in similar fashion. So the myths and the gods might be stories of monsters. Someone wishing to do so will need a great deal of time (*scholês*, leisure, 229e). Socrates has hinted before that he does not have leisure. He is in earnest, urgently seeking answers to certain questions. Accordingly, he says that as for himself he has no leisure for such things (*emoi de pros auta oudamôs esti scholê*, 229e). The reason or cause (*aition*) is that he still seeks to accomplish the admonition (*gramma*) of the Delphic oracle, to know himself (*gnônai emauton*, 229e). So he accepts what is generally believed (*nomizomenô*, 230a) about these kinds of stories and looks not to these things but to himself. As the dialogue moves toward a close we will see that

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Phaedrus, who asks questions about idle stories, is one who accepts what he has heard (akêkoa) when it comes to urgent things like the role of truth in rhetoric (261b, 267d).

So, much like the contrast expressed in Socrates preference for the human over the plane tree, we have a contrast between explaining stories on the one hand, and explaining oneself on the other. We might suspect that Socrates’ resolve will not go undisturbed. And indeed we find that Socrates is soon outside himself due to the effect of the environs. Soon the monstrosity will emerge in regard to Socrates, in the question of what kind of beast he is.

By his indifference to stories about Boreas in favor of knowing himself, Socrates appears to be breaking free of earlier Greek traditions about selfhood, traditions that situate the individual much more firmly in her milieu. Ruth Padel describes the sense of the self depicted in Greek tragedy and finds it quite porous to the external world. Her account shows a world luminous with divine forces that assail or assist the human being.

Two fifth-century thoughts crucial for our understanding of tragedy are that human beings are made of the same stuff as the universe, and that we infer the inner, which we cannot see, from the outer, which we can. I introduced these thoughts in scientific contexts, but they belong with a comprehension of the world that is also, at every point, daemonic. Daemons, like liquid and air, are part of the fabric of the world. Tragic audiences expected daemons both inside, in their innards, and outside, in the environment. From the visible surfaces of world or person, they inferred the unseen presences of daemon.

Note the elemental continuity here between humans and the cosmos, a view reinforced also by Hippocratic theory. These daemons were by no means inert or neutral, but animated in one way or another towards humans. Regarding lightning, flood, wind, fire

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10 Ibid., p. 114.
and storm she says, “we think of them as forces of ‘nature,’ but to the Greeks ‘nature’ was also (as we would put it) supernatural, a medium of daemonic expression, whether tender or aggressive. The elements are the gods’ arsenal.”

Padel’s historical description of Greek selfhood might lend support, if he were interested, to Heidegger’s depiction of the daemonic as discussed in the Chapter 2, as a directionality that runs counter to intentionality, comes to us from objects in the illumination of the world as it lights those objects up. I think it also captures, formally at least, what I called in chapter one the dynamic structure of *apeiron*’s role in the cosmos, where the presence of *apeiron* on the boundary of the cosmos effects the interior of the cosmos, at a remove from itself, what I take to be an eccentric, ‘choratic’ structure that is Ionian in spirit. Concomitant with this view would seem to be the conception of no absolute boundary between self and environment, or in Heidegger’s language, perhaps, self is not first a subjectivity surrounded by inert objects. The historical dimension of this theme in Heidegger comes through in comments such as “only a god can save us,” which could be heard as an echo of Phaedrus’ question to Socrates about whether he thinks stories about Boreas, at least the one about the defeat of Xerxes, are true. Probably in light of the question of what kind of animal Socrates is, the test will be how he responds to this very Greek natural setting. We will see his daemon seems cut from a cloth other than the elements, which may represent Plato’s difference from Heidegger, his emphasis on the politico-cosmic axis of Anaximander’s thought as opposed to the theo-cosmic. We can note here this distinction between

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11 Ibid.
daemonic nature and Socrates’ daemon a certain continuity with Levinas’ distinction between the *apeiron*, from which the mythic God’s emerge, and the infinite, associated with the face of the other and with the call for justice.

As Padel describes this Greek cosmos, it is not a matter of the pure subjection of a powerless shadow self. In words that anticipate what Levinas calls “extraterritoriality,” the separation from the elemental by virtue of the dwelling, in relation to which human activity takes its meaning, she say, “the fifth century tended to date the beginning of civilization to some primal sheltering from the elements.”¹³ Shelter was a differentiation from that environment, though of course certain gods dwelled in the human home, too. Emotions approach from outside and the human’s control is limited. “Emotion approaches inexorably. All we can do is hope it will be gentle when it comes.” And “in tragedy, anything that alters consciousness is an alien conqueror.”¹⁴ Later in the dialogue Lysias’ speech indicates that he views himself as defeating such an attempt at conquest by Eros. Emotion is sent by a god, but one should fight it, because it can be damaging, even if from a god, though Padel says, *theomachia*, fighting a god, always ends in destruction. Consequently, after a speech about love that he comes to regard as disrespectful, Socrates will make much of his own palinode, his retraction in order to avoid a struggle with Aphrodite. He seems to want to avoid the conflict. “Self-control, controlling one’s own passions was an explicit ideal in fifth-century Athenian public discourse. Tragedy is drawn to the paradox that we

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¹³ Padel, p. 115.
must try to fight destructive emotion, despite its divinity and despite the fact that
fighting divinity is both impossible and wrong.”

15 Emotions are conquerors. “Desire ‘conquers’ beasts and human beings, ‘subdues’ the thumos.”

16 Thumos, of course, is what carries Parmenides as far as the gates of night and day (1.1) and similarly the
question in this dialogue will be how to reach the perimeter of heaven to see the forms.

In fact, Padel sees this Greek view at work in the more rational context of Parmenides
poem, which “pictures logical necessity as a bond that ties down (and so limits) what
exists.” She wonders if perhaps for the philosophers logic does not represent a similar
overmastering force.

A porous relation between self and world similar to the one that Padel describes,
having the same divine within and without, seems reflected in the Hippocratic tradition.
Phaedrus immediately evokes this tradition in the dialogue’s opening, when tells how a
mutual friend who is a physician has prescribed his peripatous. But a significant
difference exists. The Hippocratic tradition seems to have rationalized the structure of
the relation between self and setting, removing the divine element of the question.

The Hippocratic text *Airs Waters Places* advises the physician on how to evaluate a
new, unfamiliar place with the aim of treating the people there. The first task according

14 Ibid., p. 127. Cf. Lingis: “Not only do emotions discharge their forces on the outside
environment; they have their source in it.” *Dangerous Emotions*, p. 18.

15 Padel, p. 128.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 129.

18 Hippocrates does admit to divine causes of disease but seems to offer natural
may almost say that to Hippocrates the physis plays the part attributed by less
scientifically minded Greeks to Asclepius, the god of healing.” Brock, Arthur J. *Greek
to the treatise is to become familiar with the peculiar geography and climate of the place (chôrē;) and city (polin) in question (I: 1-II: 26). Place (chôra) shapes the polis, perhaps polis in Heidegger’s sense of some turning thing prior to the political that makes the political possible. Now one might note that we have a parallel between this hypothetical physician and Socrates. Socrates is also coming to a new and ostensibly unfamiliar place with concerns about health, though as he has made clear, it is not strictly physical health, but the health of the soul, tended in terms laid out by the oracle of Delphi: gnôthi seauton. Know yourself.

The physician must consider (enthumeisthai, I: 2, II: 1) the basic elements of that place: air, water, soil, and orientation with respect to the sun and seasons, the turning of cosmos. With respect to air, or, more precisely, winds, he sets up a governing typology defined by the predominant winds, which affect the self much as Padel describe in the relation to the gods. The first mentioned is the city dominated by the hot winds ‘between the winter rising of the sun and its winter setting’ (III). People in this type of city tend to have plentiful and brackish waters, and are prone to moisture in the head and excess phlegm. In character they are, accordingly, phlegmatic, rather weak in the head and listless, flabby of physique. We can note here that this hot climate is the type of setting in which the dialogue occurs, and Socrates has to urge Phaedrus that they not drift away from their conversation, logos, in the heat of the day, in which case the cicadas in the trees would mistake them for slaves lolling aimlessly (too much scholē, 258e-259b). That Socrates can maintain his sense of purpose in this setting

19 The last half of the Airs Waters Places (XII-XXIV) elaborates on the characters of different peoples based on the features of their place.
testifies to his strength of character, his ability to control the chariot of the soul by
restraining the horse of passion in an effort to see what is highest.

Airs Waters Places also makes reference to the north wind, Boreas (IV),
who/which has already been invoked in the dialogue. The next polis considered is that
in which the winds come in the winter and are cold (psuchra). Much as the wind in
question is opposite now, so too are the dispositions of the residents and their typical
(epichôria, IV: 4) diseases. The waters are hard and cold. The natives are sinewy and
lean, tending toward costive in the lower digestive tract but not the upper. Their
humour is bilious and diseases to which they are prone are much more violent and
acute. “Their dryness, combined with the coldness of the water, makes them liable to
internal lacerations.” The word translated ‘internal lacerations’ is règmatias (IV: 20).
Règma translates as fracture, breakage, downfall or crash. Typical diseases under this
heading include violent nosebleeds, violent epilepsy, but the people in these climes
benefit from a longer life-span. Their characters (ta êthea) tend to be fierce (IV: 32).
The dryness and the hardness of what water there is in these locales seem to govern
health. Boreas shows the features of his people, those exposed to north winds. The
violence of the abduction Oreithuia also typifies the violent diseases the physician finds
in this type of city. Furthermore, Socrates’ speculation about a ‘true’ explanation of the
story describes her as being caused to fall by the violence of the north wind (229c).

Ta êthea in the singular (êthos) means an accustomed place, but in the plural
means haunts or abodes, originally those of beasts, but later also in regard to humans.
Further the word can mean custom or habit and in the plural ‘mores,’ ‘disposition,’
‘temper,’ or ‘character.’ This combination of meanings meshes nicely with Socrates’
question about his character using the alternative of beast or human.\textsuperscript{20} Charles Scott picks up on this sense of custom as the origin of ethics, situating ethics firmly in a derivative position in relation to culture I suggested in chapter one that one could read Heidegger’s interpretation of Anaximander’s \textit{chreôn} as usage in this way.\textsuperscript{21} If Socrates turns out to heed a daimon not so grounded in \textit{ta étthea}, the \textit{ethos} of his place, of his Dasein or custom sent by his historical moment but rather heeds something beyond that enclosing perimeter, in the \textit{huperouranon}, something that as the good beyond being pushes toward some kind of transcendence, the infinite, then Socrates will indeed be the type of figure Heidegger seems to imply by his interest in returning to an earlier moment in philosophy, to early Greek thinking. The question remains whether these earlier moments were so free of the same concern, the breach of custom’s orbit by something infinite. Furthermore, how are the worldly \textit{chôra} and the would be transcendent social \textit{chôra} related, if at all? Does the latter cancel the former, as Derrida seems to think is true for Levinas? Does the one lead to the other, via Eros, perhaps, as Plato, and perhaps Irigaray, seem to suggest? Returning to the dialogue in question, the chariot ride to the rim of that sphere awaits.

Now, after allusions to Hippocratic medicine’s theories about the link between physical milieu and character, we go back to the \textit{Phaedrus} and its languid penetrating elemental milieu. All of these allusions, to Hippocratic medicine, to Boreas the god/wind and his role in that natural place (\textit{chôra} in the sense of countryside) and in

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\textsuperscript{20} Heraclitus said, “A person’s character (êthos) is his fate (daimôn). Heraclitus, (119; CXIV). The translation of ‘fate’ for daimon is Kahn’s.

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defending the city from the Persians (*chôra* in the more political sense I developed in the last chapter) seem to be invoked by Plato to define the spot Socrates and Phaedrus have finally reached, the plane tree. As if to put an exclamation point on this elemental quality that Plato has hinted at in this way, Socrates, who accounts himself indifferent to trees, launches into exclamations about how pleasant the spot is—the shade, the fragrance of the tree’s flowers, the cool water coming from a spring under the plane tree, the fresh air, the cicadas in the tree and best of all the grassy slope that allows one to rest the head at a perfect angle when reclining on it (230b-c). Twice he uses the word for place—*topos*. Socrates seems nearly possessed by the elements, though whether as a beast or a human remains to be seen. In a discussion framed in terms of beasts and humans, Socrates seems to have discovered a new appetite, what Alphonso Lingis calls “the appetite for the elements.”22 He declares Phaedrus a remarkable guide (230c) (*exenagêtai*; to lead foreigners). Phaedrus registers the peculiar change in Socrates. He calls him *thaumasie*, one who is wonderful or full of wonder, and tells him that he is most out of place (*atopótatos*; the word also has the meaning ‘most absurd’). One might ‘wonder’ if this wonder into which Socrates has been thrown, upon reaching this magical place, full of spirits, is the same wonder in which philosophy begins or if philosophical wonder is yet to appear, and if now Socrates is perhaps ready to begin philosophizing (*Thaetetus*, 155d). But Phaedrus may have meant ‘absurd’ by *atopotatos*, for he goes on to say that Socrates indeed needs a guide to avoid appearing to be one of the locals (*epichórion*). He is like one who never leaves the city, let alone goes abroad. Notice that in this place Socrates is a foreigner and a local at the same

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time, foreign in that he is out of place and needs a guide, local in that he looks silly like a local, not urbane, like Lysias, and local in that he proves to know the place better than Phaedrus does.

Socrates seems to be inside and outside at the same time and this ambiguity at this point in the text may foretell a shift, an attempt to throw off the kind of intoxication (pharmakos will soon be invoked) of that place which may have turned him into a beast. Once they have settled and Socrates suddenly becomes sober, he makes the statement concerning trees having nothing to teach (230d). Perhaps this is how he shakes himself out of the reverie into which that spot has thrown him. He says he is a lover of learning (philomathēs). Therefore, “places (chôria) and trees” are unwilling/unable (m’ ethelei) to teach anything, while humans in the city, ‘do teach’ (no verb is used, but the opposite is implied by the men ... de construction). Socrates describes himself as a lover of learning. He is indeed a ready student, but the places and trees will not teach. On the face of it, given that he is a lover of logos, it would seem that a rigid boundary has been drawn between the human and the non-human, and the human alone can teach. But he is about to sit down like a student at the foot of a tree and listen to a text, which is also inert in a way. Can he learn from the text or even, in spite of his protests, from the tree? Perhaps it will become willing to teach somehow.

Socrates continues, “But you seem to have found the potion (to pharmakon) of my leaving (exodou, 230d).” This expression requires some comment. Earlier, when Socrates is speculating about a possible rationalist explanation for the story of that place, he says maybe Oreithuia was playing with Pharmaceia and a gust of the North Wind blew her off of the high rocks and killed her, and people said she was abducted by
Boreas (229c). Pharmaceia refers to the use of potions or spells, though it is capitalized, and so is at least personified (the opposite one would think, of rationalized). Since Socrates now is also under the spell of Phaedrus’ pharmakon in nearly the same place, one wonders if Socrates is in serious danger, even from some form of death. Pharmakos does eventually kill Socrates, after all (Phaedo, 115a). Exodos, means a going out, a marching out as in a solemn procession, perhaps like a religious procession along the Sacred way, which would mean, since Socrates is later compared to an animal, that he is being made ready for sacrifice. Indeed, exodos can also mean an end or close, as in the close of life, decease, or the end of a tragedy. As he had proposed marching to Megara (227d) along the Sacred Way, the same path trod—at least as far as Eleusis, the halfway point—by initiates who will face ritual death and resurrection in order to become associated with the god, so perhaps Phaedrus now leads Socrates into some realm of danger. But what is the source of this danger? Is it the world outside the protective walls of the city? Or is it the world inside, which eventually does kill Socrates?

Socrates’ eros of the place has been described and abruptly, in the line about not learning from trees, he tries to snap out of it. The elemental’s force is here and attempting perhaps to destroy Socrates the way Boreas, as a force of nature, might destroy one, but Boreas also can be a protector. The lure of the elemental has been made clear here. Now the question is whether the demands of polis can call Socrates’ back to his duties, to his true self, the one he seeks to know and the one that requires him eventually to drink the pharmakon. This first danger, foreshadowed by the reference to Boreas, will give way to a second danger, which itself is erotic in a broad
sense, and takes shape in regard to the *logoi* of speeches, some of which are erotic in a specific sense of seeking to gain sexual favors, and of human language, spoken language, which seems to have a force of *eros* similar to the elemental. Again the dynamic relation between elemental *chôra* and social *chôra* has been set up.

The text that Phaedrus has waved in front of Socrates is, in the comparison Socrates goes on to use, like a branch of fruit that lures a hungry beast (230e). “All beasts are driven by blows,” said Heraclitus, and it seems the branch of fruit will soon turn into a stick when Phaedrus threatens Socrates in order to provoke his speech. Religious images have been invoked in their discussion, such as the Corybantes (228B), and the walk to Megara would begin along the Sacred Way along which processions to Eleusis wander. Perhaps we might see in Socrates, in contrast to the worshippers who travel along this path, a hungry beast, more fit to be sacrificed in some ritual for the sake of the community. He said earlier that the rationalizers of the customary myths would have the onerous task of coming up with all kinds absurd descriptions (*atopiai teratologôn*; misplaced teratologies, monstrologies). He claims instead that he seeks rather to understand himself, whether he might be “a beast more complicated and savage than Typho” or a beast of a calmer, more divine nature (230a). Why is Socrates behaving the way he is? What kind of beast is he? What will his fate be? These questions speak also to bigger issues of the relation between polis and nature. Will

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23Heraclitus, (Fr. 11; LXXVI).
Plato, through Socrates’ responses, domesticate the wild nature in which he has placed these two creatures in this dialogue, or will Socrates be allowed to enjoy it?

The Speeches

Finally settled in their spot, and having gotten past the various ruses of Phaedrus, the speech is read. It is a manipulative speech by Lysias aimed at seduction that in effect shows Lysias to be of two minds and from Plato’s perspective, we suspect, without self-knowledge. The speech clearly implies a model of proper subjectivity is, and one, it would seem, at odds with the view of the self that Padel finds in Greek tragedy of the fifth century since one can easily resist the forces of Eros in favor of the less costly and quixotic philia. It is a subjectivity that can emerge only in a godless milieu, where divine forces are no threat, whereas Socrates’ daimon will interfere with his leaving for fear that he has offended a god. The healthy *psuchê* is suggested by Lysias, but is it really Lysias’ self, i.e. does he know himself in his descriptions of himself. Later Socrates’ myth of the soul and its two horses will seem to involve a critique of Lysias, suggesting that in practice his *psuchê* is still determined by *thumos*, not the divine, but compulsion.

Lysias speech ends with the invitation to point out anything that Lysias missed, the assumption being that it is complete and satisfies completely. This attitude would seem to be *hubris* when viewed in light of Socratic ignorance and also an opening for Socrates. One problem remains unresolved, however; the speech that Lysias has presented is of a certain style, an epideictic speech.²⁶ So we do not know if anything he

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²⁶Nehamas and Woodruff, p. xvii.
says is what he really believes. It is merely a contest speech. Like a peacock strutting, Lysias is merely showing his cleverness in being able to make the weaker argument seem true, an idle conceit for those with leisure.

As the net result of their argument about whether there ever was a better speech than Lysias’, Socrates winds up having to give a speech against Eros. After some comic flirtation between the two that mirrors Socrates’ desire to hear Lysias’ speech and Phaedrus’ withholding of the text at the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates’ is finally persuaded to give his speech by Phaedrus’ threat to withhold future speeches from this ‘lover of words’ (this time philologóis, friend of words, instead of tou tôn logón erastou). So the branch of fruit has become a stick. In making the threat to withhold speeches from Socrates, including the intimation of physical violence (236c-d), Phaedrus seeks a god to swear by and, strangely, decides to swear his oath by the plane tree under which they sit (236d-e) the tree from which Socrates said he could learn nothing. Whether this is to swear by a god is unclear. Perhaps it is idle talk, suggesting that Phaedrus, who aspires to be urbane and seeks to explain away the divine explanations of events, is heedless of the gods to whom Socrates prays. It may be an intentional rejection of all things divine, for Phaedrus digs at Socrates later for his ability to make up stories (275b).

Socrates agrees to speak, but with his head covered so as not to have to look at Phaedrus. Out of shame, he says, but shame over what? Speaking in the name of a tree? It seems his speech-making ability (style) is the question. But after the speech he rejects the content outright. Placing a veil over his head also makes Socrates’ identity
ambiguous. We know who the speaker is, but cannot see who, much as in the situation of a text. Linked with earlier concern about knowing himself, and about being a monster, this action of covering his face may suggest that the answer to the oracle’s command to know himself may be at stake in the speech to come.

Socrates’ speech turns out to be a tale of a boy and his various suitors, one of whom is clever in devising the strategy of convincing the boy that he is not in love with him and that it is better to accept the non-lover than the lover. Obviously the tale recapitulates the relationship between Phaedrus and Lysias. The Lysias character in Socrates’ speech argues that one must know what *eros* is. It is some kind of desire (*epithumia tis*). Two desires work in the person. One is the desire for pleasure (*epithumia hēdonón*), which is inborn (*emphutos*). Heraclitus said, “It is hard to fight against passion (*thumôI*); for whatever it wants it buys at the expense of soul.”28 These notions of soul and passion, and the latter’s limits and encroachments, would seem to point to the chariot ride of the soul toward the end of the dialogue. The other kind of desire is acquired judgment (*epiktêtos doxa*), which pursues what is best (*aristou*). Sometimes these agree, sometimes they quarrel. When *doxês* rules (*kratousês*) and leads (*agousês*) the result is wisdom (*sôphrosunê*). When desire rules (in this case *arxasês*) the result is *hubris*.

But suddenly, in the midst of a speech about self-control, Socrates interrupts himself to ask Phaedrus if he agrees that Socrates is in the grip of a god (has been

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27 Socrates earlier jokes that he was enraptured while looking at Phaedrus reading Lysias’ speech (234B).
conquered). Notice that this question inverts to some extent Phaedrus’ early question to Socrates—whether the latter believes these stories about gods like Boreas are true. Also, note the contrast with Lysias’ rather godless speech. The divine cosmos seems to be in question again. Phaedrus agrees that it is an unusual flow of words (*euroia*), a transposition onto the plane of discourse of the importance that physicians of the body place on intestinal flows. Here the physician of souls has a good flow going. Socrates responds again, as if in Hippocratic fashion he is diagnosing his flow of words that come from his being in the grip of a god, “There’s something really divine about this place (*Toi onti, gar theios eoiken ho topos einai*), so don’t be surprised (*mê thaumaseis*) if I’m quite taken by the Nymphs’ madness as I go on with the speech” (238c-d). After all, he observes, he is already speaking in dithyrambs, a type of verse typical of the worship of Dionysus. Socrates predicts that he may lose control (too much flow), be something other than Socrates in this speech, which in some regards is much like that of Lysias in content and in style.

The second half of the speech has the effect of delineating the logical consequences of the definitions given. What is likely to be the result from either decision by the youth follows by necessity from this definition of the lover as ruled (*archomenôi*) by desire for pleasure. The boy too will become a slave to this rule. The list of negative consequences follows in logical sequence dominated by ‘necessity.’ Anagkê follows upon anagkê, upon anagkaion upon anagkazetai. Socrates concludes with a flurry of three different terms for love, *agapôsin, philousin, erastai*. Phaedrus is unsatisfied, thinking Socrates is merely in the middle, needing yet to describe the

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29Nehamas and Woodruff, p. 18, n. 42.
advantages offered by the non-lover. Socrates’ defense again indicates that language has a force of eros similar to nature. He again refers to his speech as a story (muthos), and then declares he must leave before Phaedrus forces (hupo sou . . . anagkastēnai) something even worse on him. He will cross the river (an allusion to death) and leave (242a). Again Socrates intimates some compulsion coming from Phaedrus.

But just as he complained that Socrates only made it to the middle of his speech, so Phaedrus now says it is the middle of the day, and too hot for walking. He asks Socrates to stay and talk about the speeches until it is cooler. It is important to avoid extremes, such as heat, or cold, suggesting that we are still in a medically attuned climate. Right when he was about to cross the river, he heard the familiar divine sign which always holds him back from some action, in fact it seemed to be some voice (tina phônên) from the very spot (autothen). The spot that had intoxicated Socrates may now be calling him back to himself. He heard a voice in that very spot, under a tree that he said he could learn nothing from. We note that he has experienced to manthanein, but not clearly at the feet of a human being, which he earlier claimed were the class of beings from whom he could learn. Then Socrates says that the soul, about which more will be said shortly, is also a seer (mantikon) and thus he had a bad feeling while speaking earlier, as if he was gaining praise from humans, but failing the gods. He says again that he now understands his offense. He has offended Eros. Eros has been implied in the power of the place on Socrates. Eros, which draws together physical opposites into one, thereby yielding an Ionian elemental fullness, Eros which draws humans together in passion, which has drawn Socrates out of himself into the eros of
that beautiful place. In the huperouranon, along with the colorless righteousness and temperance, Socrates will see also beauty in all its splendor. Beauty leads us to that realm beyond, if we can move beyond a simple fixation on the object of beauty itself. Does Plato’s placement of beauty in this beyond point to Lingis’ passion for the elemental? It would seem that for Plato at least, the elemental and the infinite of the beyond being might not be entirely contrary to each other, but may participate somehow together, that space is not cancelled by the infinite but somehow the infinite participates in this fleshly world of ours, charged with Eros, the infinite may inhere in the flesh of the world of a sultry idyllic milieu gathered together by a shady plane tree.

After a description of why the speeches were bad that again invokes medical imagery, Socrates gives another speech which he tries to exempt himself from, saying it is by another person, Stesichorus, who set the precedent for palinodic speech. Again this idea is much in line with the type of subjectivity that Padel suggested was typical of Greek tragedy. It would seem that Socrates, so far at least, wants to view himself as a kind of text, in the sense that he reports the words of another. Accordingly he begins by quoting Stesichorus’ palinode, retracting his previous speech. The first point of this new speech is that madness is not always a bad thing, for it gives prophecy, provides an escape from misery, and produces art, since such creation involves possession by the Muses. In describing the importance of madness to prophecy, Socrates mentions the oracles at Delphi and Dodona as examples of constructive madness. Dodona was an

30 On the other side of the stone at the temple at Delphi, opposite ‘know thyself,’ was the exhortation, ‘nothing in excess.’ See Nehamas and Woodruff, p. 5, n. 14.
A contemporary of Plato might make a connection between this oak tree and the plane tree under which the two are sitting, especially since Plato had singled it out for attention and that very spot seemed to Socrates to have produced a voice not long ago. Elements overpower. Speeches overpower. Passion is in both of these places. But the soul’s health depends on controlling and directing passion. This brings us to the famous myth of the soul as a chariot.

The Chariot

Socrates’ description of madness, of which love is a good form and so is sent by the gods, leads him to a discussion of the soul. He finds the structure of the soul too difficult for a mere mortal to describe, so he reverts to a simile. He compares the soul to a chariot with two winged horses and their driver. Whereas the first part of the dialogue played with the difference between the animal and the human, now the contrast is the human and the divine. The soul described is characteristic of both humans and gods, the difference being that the horses of the human souls have lost their wings and fallen to the earth, which is the process of becoming embodied. So the simile offers a continuity between mortals and immortals (the nature of soul) and a discontinuity (wings and their atrophy), though the soul’s proper attribute (possessing wings) is one and the same. What causes the shedding of wings? Proximity to the divine (which has beauty, wisdom and goodness) nourishes the wings’ growth, while foulness and ugliness make the wings disappear. The horses of the gods’ chariot are

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31 The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, M.C. Howatson and Ian
both noble and of good stock. But only one of the human’s horses is of this sort, the other being the opposite (ex anantiōn, 246b) so driving the chariot is tricky business.

First Socrates announces a kind of procession of the gods, led by Zeus. The gods ride the chariots out to the rim of heaven and gaze out into the beyond (to huperouranion topon). In this beyond is the real, (ousia ontōs ousa (247c7) on ontōs (247c2) or ta onta ontōs (247c3)) and the true (talēthē). This question of truth will come into play later in relation to rhetoric, after the myth of the chariot ride is left behind, which suggests, I think that the discussion depicted in this dialogue is itself meant to recapitulate this chariot ride, with the two participants circling around that which they wish to catch sight of, perhaps as drivers of separate chariots, perhaps as two mismatched horses trying to pull one chariot. Notice also that in his description Socrates speaks specifically about one driver, “our driver” (ho archōn hêmôn, 246b). He posits a virtual identity and spends considerable time on the horses. If he is speaking, at least so far, of a single driver, then Parmenides’ kouros might come to mind, whose first words were about the horses carrying him. The kouros, however, had stout horses and immortals guiding him. Socrates’ driver must struggle to get a bit of the alētheia that the goddess served up hospitably to the kouros. The gods each have well-trained horses and so get a good look at the really real. On their circuit (en tēi periodōi)32 they see not mundane forms such as ‘tableness,’ but justice itself (autēn

32For they return again to the same spot in going around the circle. Both Heraclitus and Parmenides use the image of a circle. Cf. David Gallop, Parmenides of Elea: Fragments: A Text and Translation with an Introduction. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984: “and it is all one to me where I am to begin; for I shall return there again” (1.5). Heraclitus: “The beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of a circle” (103; XCIX).
dikaiosunên), self-control (sôphrosunên), and knowledge (epistêmên, 247d, and later beauty replaces knowledge). Unlike the adroit deities who handle their pair of noble horses easily, the humans with their mismatched horses and varying degrees of driving skill are in turmoil. They collide and struggle and so see very poorly, leave unsatisfied (ateleis) and come back with only opinions (doxastı, 248b). Here is a chariot ride that seeks to attain Alêtheia and avoid doxa. It would be surprising if Plato did not have Parmenides in mind.

Socrates offers a description of this realm beyond the heaven (ton hyperouranion topon). The poets have never before and never will adequately praise it. They are unable to access this realm, but nonetheless it is still the object of their rhapsodizing. Socrates says that one must risk speaking about it, for it is truth that is the subject of concern. One senses that he is going beyond the poets when he describes this realm as without color (achrômatos) and without shape (aschêmatistos) and impalpable or not to be touched (anaphês). These three adjectives modify the cluster of words ousia ontós ousa (247c), the really real essence or nature of being. Stripped of all perceptible qualities these essences are beyond the grasp of poets (247c), and perhaps imagination. Indeed these realities are untouchable, not present in the world like worldly things, but present like a trace or face, or as if, as Lingis says justice is present, around the edges of a conversation.

34 Woodruff and Nehamas translate “that really is what it is” and see it as a reference to the forms, which they describe as “the supreme entities in Plato’s theory of reality, the transcendent Forms, such as Justice and Beauty,” p. 33, n. 74.
There follow a series of formulas about how different souls are incarnated, based on what they were able to catch sight of. A hierarchy of incarnations obtains, delineated in terms of how much of the real one has seen but depicted in terms of various political roles is obviously in parallel with the status to which souls are reborn.

But a certain paradox seems to be operating here. On the one hand there is eagerness to see this realm, now compared to a pasture (248b), because it is true nourishment for the best part of the soul and it is nourishment for the wings that lift the soul. Thus one seems to have a situation in which the strength of the wings determine what kind of access any soul has to nourishment for those with wings; yet without that same nourishment the wings cannot be strong. Without strong wings the soul falls back to earth to take an incarnation. Nourishment, a theme in the *Timaeus*, can only be accessed if one gets the proper nourishment. Thus the soul is somehow paradoxical, atopos, maybe even eccentric.

The one initiated into this cosmic (or transcosmic) vision long ago or who has become corrupted proceeds toward visible beauty in a depraved fashion, seeking only to procreate or chasing unnatural passions in the manner of a beast (*tetrapodos*--four footed, the double entendrè seems intentional, 250e). The philosopher is special, the only one whose mind (*dianoia*, 249c) grows wings. The philosopher keeps in memory those realities by virtue of proximity to which the gods are divine. The gods are divine because they are close to these realities, which seems to be a significant statement. The divine is no longer a force coming from itself, a kind of uncanny thing, but is fixed in relation to certain realities, realities other than blind fate or power. In contrast Heidegger, in discussing Parmenides, keeps a prominent role for *moira*, as “the
apportionment, which allots by bestowing and so unfolds the twofold. . . .

Apportionment is the dispensation of presencing.”35 Moira would still seem to dictate
the shining forth of the gods, a position at odds with Plato, who does not define the
human and gods in opposition, mortal and immortal, but in a closer proximity to each
other. This new role for the gods may indeed indicate the beginning of metaphysics as
the instantiation of regular or transcendent principles, other than blind fate, in some
place like a ‘beyond,’ metaphysics of the sort that is often claimed to be Plato’s
philosophy, though I would suggest that this ‘beyond’ is most clearly depicted in the
dialogue as Phaedrus and Socrates walk off together at the end, like two horses yoked,
their poi kai pothen (to where and from where) now a mutual project for a while.

The point of this long excursus on the nature of the soul, says Socrates, is to
explain the madness of divine love. The effect that eros has on people is due to the way
that beauty in another human (and given what has transpired so far we might add the
beauty setting of the dialogue) reminds one of the true beauty that one has seen already,
thus the power of erotic love to shake the soul, the madness of the lover. We see here
that this narrative about souls has been an exercise in philosophical anthropology.
Beauty shines forth in earthly objects, but the other two realities witnessed by every
human in that chariot ride, justice (dikaiosunê) and self-control (sophrosunê), do not.
They are harder to see, less visible and more invisible in the muddle of human
perception into the beyond, though we have all had some glimpse of them. They are
like Levinas’ idea of face, which is not present in the world in the same way as other
beings (without color), but which has a universal force (all of us have glimpsed it so

35 “Moira (Parmenides VIII, 34-41),” in Early Greek Thinking, p. 97.
that we recognize it somehow). Beauty shone more clearly at the time of the ride and the ones who saw it were like those celebrating a mystery, gazing in rapture, pure and perfect (250b-c). Suddenly Socrates himself is yet again seized in the moment and expatiates about beauty, but he catches hold of himself, as if seizing the reins on a chariot, and says that beauty appears to the strongest of the senses, sight. Justice and temperance however, lack color, seem without any clear beauty.

In chapter seven John Sallis will call this kind of separation between the sensible and the intelligible ‘metaphysics.’ It may be so, but these other two forms, justice and moderation, which do not shine like beauty does, seem to get lost in his work. Levinas might argue that the differentiation of a domain beyond sense that Sallis complains about, a domain that lacks the luminosity to which sense responds and that even grants sense in the first place, is actually the proper use of the meta-physical. It is what is beyond the luminosity of *phusis*, which is shining for Heidegger.\(^{36}\)

After giving a classification of kinds of lovers based on whose chorus they sang in the original *periphoron*, or trip around the rim of heaven, and depicting how the captive (love object) is seized, Socrates tosses off a quick prayer to *Eros* claiming that the inflated, poetical language of his palinode was Phaedrus’ fault, as if the two of them were horses yoked together, struggling at crossed purposes. He asks forgiveness for the earlier speeches and is especially concerned that his expertise in love (*tên erotikê miai echnêns*, 257a) remain unaffected and that he might command a bit more honor among

the beautiful people. The earlier speeches were the fault of Lysias, who should be converted to philosophy so Phaedrus no longer has to play both sides (epaphoterizēi, 257b) but can turn to viewing Love only through philosophy. Playing both sides may mean having to pull for both horses, himself and his partner, Lysias. Or it may refer to a certain double-mindedness on Phaedrus’ part, for he nods along with Socrates yet also supports Lysias. Socrates’ whole prayer sounds fairly pragmatic, as if everything said in the palinode pertained not to truth, but to escaping any ill consequences of the previous speeches. Similarly Lysias’ speech seemed designed not to express truth but to accomplish the agenda of seduction that dictated the content of the speech.

Writing

Phaedrus chimes in with his agreement, hoping that everything Socrates has prayed for will come true, if indeed it is best for them. Phaedrus does not seem to know for sure, or at least he does not believe it is best for them. He also still responds to Socrates’ speech on strictly rhetorical grounds: it is a better speech than Socrates’ first one and Lysias will not be able to match it (257c). But then there comes a tangent that introduces the theme of writing. Perhaps Lysias will not dare to try to match Socrates’ speech, for he was recently accused by some politicians of being a speech writer

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37 On Socrates’ peculiar erotic force, “the original nature of his erotic drive,” see Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, Hans Meyerhoff, trans. (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 45. Friedländer entitles his second chapter “Demon and Eros,” because he sees these two aspects as constitutive to Socrates personality. ‘Demon’ refers to the famous daimon that frequently intervened to influence, usually in a prohibitive way, Socrates’ behavior. We saw this intervention
(logographon). So perhaps his pride will restrain him from writing it. This laughable idea gives Socrates a chance to talk about how politicians love writing speeches, even though Phaedrus insists that politicians are ashamed to write lest they be taken by later generations for sophists (sophistai, 257d). No, says Socrates, who then goes on to describe the writing of legislation, regarding it as a kind of speech writing. The discussion allows Socrates to set up all forms of writing as the same. The important distinction is whether one writes well or badly. Thus when the palinode that suspended Socrates’ learning has been accomplished and we seemed to have finished the dialogue, a new task turns up—to determine what makes for good and bad writing.

After a digression about the cicadas overhead in the trees who are watching this pair to see if they use their time well or merely slumber in the heat, Socrates turns to the question of speaking well. He asks whether the one who would speak well must have in mind the truth (to alêthes) about the matter on which he wishes to speak. Phaedrus answers: What I have heard (akêkoa) about this is that it isn’t necessary to learn the really just things (ta tô, onti dikaia) but merely the things seeming so (doxant’) to the crowd (plêthei). The same is true of the good. For persuasion (to peithein) proceeds from these opinions people already hold, not from the truth (259e-260a). With this statement Phaedrus firmly plants himself in the realm of doxa, which is what is left to those charioteers who have not clearly seen into the hyperouranion; this domain defines mortals in Parmenides—those who have stayed on the much traveled paths of doxa rather than the path that the kouros has taken to truth where truth and persuasion cannot be separated.

when Socrates was not allowed to leave after making his first speech. Eros is in fact the
We might point out that it was the crowd that voted against Socrates in the Apology. So Socrates is yoked not only to his own passion by means of his person, and to his friend Phaedrus by means of this dialogue, but to the lumbering horse Athens by means of his citizenship, a partner whose passions seem driven only by doxa and who is inert to the tiny stings of the gadfly that travels beside it. Yet even when this last pairing results in his death, Socrates proclaims he has been healed, which would not seem right according to public opinion. To his mind, however, he has attended well to what he has seen in the beyond, since he has managed well his ill-tempered horse, the one that would want to bolt in the face of execution. In the language of the Gorgias, rather than fearing to suffer harm himself, he fears harming the city and what makes the polis what it is: its laws. The laws (and justice) seem to be highest, just as for Parmenides themis and dikê brought the kouros to the truth. But the human situation is such that this priority is easily called into question by the force of passion. “Everyone will agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality.”38 These lines open Totality and Infinity. A few paragraphs later Levinas adds, “The moral consciousness can sustain the mocking gaze of the political man only if the certitude of peace dominates the evidence of war.”39 These words would seem to apply to Socrates, through whom, says Levinas, “the pre-Socratic is first made intelligible.”40

38 Totality and Infinity, p. 21.
39 Ibid., p. 22.
As if responding to Phaedrus’ claim about what he has heard, that truth and persuasion need not go together, Socrates introduces what he calls dialectic, an which he describes as cutting according to the joints of the matter. Socrates says “I myself (εγώ ἐγώ μοι) am a lover (ἐραστής) of these divisions and collections (τῶν διαίρεσεων καὶ συγκολλήσεων) (266b).” One notes the emphasis in this statement on Socrates’ person, with the emphatic suffix added to εγώ and the reflexive identification contributed by autos. What makes this construction most interesting is the ongoing theme of knowing oneself, Socrates raison d’être, and the contrast it adds with Socrates’ severe efforts to absent himself from the speeches he has given. The words emphasize Socrates presence in the statement about dialectic. The reason for this love of dialectic is his desire to be of such a sort so as to speak and think (266b). One would expect an adverb here to modify think and speak, especially when we are discussing the art of speaking well. But none is given.

Socrates says that if he finds someone whom he believes can see the one that naturally encompasses the many, he follows them as if they were divine. (Phaedrus was called divine, but in regard to speeches, not dialectic.) At this point he describes his name for them as ‘dialecticians.’ This formula, a one unifying a many, seems to be a way of describing a form. The dialectician sees the form. Since the dialecticians see forms they would seem to be those able to control the chariot, those who would be proper guardians of the city discussed in the opening section of the Timaeus. One senses that just as Socrates has found himself yoked to Phaedrus for a while, he seeks also to be yoked to anyone who fits this description of a dialectician.
The discussion turns to Thrasymachus and the rest of the speechmakers in Athens, who saw (eidon) that what is likely (ta eikota) must be honored more than the true things (tôn alêthôn). Because of the power of language (rômên logou, 267a) they make small things appear big and big things appear small, the new-fangled ancient and vice versa. They have discovered how to argue concisely and unendingly (apeira) about all things (267a-b).” Phaedrus has nothing to add to Socrates’ summary.

Here we have reference to the power of language. Like the power of eros, and the power of that place, language has a power to take possession of us. Even more this power took possession of Socrates, for it was speeches that Phaedrus used to lure him out of the city, like one leading an animal with a branch holding fruit. But Socrates seems to have broken free of the power that speeches have over him (controlled his unruly horse?) and focused on truth, like a philosopher, thereby showing what kind of beast he is.

But what of the format of writing (graphêis)? For now, in the context of the power of language, Socrates mentions it overtly. What makes it apt (euprepeias) or inept (aprepeias)? Socrates now tells what he has heard (akoên) of the ancients (tôn proterôn--more literally, ‘first ones’). It is another myth (274c-275b). The appeal goes back to Egypt, to the divinity Theuth, who offers the gift of writing to king Thamus. Theuth claimed writing would make the Egyptians wiser and improve memory. The

41 Note the shift from technikôs and atechnikôs to words derived from prepô, which means conspicuous, to be like, resemble; to become, seem, fit.

42 Theuth, the Egyptian god of learning gets mention in regard to writing in the Philebus (18b). Similarly the Timaeus makes appeal to ancient knowledge from Egypt. In the Phaedrus the value of this story is tempered, as Socrates prefaces it by asking would we still care what the speculations of others whether if we could discover the truth about these things by ourselves? (274c).
king objects that rather it will introduce forgetfulness (lēthē) into the soul. Their memory will atrophy because they put their trust in an external (exōthen) thing like writing, which uses signs that belong to others (hup’ allotriôn tupôn), rather than remembering from within (endothen) by themselves. It is not a drug (pharmakon) for remembering (mnêmēs) but reminding (hupomnēseōs). This device will provide the appearance of wisdom (sophias doxan) without the real thing (alētheian, here are Parmenides’ main terms in play in regard writing, and they implicate Phaedrus, who in the beginning had sought to appear wise by giving Lysias’ speech). They will hear many things (poluêkooi) without teaching (didachês). On these last two Greek terms it seems that much hearing (associated with Phaedrus) is not necessarily teaching. Just as trees might not teach, some humans cannot either. And texts do not teach, either. As Thamus says to Theuth, the texts will allow them to hear many things (poluêkooi) without being properly taught (aneu didachês, 275A).

Phaedrus sarcastically congratulates Socrates on his ability to make up stories (logous poieis). It is understandable that Phaedrus might feel rebuked. The dialogue began after all with him proudly in possession of a written text. Socrates again brings up Dodona, reminding Phaedrus that the first prophecies of that oracle were said to be those of an oak, but people were satisfied to believe them so long as they spoke truth, because they were not as wise as Phaedrus and his young cohort. But Phaedrus and his gang care only who is speaking (doxa) and where he is from but not whether it is true or not (alētheia, 275b-c). One could say that Socrates has learned more this day from the

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43 Mnêmēs refers to remembrance, memory or recollection, the faculty of memory or a memorial. Hupomnēseōs names a reminding, a calling to mind, or a remembrance; it is from hupomimnēskô, to put one in a mind of, remind, bring back to mind.
plane tree than from Phaedrus, which is certainly a reversal of his stated expectations at
the beginning of the dialogue.

Finally, Socrates makes his statement on writing. Anyone who writes
instructions in a book thinking it will yield clear and certain results is naive. Written
words cannot be more than a reminder for those who already know what the writing is
about. He compares writing (graphê) to painting (zógraphiai). Both are inert to
questioning. Rather they continually signify the same thing (hen ti sêmainei monon
tauton aeì) and so are in a way dead or like statues. Once written, the words are
available to all, even those who have no business with them. They cannot defend
themselves but are dependent upon their ‘father’ to come to their aid. But there is a
discourse that is the legitimate brother (gnêsion adelphon) of this one, says Socrates.
This is the discourse written down with knowledge in the soul of the disciple (en té, tou
manthanontos psuchêi), able to defend itself, knowing when it is necessary to speak and
to be silent. For some reason Plato gives Phaedrus the punch line: “You mean (legeis)
the living and breathing (zônta kai empsuchon) word of the one who knows (ton tou
eidotos logon,” 276a).

Perhaps one could make this an ethical point: the privileged presence goes to the
person, the source of words. Levinas seems to do so when he says: “The face speaks.
The manifestation of the face is already discourse. He who manifests himself comes,
according to Plato’s expression, to his own assistance. He at each instant undoes the
form he presents.”44 This manifestation is not disclosure, but revelation.45 Though we
are possessed by language, which Heidegger shows so well, there is for Plato a limit to

44 Totality and Infinity, p. 66.
this possession, which is, in Socrates’ language, soul, the soul (presence) of the speaker, which here seems to exceed language (at least written language). Most likely Plato’s emphasis falls in the context of the student-teacher relationship, a book is not an adequate teacher, which may be some consolation to the plane tree. Phaedrus adds that the written word is merely an image (eidôlon) of this living and ensouled word. The final word on writing seems to be that it is soulless (276c). This judgment, and the ethical claim of the other person, seems the point of the myth of the chariot ride. It may also explain why Socrates is willing to be yoked to Phaedrus for a while, though he would prefer a dialectician, perhaps Isocrates, who will be mentioned soon.

The process seems to be drawing to a close. They have made a certain circuit, but done so while sitting down. Yet they have apparently glimpsed kallion, the noble, if not the beautiful. One wonders whether the two of them, a good horse (Socrates) and a questionable horse (Phaedrus), yoked together by the need for dialectic and the superiority of speech over a text, have completed a version of the circuit described in the myth of the soul.

Perhaps they have, since now Socrates announces that they have decided the matter of whether Lysias’ speeches are written artfully or not. Phaedrus, the undisciplined horse, however, cannot recall how this process was carried through. He says, “So it seemed (edoxe); but remind me (hupomnêson) how” (277b). Apparently he did not get a good look at the beyond, or he is forgetful because of the spell writing. He is still in the domain of doxa and hupomnêson. We who read this story as a text can go

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back and be reminded. Phaedrus does not have this option, and the matter obviously has not clearly formed in his memory.

Socrates again reiterates the method: before one could know (eidēi) the truth about each thing one speaks and writes about, one must be able to define everything (pan horizeshtai) in itself (kat’ auto) and having defined it know (epistēthēi) how to cut (temnein) it according to form (kat’ eidē) as far as the uncut (mechri tou atmêtou). One differentiates the nature of the soul along the same lines, discovering the proper speech for each type of nature and arranging one’s words accordingly. To the complex soul, offer a complex (poikilous) and all-embracing (panarmonious) speech, but to the simple soul give a simple (haplous) speech. Then one will be able to use speech artfully, so far as natural ability allows. This process is what the whole above speech sought to remind us of (277b-c). Note also, that if one must take account of the particular soul one is addressing then speeches to large groups would seem to be of limited value. The proper form for all teaching is dialectic as reflected in these dialogues, but of course not these dialogues themselves (since, paradoxically, they are written documents).

The conclusion on writing is that Lysias or anyone who writes any kind of document, private or public, and believes it to contain something clear and firm is worthy of reproach. Here it seems we have come full circle to the beginning picture of Phaedrus seeking to conceal Lysias’ text beneath his cloak. Socrates exposed the written text in the beginning, and now he exposes writing itself. This person does not know the difference between a dream and the reality of what is just or unjust, good or bad. For the text, we remember, is but a copy (eidōlon, 276A) of the living person. By contrast there are some who believe that writing is only an amusement and that only
what is written in the soul regarding the just, the noble and the good can be clear, perfect (*teleon*) and worthy of seriousness (*axion spoudês*). This is the sort of man, says Socrates, that he and Phaedrus would pray to become, and they will make that prayer shortly. Phaedrus rubber-stamps Socrates words

Socrates reiterates that the one who has only written texts is a mere poet, speechwriter or some such. The vocabulary in this latter description is of interest in its projection of a sense of relativity of place and purpose, its unmeasured character. The person in question composes and writes twisting texts (*strephôn*, to twist, divert, turn, bend, torture, or embezzle) up and down (*anô katô*) in time (*en chronô*). We might call this one any number of things; the lack of specificity is perhaps intentional. We might rightly (*en dikêi*) call this person somehow (*pou*) any of a number of names (278e). *Poû* with accent is the interrogative pronoun of place; it assumes a dialogue and it assumes a specific answer. Take away the accent, as it is here, *pou*, and it is relativized, some place, some way, any place or way. Phaedrus and Socrates sit in a somewhat magical, or at least enchanting, place talking about people who are not in place, who exist only in texts, without, it would seem, *nous* in their souls. Of these persons the question that opened the dialogue, *poî kai póthen*; to where and from where? is proper. It is a question about where (*poû*) they are, the condition of their soul. But the most that can be said of them gets only as far as *pou*—somewhere, anywhere, nowhere in particular. The difference between *poû* and *pou* is all a matter of accent, which would not always show up directly in the written texts of the time but only in speech. A text cannot distinguish between a specific where and any where, the place of *this* conversation or
just any place. It is important to know where you are. Texts cannot do so. Phaedrus should tell all this to his friend, not, we presume, in writing, but in person (278c).

Phaedrus proposes they leave (ἰόμεν), since the heat is past; Helios has completed his circuit across the heavens, successfully, we expect. Phaedrus is thus satisfied to leave, but yet again Socrates is not satisfied. It is proper to leave praying to—we fill in the blank, the gods—Socrates says merely τοίσδε, the indicative form of the definite article, ‘to these here.’ Τοίσδε is a word that all but points. In leaving, one reverences place, the place focused by the plane tree that was unable to teach Socrates. Socrates prays to Pan, who has been mentioned once before. He was one of the parents, along with Achelous, the name for several rivers in the area, of the Nymphs, who Socrates says have composed the speech he gave (263d). Words are clearest when linked to a soul. Souls respond to place. Dear (φιλε) Pan and the other gods here (τέδε), grant that I might be beautiful (καλῶ) on the inside (τάνθοθεν). Whatever I have outside (ἐξόθεν) may it be friendly (φιλία) with the things of the inside (τοῖς εντοσ). May I reckon the wise as rich, and as for gold, not more than a moderate person (ὁ σοφρόν) can carry and bring (αγείν) with. So goes the prayer. It seems that Socrates has glimpsed what is right and moderate, outside the heavens, but without leaving that place. Socrates asks Phaedrus if they need anything else. The prayer is

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46Note that the one who speaks well has the task of defining all (παν ἡριζεσθαι, 277b). Perhaps, given the questioning about the divine that persist in the dialogue it is not inappropriate to link this reference to references in which Pan is capitalized. Of Pan, Burkert says, he “stands at the boundary of the polis culture and of humanity itself . . . Pan embodies the uncivilized power of procreation which nevertheless remains indispensable and fascinating for civilized life. Speculations concerning a universal god were later attached to his name,” p. 172.
adequate (*metriōs*) for me, Socrates says. The prayer is one of moderation (*sophrosunē*). Socrates has managed a good enough look into the beyond, it seems.

Make it my prayer, too, says Phaedrus, for friends (*tón philôn*) have all things in common. They are perhaps yoked together by their conversation. *Iômen*, let us go, says Socrates, the last word of the dialogue, plural, social. The dialogue opened with the question of ‘to where and from where?’ Now, at the end, *iômen* is appropriate, whether because they have prayed, or maybe because of something to do with Phaedrus’ last statement about friends, or because of the ground they have covered while sitting under the plane tree. Off they go together, like two horses. Of course they have been sitting. They have ridden nowhere, gazed at nothing more than the colorful charms they have seen in that place, at the aether of the blue sky between the wagging leaves of the plane tree, which seems to have filled Socrates with something like an *eros*, if only for a moment. They have spoken of, but not seen, the colorless *noema* called justice. They have been sitting still but their conversation itself could have been the real chariot ride of the soul. If Plato’s philosophy is about this realm beyond history depicted in the chariot ride, then Sallis is right to criticize it. But if instead the climax of the dialogue is these two characters walking off together, back to the polis with greater understanding, then Sallis’ criticisms might be premature.

I have wanted to highlight here a feeling of sensibility that overpowered the *polis*-bound Socrates upon entering the country and to say that it participates in *kalos*, the beautiful, even *pagkalos*, pan-kalos, the all beautiful, a word Phaedrus uses to describe their topic. It is the very noblest (*pagkalên*, 276e). In this beautiful (*kalos*) spot Socrates prays to Pan, and beyond the perimeter of what is (all) they have glimpsed
kalos. Bachelard will lift up this all beautiful in the next chapter, calling his work pancalism. He will talk of pan-kallos not with prayers but with something like them, called reveries. This pancalism may be an erotic spell with its own limitations. For Plato, this sublime sensibility does not get the last word, even if its luminosity (color) draws our attention to it first, while the other two forms just linger about the periphery like unseen voices.
Chapter 5

Gaston Bachelard: Dancing with Zeno

“The map of the imaginable world is drawn only in dreams. The universe perceived through our senses is an infinitely small one.”

--Charles Nodier.\(^1\)

“Existence is not a one-toned function; it cannot affirm itself, everywhere and in the same tone, all the time.”

--Gaston Bachelard\(^2\)

“Truth is the daughter of discussion, not of sympathy.”

--Bachelard\(^3\)

We now leap across centuries, to the twentieth century. Whereas in the *Phaedrus* the elemental might be described as shouting without a voice, or at least without a clear one, Bachelard tries gives words to the elements, with a sense of intoxication that perhaps Socrates would understand, though he might not think it urgent. Plato’s *Phaedrus* played out along a wall between city and country, between the human and the natural. The same wall will seem to be reiterated in Levinas’ debates with Heidegger and John Sallis’ debates with Levinas. Bachelard followed in the wake

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\(^3\) PN, p. 114
of Bergsonism, responded to it, and adapted it. One can see to some extent Bergson’s ideas about the quantitative and the qualitative played out in Bachelard’s distinctions between the formal imagination on the one hand and the material and dynamic imaginations on the other. The material imagination and the dynamic imagination would seem to be alive in Levinas’ descriptions of enjoyment and the relation of the egoism to the milieu of the elemental. When Bachelard says that fire’s power is not just to cook food but to make it crispy, he would seem to be clearing a path followed by Levinas on enjoyment.

In this chapter I will describe Bachelard’s philosophy of science as a contemporary rendering of Heraclitean cosmology, then will go on to elaborate his descriptions of the Fire, Air, Water and Earth, descriptions inspired not from science but from literature, yet driven by the same idea of dispersion. Bachelard’s elements could be dismissed as entirely a literary undertaking were it not for the fact that he frames his descriptions in terms of what he calls the dynamic imagination and the material imagination provide. These notions, contrasted with formal imagination, which dominates the visual and thought, carry a unique physicality.

That this physicality might even link somehow to the language of *chôra* seems implied by Julia Kristeva’s talk about psychoanalysis. (We will see that at times Bachelard counts himself as a psychoanalyst of sorts and he borrows many ideas and terms from it.) Speaking of how the stilling of motor impulses on the psychoanalytic couch yields the “displacement of instinctual energies into speech,” Kristeva connects this attempt “to conceive a psychic modality logically and chronologically prior to the sign, to meaning, and to the subject” to what Plato spoke of as *chôra*, “an ancient,
mobile, unstable receptacle, prior to the One, to the father, and even the syllable, metaphorically suggesting something nourishing and maternal.”⁴ What she is describing might well be the kind of imagination of the body that is material and dynamic imagination in Bachelard. It links to *chôra* because it is pre-linguistic (prior to articulation) and remains for the most part unseen, (not visually rendered like formal imagination is).

One might say Bachelard embodies also a reprise of Ionian philosophy, which we characterized in the first chapter in terms of complementary opposition and which Parmenides put in limbo with his emphatic ‘either is or is not.’ The link to *chôra* again appears in that I have suggested that the Ionian cosmology influenced Plato’s choice of *chôra* over *kenos*, a term which fell within the Eleatic legacy. I will come to link these two kinds of opposition, complementary and exclusive, with Bachelard’s terms from his philosophy of science—homogeneous and heterogeneous, respectively. Bachelard’s philosophy is quite comfortable with the kind of contradiction implied in the idea of the homogeneous. He defines it as a philosophy of ‘no’ and says that in this ‘philosophy of no’ an element can be complex. “An element is not a condensed heterogeneity. It is a dispersed homogeneity.”⁵ He does not mean just an element in the imagination, but seems to want to include scientific knowledge. “Its elementary character is demonstrated by the rational coherence which results from a regular distribution of its possible states.”⁶ So it seems that Bachelard’s philosophy of science is continuous with his ‘literary’ studies of the elements. For this reason I will include a brief discussion of

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⁵ PN., p. 25.
some of his ideas about science. Bachelard seems to me to be describing a kind of elemental *chôra*, and one in which embodied, enfleshed existence is portended in the notions of material and dynamic imagination.

Bachelard’s main significance to philosophy seems to be in his philosophy of science. He brought to this discipline the notion of the epistemological break. Epistemological break indicates that scientific knowledge does not accumulate in a gradual and continuous way, but by disruptions and surges. Bachelard’s discontinuous epistemology inaugurated an entire tradition in French philosophy. But in the late 1930s Bachelard surprised many of his readers by turning his attention to literature and the imagination, in particular, to the four elements as governing images in literary works.

Aristotle’s four causes play a role in Bachelard’s study of the imagination. Bachelard divides imagination according to three of them: formal, material, and efficient/dynamic. He speaks of formal imagination, which is primarily visual and has dominated the history of philosophy. Zeno puzzled the centuries with his paradoxes about the impossibility of movement. Because of the historical dominance of the formal imagination, Bachelard decides to focus on two less obvious kinds of imagination, which he calls material imagination and dynamic imagination, or, the imagination of matter and the imagination of movement.

Some years later Maurice Merleau-Ponty speaks of the ‘flesh,’ which is not merely various forms of protoplasm, but in fact the flesh of the world itself. Merleau-Ponty speaks of a certain adhesion of the seer and the visible, and notes how many

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painters have said “I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity.”7 These words were written at about the same time as Bachelard’s claim, “Everything I look at looks at me.”8 Merleau-Ponty says flesh (chair) is novel in the history of philosophy. Flesh “is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term ‘element,’ in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being.”9 This notion is perhaps more visual than Bachelard’s material imagination, which he admits he is overemphasizing because of its obscurity; he seems to think that it too is somewhat new in the philosophical tradition. But to describe flesh as midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea might put us near the domain of material imagination. The statements of Merleau-Ponty given above are from a section entitled “The Intertwining—The Chiasm,” referring to the crossing over of the tangible and the visible, the domain of the hand and the domain of the eye, two domains that Bachelard also seems to acknowledge in the material imagination and the formal imagination. For it seems to me that by focusing on matter and movement, Bachelard may have prepared the ground for such an idea as flesh.

Philosophy of Science

8 PR, p. 185.
Early in his career, the philosophy of science was Bachelard’s claim to fame, specifically epistemological questions of how pre-scientific intuitions about an object of study interfere with scientific knowledge of that object. These obstacles must be exorcised before progress can occur—exorcised, or psychoanalyzed. Bachelard, in his philosophy of science, seeks to take seriously the disruptions effected by relativity theory and twentieth century microphysics. The point of this philosophy of science for my discussion here is its arrival at a notion of heterogeneous space. This space is not the spacing Sallis affords, but it describes in reference to science a new kind of spatiality. The result, as he puts the matter in The Atomistic Intuition, is that we no longer have an absolute, analytic and Newtonian space in which to work, but instead work out of a dialectic between the analytical and the synthesis that that analysis favors.\(^{10}\) Put another way, the experimental domain steps forward because the models used in science become more mathematical and therefore less connected to our intuitions of the world. He goes so far as to speak of technology as embodied mathematics.

Philosophically, Bachelard distinguishes himself from traditional philosophy, which is a gathering, unifying, and abstracting process that he describes as “finalist and closed.”\(^{11}\) Scientific thinking on the other hand is “open-ended.”\(^{12}\) “The philosophy of physics is . . . the only open-ended philosophy. All other philosophies posit their principles as intangible, their primary truths as total and complete. All other

\(^{10}\) Les Intuitions atomistiques (Essai de classification) (Paris: Librarie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1975), pp. 3ff.
\(^{11}\) PN, p. 4.
\(^{12}\) Ibid.
philosophies glory in their closedness.”\textsuperscript{13} The language reminds one of Heidegger’s emphasis on truth as dis-closedness.\textsuperscript{14} Opting for an epistemology akin to what he sees occurring in the scientific process itself, Bachelard speaks of dispersion and complification in the progress of knowledge. The more one knows about a thing, the more complicated one’s knowledge becomes. Concepts have been viewed as regulating overseers of knowledge, capable of condensing knowledge much like one zips a computer file. Bachelard turns his back on this view. Objectivity is this dispersive pluralization, but it is a coherent pluralism.\textsuperscript{15}

Implications of this view are several. The scientific community becomes prominent over the individual genius. As one commentator describes it, the \textit{cogito} (the ‘I think’) becomes a \textit{cogitamus} (‘we think’).\textsuperscript{16} Knowledge therefore precipitates out of the ether of one ill-defined thinker’s mind into a community of thinkers, and such a community requires codification of standards and practices for carrying out their joint endeavor, codification which could perhaps remain unclarified in the older model of the solo thinker.\textsuperscript{17} Science necessarily becomes discursive, dependent on an accumulated, externalized body of knowledge. Yet this method is never without its “subjective

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{15} PN, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{17} Here perhaps are the roots of a ‘death of the subject,’ in favor of institutionalized discursive practices. Though see Mary McAllester Jones’ argument that contrary to those who proclaim the death of the subject, Bachelard is soundly humanistic. \textit{Gaston
residue.” For although “the mind may change its metaphysics, it cannot do without
metaphysics.”18 Here is the central structure that seems to guide Bachelard’s work.
There is a coordination between the rational and the real, between the world and the
thinker that is our inescapable situation. He speaks of it as a constructivism.19 It means
that science is a rational model linked to a reality that is formed in turn by that rational
model. The upshot is that realism can no longer function as an anchor for thought. So
he speaks of surrationalism.20

The second implication of this position comes in the way in which this
intersubjective domain of knowledge functions. Differentiation becomes essential to all
understanding. One understands by way of disagreement. Hence, negation plays a
primary role in the matter. Negation fixes ideas, negation produces clarity. The
expression, ‘the philosophy of no,’ which is the title of one of Bachelard’s works,
indicates a belief that understanding of an object arises more fully as we come to
understand what it is not, when thinking breaks with old understanding by saying ‘no’
to them.21 Such dispersion seems rather un-Parmenidean. “The first contradiction then

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Bachelard, Subversive Humanist: Texts and Readings, (Madison, Wisc.: The University
18 PN, p. 11.
19 Ibid., pp. 14, 53, 115. This seems to be what he means when he speaks of “non-
Cartesian epistemology,” e.g., pp. 67, 74. See also Privitera, p. 3.
20 PN, p. 15.
21 “Phenomenology I found objectionable in that it postulated a kind of continuity
between experience and reality. I agreed that the latter encompasses and explains the
former, but I had learned from my three sources of inspiration that the transition
between one order and the other is discontinuous; that to reach reality one has first to
reject experience, and then subsequently to reintegrate it into an objective synthesis
devoid of any sentimentality.” Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, John and Doreen

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constitutes, as it always does, the first piece of knowledge.”

This move has implications for the elemental. The result is “the metaphysical paradox that an element can be complex.” He adds, “in short the simple notion makes way for a complex notion without, moreover, abrogating its role as an element.”

It seems that from a scientific standpoint Bachelard is describing kind of ‘spatiality’ that is not the discrete sameness of Parmenidean reality, at least as it worked itself out in atomism but is rather a dispersed, Heraclitean space. Negation is not the priority of the nothing that Heidegger describes as the noncognitive means of access to the whole, for it is an action of the intellect that does not seem dependent on some prior attunement. Nor is it strictly Bergsonian affirmation of the flowing plenum. Rather it is dialectical. Negation gives understanding which gives way to further negation.

In fact one example he gives of this no-function is the progress of the theory of the atom. Niels Bohr modeled the atom after the solar system. Since then various aspects of this model have been negated progressively until the atom is nothing other than the “sum of the criticisms to which its first representation has been subjected.”

This negative definition, however, which can hardly refer any longer to a discrete entity in the former sense, is positive in effect and offers knowledge of a sort, particularly for pedagogical purposes.

In this surrationalism one has a definition that is not established in terms of an identity and is not a substance in the usual sense, but rather a dispersed substance. We will see that his depictions of the elements take on just this character of dispersion, yet

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22 PN, p. 18.
23 Ibid., p. 25.
25 PN, p. 119.
while retaining a kind of unity. In the domain of science, he calls this dispersed substance a super-object.

By means of dialectics and criticisms, surrationalism somehow determines a super-object. This super-object is the result of a critical objectification, of an objectivity which only retains that part of the object which it has criticized. As it appears in contemporary microphysics the atom is the absolute type of the super-object. In its relationships with images, the super-object is essentially the non-image. Intuitions are very useful: they serve to be destroyed. By destroying its original images, scientific thought discovers its organic laws. The noumenon is revealed by dialectizing one by one all the principles of the phenomenon.26

Here it seems we have a similarity with Atomism’s views about immediate intuitions, the sense experience Democritus called bastard knowledge, needs to be challenged, negated, though Bachelard does not at all seem sympathetic with Atomism’s materialism. Picking up on Whitehead’s notion of ‘surstance’ (sur, ‘above,’ as opposed to ‘sub,’ below), Bachelard says, “Following Whitehead’s inspiration one is led to define a substance by the coherence of the rational principles which serve to coordinate its characteristics, rather than by the internal cohesion which realism affirms and, in so doing, continually overshoots the mark of effective proof.”27 We will see that the resistance to what he calls realism continues as he takes up reverie and the elements. He also offers the term “ex-stance” in order “to underline forcefully the fact that substance is defined by a group of external determinations, arranged in such a way that they cannot together achieve enough precision to acquire absolute interiority.”28

One could say that this little prefix, ex-, as such prefixes seem to do, has implications for the whole tradition. The implications extend back to the Greek beginnings of philosophy, to Aristotle, who did not go ‘sur’ or ‘hyper’ but ‘sub’ or

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 66.
‘hypo.’ He concerned himself with substance, hypokeimenon, ‘that which endures/persists beneath.’ Bachelard’s sur-stance clearly forms part of what he calls his non-Aristotelian philosophy.  

Before moving on to the poetic works, it would be useful to dwell briefly on what Bachelard has to say specifically about elements in The Philosophy of No. While discussing particle spin, he points out that the particle has not one spin but a collection of possible spins, hence he speaks of “the pluralist character of the element, the character at once non-realist and non-Cartesian of the epistemology of elements.” Much like the atom itself, the element becomes a system of qualifications rather than “a simple real quality asserting itself as an initial datum.” So the element itself seems to become a dispersed substance, or ex-stance. One must resist the old habit of attributing a specific property to the element, whether position or mass.

“Every element, in every one of its properties, is polyvalent. An element is therefore not an ensemble of different properties as ordinary substantialist intuition would have it. It is a collection of possible states for a particular property. An element is not a condensed heterogeneity. It is a dispersed homogeneity. Its elementary character is demonstrated by the rational coherence which results from a regular distribution of its possible states.”

A dispersed homogeneity seems to mean that, as David Bohm has also suggested, modern physics has come back around to Heraclitus and the Ionian tradition. An element is not a condensed heterogeneity, which would seem to be traditional Atomism’s definition, but a dispersed homogeneity. I suggest the terms concentric and

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28 Ibid. Cf. also p. 69.
29 Ibid., Ch. 5.
30 Ibid., p. 40.
31 Ibid., p. 75.
32 Ibid., p. 75.
eccentric. Traditional realism may want to view its object concentrically, as situated and determinate. Surrationalism is an eccentric view, where the object appears only off-center in its nexus of negations. The element, like the chōra, would seem to constantly withdraw without disappearing. In addition it would resemble Socrates, who is eccentric (atopatatos) and, if we can stretch a bit, who understands himself in relation to the not, by what he does not know, but who is always ready for a conversation (logoi) since “Truth is the daughter of discussion, not of sympathy.” 34

What has this discussion of Bachelard’s philosophy of science attained? It has shown that Bachelard has retrieved a tradition on the grounds of philosophy of science that can speak of the elemental in a different way than decomposition and atomism. Rather than a concentric self-sameness of elements, one has an eccentric fluidity, and this latter characteristic yields not less knowledge of these phenomena but more. He will come to describe the elements of fire, earth, air and water similarly. 35

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On Imagination

Imagination dominates Bachelard’s elemental works. In fact, it is one of the few key terms he defines sharply. Imagination is “the human psyche’s experience of

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34 PN, p. 114.
35 I realize I have identified Bachelard with the Heraclitean tradition and will also do so with Bergson (see Chapter 6), and that Bachelard did not embrace Bergsonism wholeheartedly. An analysis of this problem would involve a careful reading of The Dialectic of Duration, Mary McAllister Jones, trans. (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000).
openness and novelty.”36 Imagination does not form images but deforms the images given by perception,37 much as the physicist observer shapes what is observed. Imagination for Bachelard, as his repeated early attempts at psychoanalysis of knowledge indicate, is a pulsion, the technical psychoanalytic word for a drive. As will be the case with John Sallis’ formulation of it in chapter seven, imagination is not simply an occasional sideline of the rational human, or some kind of optional conceit. Bachelard quotes Blake: “The imagination is not a state: it is the Human Existence itself.”38 One must be alert to the fact that this description comes from Air and Dreams, and the imagination it describes conforms fairly closely to the qualities he finds in air. Imagination, in other works, in the fields of other elements, takes on different hues, according to its object; it too is dispersed, and this transformation fits well with Bachelard’s dispersive epistemology. For Bachelard the human is the transcendence of the imagination. But imagination’s activity is to a large degree unavailable to awareness, much like the interpretive obstacles that his philosophy of science sought to ‘psychoanalyze,’39 and therefore by definition it is unconscious, an frequent, slightly Jungian feature of his analysis that is not always so helpful.

An image, as best one can describe it, is a privileged word which draws other words around it. Images in the hands of the imagination are mobile. While concepts

37 Slovaj Žižek makes a similar case. See The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology, (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 28ff.
38 AD, p. 1.
39 E.g. PN, 20, 38, 111; Cf. The Psychoanalysis of Fire, Alan C. M. Ross, trans. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), which still retains a more suspicious view of these
(and symbols as they are usually treated) hold still and are of the order of vision, images participate in the realm of the dynamic, dynamic in the sense of physical powers, substantial feelings of movement, density, lightness or heaviness, all experiences not available to vision. “Images are psychic realities. Both at the time of its birth and when it is in full flight, the image within us is the subject of the verb to imagine. It is not its direct object (complément). In human reverie, the world imagines itself.”

Even early on, in The Psychoanalysis of Fire, he says that imagination,

> “constitutes an autochthonous, autogenous realm. We subscribe to this view: rather than the will, rather than the élan vital, Imagination is the true source of psychic production. Psychically, we are created by our reverie—created and limited by our reverie—for it is the reverie which delineates the furthest limits of our mind.”

It is hard to imagine a stronger statement about imagination. He goes on to speak of imagination’s work as providing “a new form to experience, when reverie transforms forms that have previously been transformed, that we must look for the secret of the mutant forces.”

This new form sounds quite a bit like the dispersive philosophy of no.

The formal imagination has been much studied, but not so for the material and dynamic imaginations. Images exist that “stem directly from matter.” The eye gives them names, but “the hand truly knows them.” The material imagination “penetrates deeply enough into the heart of being to find the constancy and lovely monotony of matter.”

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‘obstacles’ rather than the celebratory attitude that takes over later. See esp. Ch. 5 and pp. 46-7. Hereafter PF.


PF, 110.


Ibid., p. 2.
in the discussion of the Anaximander fragment, the needful to the hand, the usage, which I interpreted along the lines of his contextual reading of being. In Chapter 7 we will see John Sallis bring out this aspect of Heidegger’s thinking, describing how the hand knows a walking stick better than does the eye. But Bachelard seems to want to push the matter further, not just to our hands, but right down into our commonality with substance (or surstance) itself. Visual images orient us in the opposite way required for substantial participation. The process he has in mind is a “becoming one with a particular matter,” rather than “extending ourselves throughout a differentiated universe.” Form itself is dependent on matter, for each form has its proper matter. “Poetic images also have their matter.”

Dynamic imagination, more akin to Aristotle’s efficient cause, is the other kind of imagination Bachelard opposes to formal imagination. This imagination of movement is a special type of movement. It is movement perceived from within. For not all movement is dynamized. Visually perceived motion remains, as he calls it, cinematic. “Because sight follows motion so effortlessly, it cannot help us make that movement an integral part of our inner lives.” Of each element this “physics of the dynamic imagination” asks its “specific density of being” and “exact energy potential for becoming.” In words that sound a bit like Merleau-Ponty, he says that his goal is “establishing a correspondence in materiality between things and ourselves,” which means venturing into something called “counter-space.” It involves an “inversion of subject and object.” Counter-space and an inversion of subject and object have at

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44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., p. 3.
least superficial similarities with what I have been discussing in terms of chôra.

Elemental space, or what Sallis calls spacing, gives way and so might function something like a counter-space, a different space, especially if we give counter its verbal sense.

Regarding dynamic imagination, I offer an example, an intriguing analysis from his discussion of air. He announces ‘the wave theory of the lark.’ “Could we not,” he asks, “bring to poetics the great syntheses of scientific thought? Then we would say: In poetic space the lark is an invisible corpuscle that is accompanied by a wave of joy.”

He goes on:

The philosopher, throwing caution to the winds, would propose a wave theory to explain the lark (une theorie ondulatoire de l’alouette). He would let it be known that it is by means of vibration (vibrante de notre être) that we come to know the lark; it can be described dynamically by an exercise of the dynamic imagination. It cannot be described formally by referring to the perception of visual images. A dynamic description of the lark depicts an awakening world that at one stage is singing. But you will be wasting your time if you try to capture this world at its point of origin when its existence is already expanding. You will be wasting your time if you try to analyze it when it is pure synthesis of being and becoming, of flight and song.47

Of course this sounds like a full blown romanticism, or worse, some kind of physical mysticism. But for Bachelard such reallocation or inversion of categories and objects, categories repeatedly aligned with objects improper to them and vice versa would seem not fanciful, but consistent and necessary, an attempt to force dispersion, to complicate knowledge and thereby develop understanding just as his philosophy of no suggested we do. Clearly the range of knowledge, of the imaginary, at least, is open-ended, along the lines of the philosophy of no that Bachelard says guides his work. This opening force seems to come from images themselves. “It is from their natural seed nourished
by the strength of the material elements, that images multiply and cluster. Elemental images proliferate; they become unrecognizable. They reach that point because they want to be different.\footnote{WD, p. 85.}

Bachelard multiplies descriptions of his project, interjects rhetorical, somewhat Zarathustrean evocations of a longed-for practitioner with the skills and time to carry out the unheard of analyses he announces, such as an oneiric archaeology (oneiric: pertaining to dreams), or a chemistry or physics of reverie,\footnote{PF, 90.} a chemistry of poetic images, imaginary physics, a chemistry of sensations, a physics of mortality, a physics of the unconscious.\footnote{Ibid., 82.} Indeed, Bachelard cultivates confusion between different theoretical contexts and their typical objects in what we might call a deluge of intentional category mistakes that are perhaps to be expected in a philosophy trying to effect what it calls Non-Aristotelian logic.

If Bachelard’s poetics has an overarching axiom it would be his claim that the irreal determines the real. This point seems to be resisted at first, e.g. in The Psychoanalysis of Fire, where the irreal must be psychoanalyzed and removed. But

\footnote{Ibid., 84-85: AS, 101-2. Emphasis original.}

\footnote{WD, p. 85.}

\footnote{PF, 90.}

\footnote{Ibid., 82. One senses the alchemical intimations in these intentional blendings or inversions of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ realms are not accidental. Alchemy fascinates Bachelard, and is indicated throughout his work. We get references to Sylphs and Undines, and Salamanders (PF, 90), beings fantasized by the alchemist Paracelsus as inhabiting air, water, and fire respectively. From time to time clear alchemical allusions appear. For example, “we will often have trouble in measuring air images exactly; too much matter or too little and the image will either remain inert or become too volatile: two different ways to make it ineffective. Moreover, personal factors (coefficients personnels) intervene to make the scales tip one way or the other” (AD, p. 12; AS, 20). Here we see once again the emphasis on the observer’s role, in that over against simple formulas and recipes, the practitioner’s wisdom, gained from experience, is required for

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Bachelard later embraces it in his celebration of reverie and the dream. Or said another way, as Bachelard dwells longer with it, the irreal would seem to cease being purely an obstacle. Perhaps the best definition of real for the time being might be the proper that intervenes between category and object such as to govern the alignment of the category to its proper object, or the system of knowledge with its proper content. This describes the concentric. In this case, the irreal, Bachelard’s improper, eccentric alignments, could indicate the attempt to cultivate discontinuity and knowledge. This mixing and blending in order to come up with gold suggests Bachelard’s peculiar nod to his beloved alchemy, which, of course, is not proper science, but may be poetically just.

The mode of the imagination, our means of access to it, is the oneiric realm, the reverie, which can be, is most frequently, a waking dream, a musing, that moment when one lowers the book and stares out the window with no clear sense of time or place, or in other works it is the nocturnal dream. Reverie is obviously some kind of psychological state. But when Bachelard speaks of reverie, the references are usually to writers, or as Bachelard would be inclined to describe them, dreamers. Poe and Swinburne dream water, Nietzsche or Shelley air, Hoffman fire, Goethe has the earth dreamer’s traits (Bachelard says that unlike in the works of the poet of air, when one leaps in Goethe’s poetry one hears the heel strike the ground).  

Along the way, Anglophones encounter numerous other writers whose names might be new to their ears, Novalis, Michelet, Apollinaire, Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Tristan Tzara, Raoul Ubac, and Paul Eluard to name just a few. It would be a mistake to gloss over these proper practice, and through these personal coefficients obsessions and obstacles of various sorts can interfere.

51 AD, 13; AS 62.
writers. So I am going to gloss over them. Suffice it to say that many are Symbolists and Surrealists, and these movements provide an important backdrop for Bachelard’s work. But we cannot explore that here.

ON FIRE

Now I will offer a rather whirlwind tour through Bachelard’s works on the elements to provide a sense of the eccentric function of the elements for Bachelard. First we consider fire.

Fire is the ultra-living element. It is intimate and it is universal. It lives in our heart. It lives in the sky. It rises from the depths of the substance and offers itself with the warmth of love. Or it can go back down into the substance and hide there, latent and pent-up, like hate and vengeance. Among all phenomena, it is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in Paradise. It burns in Hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse. It is a pleasure for the good child sitting prudently by the hearth; yet it punishes any disobedience when the child wishes to play too close to its flames. It is well-being and it is respect. It is a tutelary and a terrible divinity, both good and bad. It can contradict itself; thus it is one of the principles of universal explanation.52

Notice that fire has the same unified plurality that Bachelard seeks in his philosophy of no. The fires of hell are understood better when contrasted with fire’s glow in the heavens.

Bachelard contrasts fire, which involves quick change, with life itself, which is characterized by slow change. One must note the alchemical parallels here. According to Mircea Eliade, for alchemy the whole world is alive. In this cosmology, metals gestate like fetuses as living entities within the earth, slowly moving to the perfect form of metal that is gold. The alchemist, so closely connected with the forge of metallurgy,

52 PF, p. 12
intervenes to speed up the pace of this change, by perfecting these undeveloped metals in the fires of the forge. The alchemist therefore stands in for time.53 As the alchemist’s instrument, fire hastened the slow changes of natural life, the way fire also does in Bachelard’s estimation above.

The first encounter with fire always occurs in a social context, in the household, a domain already delineated into the relations of parent and child. For some few people, this fact yields what Bachelard calls the Promethean complex, the will to go beyond one’s elders. The little child steals some matches and lights a fire of his or her own. The child is exceeding the proper context of fire and appropriating it for himself, outside of the family domain. Fire symbolizes this going beyond, in the way that Prometheus stole fire in defiance of Zeus’ command. This complex would seem to strike a biographical tone for Bachelard, who was born in fairly humble circumstances as the child of shopkeepers in Champagne, but who was an autodidact; he studied at night while working in the post office, and eventually arrived, outside of the normal French system of competitive examinations, to teach at the Sorbonne.54 This Promethean Complex mirrors in the intellectual realm the Oedipal Complex, which, as more biological in nature, falls outside what Bachelard describes as his purview in The Psychoanalysis of Fire.

As if sensing the reader’s skepticism at what seems like full blown fancy, Bachelard pauses and moves onto less fanciful turf, the history of ideas, to reject

utilitarian explanations of human thought, concentric explanations which he calls realist in other places\textsuperscript{55} and for which fire has value because it has utility: it cooks food and warms bodies. Realism assumes that need. Realism thinks first and determines all that follows and that reverie and repose are merely the values of idealism, which arises only after basic needs are met, that what happens after sundown has less ‘real’ value. This frame of reference sees explanation entirely in terms of what is productive. But, says Bachelard, the peasant’s hearth is not excluded from reverie. That is to say, even where needs have not entirely been met, reverie occurs. And fire has value not simply because it cooks, but because it makes food crispy and crunchy and gives material form to human festivity and so reveals itself as a friend.\textsuperscript{56} The gastronomic is more highly prized than the nutritive. From fire we learn that the human being discovers intellect in joy, not in sorry, out of desire, not need, terms that will be echoed in Levinas’ description of human being. Then speaking like a mountain climber he concludes, “The conquest of the superfluous gives us a greater spiritual excitement than the conquest of the necessary. Man is a creation of desire, not a creation of need.”\textsuperscript{57}

Fire also bears the mark of a desire for sudden change, for development and conclusion and consummation, even as far as human destruction. Hence, he speaks of “The Empedocles Complex,” named for the Pre-Socratic thinker who legend says threw himself into Mt. Etna in Sicily. Here love and death unite in the same moment aimed at losing all in order to gain it back again.

\textsuperscript{55} See, e.g., PN, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{56} PF, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p. 12.
Bachelard’s elements seem to be continuous within themselves; the reverie by the fireside evokes the volcano, evokes the funeral pyre. “The bit of straw which flies away with the smoke is sufficient to urge us forward to meet our destiny. What better proof is there that the contemplation of fire brings us back to the very origins of philosophic thought? If fire, which after all, is quite an exceptional and rare phenomenon, was taken to be a constituent element of the Universe, is it not because it is an element of human thought, the prime element of reverie?”58 Here we get a clear exercise of dispersive thought. A spark adrift brings forth destiny, a hearth is united with death. Rather than Parmenidean predicational monism, which says basic things must have only one predicate, for Bachelard the more predicates a thing has the more basic it is. Elements are complex. He ends this chapter on the Empedocles complex with his statement of the basic inversion that comes closest to unifying everything he says: “The dream is stronger than experience.”59 Analysis is always later. No empiricist, no realist, Bachelard seems to be an oneirist. This description, the power of elements as unifying features of human emotional and imaginative experience indicate Bachelard’s uniqueness. His elements are truly ‘fantastic.’

Having perhaps anticipated that after such dreamy ditties about ash we might react to him as a bit of a flake, Bachelard offers a ‘productive’ example. The practice of igniting fire by rubbing wood together has no natural explanation. How did humans come to make this discovery? At this point in his psychoanalysis of fire, Bachelard allows us a glimpse of the reason for his resistance on this count. For what is at stake in this talk of dreams of fire is not some flight of fancy for our off hours, but more serious

58 Ibid., p. 18.
debates. He has with this early elemental book not yet put philosophy of science behind him. He is challenging the advocates of what he calls “recurrent rationalism,”\textsuperscript{60} who put forth the weak explanation that humans somehow observed this phenomenon of sticks rubbing together to produce fire somewhere in nature. “They are,” he claims, “judging by inference from a known science without seeking to recapture the conditions of the primitive observation.”\textsuperscript{61} Elsewhere he adds, “the human mind did not begin its development like a class in physics. The fruit that falls and the stream that flows present no enigma to a primitive mind.”\textsuperscript{62} The quote given is preceded by "Movement itself arouses scarcely any reflection." It might be argued that Zeno, the one who first made movement a puzzle, founded modern physics. But if motion is no primary conundrum, it seems Zeno is an afterthought.

He describes what he calls, after the German poet Novalis, the Novalis Complex, which means that fire’s property of heat takes precedence over its visual quality, heat being able to become one with the very interior of a thing, of a person; here the friction of mere rubbing of surfaces becomes a possession in the very depths of a substance. “Light plays upon and laughs over the surface of things, but only heat penetrates.”\textsuperscript{63} Heat has an interiority. Here we have a foreshadowing of what comes later to be called the material imagination, an idea which seems to demonstrate the degree of our oneness with Merleau-Ponty’s flesh of the world. Heat goes to that part of things where the eye and hand cannot. This interiority means that fire is within us,\textsuperscript{59} \textsuperscript{60} \textsuperscript{61} \textsuperscript{62} \textsuperscript{63}
but it is also outside of us, thus the profound duality of fire. Within the oneiric realm contradictions are not dilemmas, they violate no laws. Fire “can contradict itself; thus it is one of the principles of universal explanation.”64 In fact, contradiction “is the law of the unconscious.”65

Another facet of fire is alcohol, the water that burns, called *eau de vie*, but also *eau de feu*. Intake of alcohol burns within, thus giving the convergence of inner and objective experience. Alcohol, “the communion of life and of fire,” immediately warming, conveys “action in small quantities.” “It conforms to the rule of desire for realistic possession: to hold a great power within a small volume.”66 Great power in a small volume—think for a moment how in our movies and films the halls of power are often represented by images of men in suits peering with a satisfied mien into the amber liquid in their glasses, their feet on desks, because they can. The older the scotch the better, the more expensive the whisky, the more power concentrated in the glass and consequently in the room.

**The Flow of Water**

Bachelard suggests his own temperament favors water. *Water and Dreams* has the subtitle “An Essay on the Imagination of Matter.” Its subject is what he calls “the material imagination.” He claims that water is more feminine and uniform than fire, more constant, symbolizing human powers more hidden, simple, and simplifying.67

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64 PF, p. 7.
67 Bachelard uses gender differentiations frequently. Chapter 2 of *The Poetics of Reverie* fully embraces the engendering of words in the French language. “As soon as it is a question of the man who is producing the poetic works, there is no neuter gender.” PR, p. 91, emphasis original. I merely point out this matter, but, as with the question of
Water, if its images are persistently attended to, yields a type of intimacy different from fire and rock. It is also a type of destiny, not the “vain destiny of fleeting images and never-ending dream but an essential destiny that endlessly changes the substance of the being.”68 This observation, he insists, is a completely Heraclitean point. Heraclitean flux (mobilisme) is a concrete and complete philosophy. One cannot bath in the same river twice, said Heraclitus, true on the oneiric level because the human being shares the destiny of water, the most transitory element. The person dedicated to water “dies every minute; something of his substance is constantly falling away. Daily death is not fire’s exuberant form of death, piercing heaven with its arrows; daily death is the death of water. Water always flows, always falls, always ends (finit) in horizontal death.”69

We might lend some substance to this fanciful language if we mention here that the water poet par excellence is Edgar Allen Poe, whose works might well be characterized as continual, inevitable falling away. “The pain of water is infinite.”70

He brings alive the old link between elements and language. (The Greek word for elements (stoicheia) is the same word used for the letters of the alphabet. Plato suggested the elements were syllables.) Water “contributes a type of syntax, a continual linking up and gentle movement of images that frees a reverie bound to objects.”71

Poe’s metapoetics holds up a water that gives a peculiar motion to the universe, a slow Heracliteanism, where water is full of weight, without impetus, a mediator between life

the ‘feminine’ in Levinas, I cannot address these complex issues in the space available here.

68 WD, p. 6.  
69 Ibid., p. 6; L’Eau et rêves, essai sur l’imagination de la matière, (Paris José Corti, 1942), p. 9. Hereafter ER.  
70 WD, p. 6.  
71 Ibid., p. 12.
and death. “Language learns the most frightening of syntaxes, the syntax of dying things, dying life.”72 Again he resorts to the psychoanalytic term, complex. “To characterize accurately this syntax of becoming and of material things—this triple syntax of life, death and water—I have selected two complexes, here called the Charon complex and the Ophelia complex.”73 Charon is the ferryman across the river Styx in Hades. Ophelia, of course, is Hamlet’s quite frustrated lover, who drowns herself. Both “symbolize a meditation on our last voyage and our final dissolution. To disappear into deep water or to disappear toward a far horizon, to become a part of depth or infinity, such is the destiny of man that finds its image in the destiny of water.”74 This is water’s profound character, its depth as opposed to its superficial, surface character.

Water has also the capacity for compromise with other elements, particularly earth, in the form of paste (la pâte), “a basic component of materiality.”75 Kneading and modeling are essential for studying any relation between formal and material causes, again conveyed in terms of the hand, the visualizing hand that caresses the shape of the finished sculpture, the working hand that learns “the essential dynamic genius of reality” through “working with a matter that resists and yields at the same time, like passionate and rebellious flesh (chair). It amasses all ambivalences.”76 As if to drive home the fact of the ambivalence of the unconscious, he emphasizes next how for the unconscious water is feminine and birthing, while we had just had water linked

72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., p. 13.
76 Ibid., p. 13; ER, p. 19.
with death in the Charon and Ophelia complexes. Water means birth and death. This
seems a contradiction. ‘Yes,’ he would say, ‘but that is why it is true!’

He moves on. The unconscious that loves water ascribes purity to it. “Pure
water” is a pleonasm, a “natural morality learned through meditation on a fundamental
substance.” How serious is Bachelard? Water teaches morality? Here fresh water
has priority over oceanic water. Water is the element to which the adjective ‘fresh’
most naturally belongs. In his final chapter, on violent waters, he switches orientation,
from material imagination to dynamic imagination. Violent waters are characterized by
anger, and here for Bachelard, who ascribes gender to everything, water becomes
masculine. Water becomes water to which one does violence. He focuses on the
swimmer, testing himself or herself against water that would threaten to overwhelm.
Here is a precise instance of what he calls “the fundamentally organic quality of the
imagination.” The human, or at least the dreamer, is bathed in the element. It is the
muscular imagination of the swimmer.

His conclusion is entitled “Water’s Voice,” offers what he calls “the most
extreme of my paradoxes. It will consist in proving that the voices of water are hardly
metaphoric at all; that the language of the waters is a direct poetic reality; that streams
and rivers provide the sound for mute country landscapes, and do it with a strange
fidelity; that murmuring waters teach birds and men to sing, speak, recount; and that
there is, in short, a continuity between the speech of water and the speech of man.”

78 Ibid., p. 15.
79 Ibid. “But when the human apes first descended from the trees they stood erect by
holding on to the trees until their torsos themselves became trunks, and it was the winds
and the birds that taught them to sing and to sing with the voices of the winds and the
Human language has a liquid quality, an overall effect of water in its consonants.

Bachelard is no doubt playing on the use in phonetics of ‘liquid’ to describe frictionless consonants (l, r, and sometimes m and n, though he seems to want to include others, if not all). In the end, he says water emerges as a complete being, with body, soul, and voice. A poetics of water has a unity, a unity of the element that material imagination needs.

**In the Air**

Bachelard’s work on air is about the dynamic imagination. Again he identifies the imagination with Heraclitus and reiterates the priority of Heraclitus when he says that images have the essential character of mobility. Permanent structure and mobility are opposites and form is easier to describe than movement. But motion is more important. Images are studied by examining their mobility, productivity and life.\(^{80}\) Fortunately given images often have their own way of moving. Some images are conventional, but others are “actively lyrical” and they renew us, even having a “tonic effect on our physique.”\(^{81}\) There is a certain regularity of movement in the imaginative life—“a coherence based on mobility.”\(^{82}\) Each element has its own peculiar dynamism. But air is especially close to dynamism, to movement. The substance air is most frequently linked to the adjective “free.” Air offers many difficulties, in that it is very thin matter, yet it has the advantage that with air “movement takes precedence over

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\(^{80}\) AD, p. 2.

\(^{81}\) Ibid.

\(^{82}\) Ibid., p. 7.
matter.” With air, “where there is no movement there is no matter.”\textsuperscript{83} Aerial phenomena especially offer guidelines for rising, ascent, and sublimation, fundamental principles of the ascensional psyche. Consequently, légère, lightness/rising is the dominant term here. The inner reality of ascensional life is lightness, gaiety, and release, defined on a real verticality, not an empty metaphor, but a principle of order and scale of degrees of a special sensibility.

The first principle of ascensional imagination is the prominence of this vertical axis. He says “of all metaphors, metaphors of height, elevation, depth, sinking, and the fall are the axiomatic metaphors par excellence. Nothing explains them and they explain everything.”\textsuperscript{84} Bachelard seems to be on to something here. John Sallis claims that ascent is the first philosophical image.\textsuperscript{85} Levinas adopts height as the whence of the moral demand.\textsuperscript{86} These metaphors, says Bachelard, have an essential quality and are more natural than others. Language, dominated by the seduction of the visual, is not well suited to such images, and for this reason they go unrecognized, yet they have an extraordinary power. “They govern the dialectic of enthusiasm and anguish.”\textsuperscript{87} One cannot express moral values without reference to the vertical axis. This is essential to his “physics of poetry” and “physics of ethics.”\textsuperscript{88}

Of course, the other vertical possibility is downward, the fall (chute). The vertical axis has a tonicity such that rest is not an option. “What does not rise, falls.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 10, emphasis original.
\textsuperscript{87} AD, p. 10.
Man, qua man, cannot live horizontally. So habit is the antithesis of creative imagination. Habitual images obstruct imagination and so are no longer dynamic.

He discusses the wing, then the moral fall, wherein he will conclude that “the experience of the imaginary fall is a first axiom of dynamic imagination,” but ultimately belonging not to the aerial imagination but the terrestrial. Fall here is limited to the sense of inverted ascent, an “indirect point of view.” Nietzsche was a genius of the aerial imagination, for whom air always pertains to the heights, and is dry and cold. All of these images of air so far are attempts to understand “the dynamic meaning of the invitation to travel.” Now he turns to what he calls “the imaginary vectors that can be attributed to various aerial objects and phenomena,” namely, the blue sky, the constellations, the clouds, and the milky way, and then the aerial tree, as a being of the earth that still follows the principles of aerial participation. Violence intrudes into his analysis of the violent winds, violence still remaining “a characteristic that does not fit well into an aerial psychology.” Finally he turns his attention to the gentle breath, connected from a restricted, metaphorical view.

On the Earth

Bachelard took two books to deal with the earth. Together they form a whole.

The first book is *The Earth and the Dreams of the Will*. The second is *The Earth and the Dreams of Repose*. He gives a subtitle for this second book: *Essay on the Images of* 

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The division reflects the two broadest features of the earth. First, it is the site and the material of labor. The preposition *contre* determines this relation, for the earth is hard, hostile, and provokes the will. Since earth in this sense calls forth action from us, it is a matter of dynamic imagination. Hard and soft come define the qualities of this earth. The second book, on repose, describes the earth as a place of interiority, of intimate enclosure, of shelter. The pronoun here is *dans*, in. This domain involves the material imagination, for the imagination seeks to go within, to go to the depths of things.

While fluid substances like air and water demand to be thought in the depth and intimacy of substance and force (i.e. material and dynamic imagination), earth is so well and clearly formed that the reverie of matter seems inaccessible and the arguments of the opponents, realist philosophers and psychologists, irresistible. In this realm it seems that perception determines images. This realism believes that the person sees first, then imagines afterwards by combining impressions. See well, says realism. Dream well, says Bachelard. Dreaming comes before perception. So this surrationalism of the reverie is something like Sallis’ reorientation of imagination as part of perception, though Sallis seems to think Bachelard lacks the proper rigor.

Given the prominence of the will in the first book on earth, he pauses over its relation to the imagination. On a superficial view the imagination and the will could pass for opposites, but they are really in close solidarity. “One can want well only what one imagines richly, what one covers with projected beauties. Thus the energetic work

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93 Ibid.
of hard matters and of pastes kneaded patiently is animated by the promised beauties. One sees appear an active pancalism, a pancalism which must promise, which must project the beautiful beyond the useful, therefore a pancalism which must speak."96 Pancalism, the all beautiful, must speak, which of course means poetry is the first human utterance.

The book proceeds to treat first the dialectic of hard and soft which commands all the images of terrestrial matter. Earth is unique among the elements in that it has the primary character of resistance. The other three elements can be hostile but are not always so. One has to dream them to know this wickedness (méchanceté).97 Earth, however is incessantly resistant. He hesitates about the priority of soft over hard, which to treat first. Paste, malleable and pliant seems the primitive matter. Here again the alphabet intrudes into the elemental; he gets distracted by the consonant ‘m,’ which begins so many words that have to with plastic media, such as matter, mother, and sea (mer).98 But Bachelard admits to favoring the hard, and the imagination of energy that forms naturally in combat of work against hard matter. Psychoanalysis will say, he claims, that the true adversaries are human, the family and its interdictions. But this is only in the realm of the symbol. In the world of energy, the resistance is material.99 Psychoanalysis misses the domain of imagination, because it looks for the real beneath the image, not the image beneath the real.

95 See Force of Imagination, p. 7.
96 TRV, p. 8.
97 Ibid., p. 10
98 "The old missionaries used to say that the Indians had neither faith, law nor king, since the initial sounds of these words in Portuguese, f, l and r, were missing from their phonetic system." Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, p. 277.
99 TRV, p. 19.
Hardness dreamed is hardness attacked. The enduring matter is a dynamic emergence beyond a space-time. In this enduring matter, the human realizes itself rather as a becoming than as a being. It knows a promotion of being. Matter reveals our forces to us, gives durable substance to the will, gives well-defined temporal schemes to our patience, and gives a future to matter. In the encounter with hard matter, perhaps “the philosophical dualism of subject and object presents itself in its most frank equilibrium.” The working subject has its existence dynamized. Philosophy takes place in school, from scholê, the Greek word for leisure. It is no wonder then that in leisure philosophy is seduced by the visual, loses the material imagination. The will to work, however, overtakes the domain of signs and appearances, the domain of forms. Work animates the worker by material images.

A kind of synthesis offers itself between the two poles of hard and soft by way of the forged matter. The forge is a masculine dynamism that marks the unconscious. It unites the imagination of matter and the imagination of forces. In regard to the soft it is the potter who accomplishes this synthesis. Work is a kind of jouissance, and the material image is a future, is the whole near future, the materially prefigured future inherent in the work. “Homo faber in his work on matter does not content himself with a thought of geometric adaptation, but enjoys the intimate solidity of basic material.” Here one touches the foundation of matter, not through vision, but through work. Here is a knowledge that is not strictly formal, sure of the margins of it content. This material imagination is a dépassement, an overtaking or exceeding of immediate being,

100 Ibid., p. 22.
101 Ibid., p. 23.
102 Ibid., p. 24.
of the real. It is a matter of forces more than things, differentials rather than sums, and so it is dynamic imagination. We might say that in this Heraclitean universe there is no room for Zeno’s suspension of movement as he parses its stages. Here movement is assumed, imagination is always already at work. Imagination is aggressive and labor is a battle of wills. “War is the father of all things,” said Heraclitus.

The second part of The Earth and the Dreams of the Will takes up rocks, jewels, petrification, and metallism. This involves crystalline gems that are psychological monstrosities of valorization. Metallism involves a certain refusal of participation. Rocks resist their forms. Then he takes up the psychology of the heavy, the fall (chute). He calls it the Atlas complex and it complements the discussion of falling given in Air and Dreams. One notes here again the indication of a special correspondence between Air and Earth, or between Earth and Sky, what Bachelard calls verticality.

The second earth book, on repose, seems dominated by the motif of going beyond, depassement, or au-delà, by the quest to see the invisible, which is imagination’s task. One need not separate images of repose from the images of labor discussed in The Earth and the Dreams of the Will. For Bachelard images are not concepts, they do not isolate themselves in their signification, but dépasser, go beyond their signification and so are multifunctional. Imagination is the subject transported into things. It is consciousness’s immediate valorization of experience. It is therefore a kind of repose, and so finds its affinity with earth just as it did with the other elements. In each work imagination seems to mirror the element in question. This drive for interiority has sent humans searching for the foundation of things, for that final image

\[103\] Ibid., pp. 31-2.
that is the place of repose for the imagination. But true to the dialectic of imagination
and ambivalent nature of the unconscious, it is the same time a substantialization of the
whole universe wherein the cosmos becomes an ultracosmos. Thus we have another
contradiction: the union of the macro and the micro.

He describes the earth’s central place in this drive for repose (for the
unconscious, the earth is always the center, just as Husserl said that phenomenologically
the earth does not move). But then the second chapter dialecticizes the first, for beneath
the surface there is always agitation, much like micro-physics has shown, that the
bottom is no bottom. Still the imagination has this desire to see the hidden, and the
forbidden. He calls this play of the hidden and the revealed a “noumenal chemistry,” and
seems to want to say, in critique of philosophy that the history of philosophy has
discredited the notion of the noumenon, wrongly, because of neglect of the material
imagination. This neglect results from the negativism of its methods, which leave
philosophy to work in an experiential ghetto. That is to say, it seems, philosophy
neglects the oneiric and poetic. “The hidden and fleeing beings forget to flee when they
call to the poet by their true name.” This contrast of repose and violent penetration
shows up in two contrary images, first the cave, which reflects repose, and second the
labyrinth, which is twisted and tortured motion.

In the end he turns to three examples of what could be an encyclopedia of
images: the serpent, the root, the vine, concluding with a concrete reverie of the
vineyard, where he says that if a comet passes by during the growing season, the vintner

104 Ibid., p. 25.
106 Ibid., p. 12.
can taste the difference in the wine. Here again the macro and micro are merged. The serpent is twisted animality, the root, which was Empedocles’ image of the elements, twisted vegetal matter, both labyrinthine nightmares, and the vine a fundamental alchemical reverie. He speaks the primitive happiness in the heart of the nut and the seed, which of course was put to work by Anaxagoras to describe the elements. It is an expensive but concentrated happiness, hidden in its modesty. For the dreamer, the smaller the beings the more active and more rapid their functions. “For a little thing, one could propose a Heisenberg principle for the oneiric life. The faeries are then extraordinary oneiric activities.” He speaks of Lilliputian reveries. The intimate imagination desires to creep into all things. Quoting that Dadaist/Surrealist, Tristan Tzara, he says, “I am the millimeter.” This dialectic of interior and exterior would seem to constitute the appeal of the microscope. These dialectic impressions sometimes live from the contradiction between a substance and its attributes. Again firmly embracing Heraclitus, this time the theory of dependent opposition, he speaks of the secret blackness of white things, how black lives in white, in images like black milk. The dialectic of imagination finds more of reality in that which hides itself than in that which shows. (It was Heraclitus again who said, “Nature loves to hide.” Phusis krupteshai philei). Within the space of a small thing is an infinity, not just a formal infinity as discovered by Zeno’s infinitesimals, but a dreamed infinity.

107 Ibid., p. 325.
108 Ibid., p. 17.
109 Ibid., p. 18.
Bachelard concludes by apologizing for neglecting ploughing, saying there is not enough space in a book such as his to do justice to the agricultural imagination, the joy of spade and rake. He also apologizes for not dividing out the various registers of these images. But images cannot be studied in pieces. Rather, they are themes of totality. Repeating the terms in which he spoke of contemporary microphysics in *The Atomistic Intuition*, he says analysis is only as good as the synthesis it facilitates. It seems one cannot understand images analytically, for their value in clarifying comes in unifying the most diverse impressions. His goal is to leave all images their life, a life which is simultaneously multiple and profound. His task, he says, is to show the glee of images overtaking reality (*la joie des images dépassant la réalité*).\(^{111}\) Zeno said that Achilles could not overtake the tortoise. Before Achilles can get to the tortoise he will have had to reach such and such a spot. Zeno operates within the perfect tense. Images carry the future tense in them. In this tense the tortoise is toast.

One more point should be made about Bachelard’s reveries. Material reveries have a cosmic nature. “All great substantial values, all valorized human movements, rise without difficulty to the cosmic level. There are a thousand ways of going from the imagination of milk to the imagination of the ocean because milk is a value for the imagination that finds release on every occasion.”\(^{112}\) He says, “*the cosmic image is immediate*. It gives us the whole before the parts. In its exuberance, it believes it is telling the whole of the Whole. It holds the universe with one of its signs. A single image invades the whole universe.”\(^{113}\) Further along he dreams of “intimate

\(^{111}\) TRV, p. 25.
\(^{112}\) WD, 123.
\(^{113}\) *Poetics of Reverie*, p. 175.
cosmicity."\textsuperscript{114} Then, "the simplest hearth encloses a universe."\textsuperscript{115} Images clearly respect no parts. They are eccentric in the whole.

Bachelard is highly quotable and intoxicating. In the end the question is not whether Bachelard’s surreal or surrational formulations about earth, air, fire and water signify in the way we think they should. The question is perhaps more a matter of whether what he says about the priority of the oneiric realm is true, that beneath this rational work we do, a force of imagination is at work that we have not recognized. This oneiric realm accounts for what he frequently calls the tonicity of images, the constant tension or pulsion that dreaming involves and that imagination is. This tonicity is not defined in relation to the nothing. The ‘no’ of the philosophy of no is a move beyond, but follows on dialogue, not anxiety. It is eccentric, but perhaps not abysmal, as entirely groundless. We will see in chapter seven John Sallis’ attempt to read the elemental as part of a dynamic model based on ‘spacing,’ or ‘choratic’ space, examined in the sense of how it draws together. This drawing does not seem the same as the tonicity of Bachelard’s images because it seems to leave out the dreamer. The subject of this choratic space remains obscure. Consequently to speak of ‘enjoyment’ leaves the question of who is enjoying. In spite of a high priority for the moral images of height, which are, like Levinas’ face, not particularly visible for the formal imagination, he does not seem to find many others in his reveries. Talk about imagination in the end seems a leisurely, idle activity. These are Bachelard’s own words for his book, The

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 189.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid. Ibid., p. 193.
Poetics of Reverie.\textsuperscript{116} It is not the work of a Socratic philosopher, who always keeps in mind the city back on the other side of the wall, and for whom \textit{chóra} is no dream but is a giving way in relation to the other.

But one might hope that a philosopher skilled in surrationalism might emerge to examine the way the atomism derived from depictions on high school science text books of corpuscles in a void has become an unconscious obstacle, an obstacle first, in the way that we consider the world, as dead matter to be seized and used like so many components of a building, and, second, in the way that we consider ourselves, as discrete entities at peace until disturbed by others, with whom we must negotiate difficult relations that our primary state sloughs off. Levinas is quite good on this second count. But his translator, Alphonso Lingis, will emerge in chapter eight to suggest that Levinas commits the same atrocities as the rest of us on the first count.

\textsuperscript{116}The Poetics of Reverie describes itself as “a book for leisure reading” (p. 176), a leisurely book” (p. 36) by “an idle philosopher” (p. 188).
Chapter 6

Levinas: Destroying the Sacred Groves

The essence of Dasein lies in its existence.  

Life is an existence that does not precede its essence.  

. . . Food, Drink and Shelter, three things necessary to man which man offers to man. The earth is for that. Man is his own master, in order to serve man. Let us remain masters of the mystery that the earth breathes.  

Bachelard has described with near glee, a world enchanted with things that seem alive and nearly look back at me. “Everything I look at looks at me.” Now we turn to Levinas, whose elaborate description in 1961 of the existent enamored and embedded in the elemental milieu in enjoyment (jouissance) would seem, if not for the total lack of any specific reference, to owe some debt to Bachelard’s work in the thirties and forties on the imagination. Yet a profound difference persists between them. The difference between Bachelard and Levinas is, I think, closely focused in the following comment from Levinas: “What inward existence lacks is not a being in the superlative, prolonging and amplifying the equivocations of interiority and its symbolism, but an order where all the symbolisms are deciphered by beings that present themselves absolutely—that express themselves.” From another perspective, one in which Levinas is calling into question Heidegger, whom Levinas sees as promoting what he calls a

paganism of place and things, like jugs of wine and holy bridges across rivers that gather together the whole world, Levinas says, “The mystery of things is the source of all cruelty towards men.” Here one finds the basic strand that opens what seems an unbridgeable gap between Levinas’ thought and Heidegger, as well as Bachelard’s natural reveries. It is also a gap, more broadly construed, between an ethical concern for humans on the one hand and, on the other, efforts to focus ethical concern on the natural world, whether by way of re-enchanting the things we call nature, or capturing the spell of the sensuous, or a return to a sense of place, or even just things looking back at me. Perhaps we have all heard the retorts flung at advocates for animal rights, that some people love animals more than they love other humans. Levinas would seem to be saying something similar to Heidegger about things, and perhaps Bachelard as well, arguing instead for what seems an exclusively anthropocentric ethical imperative. Not just a call to remember humans first, but the claim that an enchantment with the mystery of things leads directly to all cruelty towards human beings. Could it be that re-enchantment of nature leads to violence? Or put another way, must the importance of the human eclipse all other ethical concerns?

If one is concerned about ecological issues in philosophy, it would seem best to skip right over Levinas and thereby make one’s task easier. Why bother with him? Three reasons suggest themselves. First, his position raises what seem to be necessary questions for the kind of attempts at reanimation that drive Bachelard and perhaps Heidegger in his talk of beings giving reck. These attempts, he would say, are not something new, but actually more of the same old primitive tribalism of place and

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5 TI, p. 178.
world that humans have sought to overcome by pushing ethics beyond local custom or
ethos (nomos) and toward attempts to address one’s responsibilities to all humans, to the
liberal state, “the state which always asks itself whether its own justice really is
justice.”7 He views this type of repristination of nature as a nostalgia for the primitive.
This is not surprising, perhaps, for a Parisian who includes the city among one of his
many lists of elementals.8 Re-enchantment is a wrong response to objectification of the
cosmos by scientific thinking, an objectification that Levinas will argue has both
advantages and disadvantages. The non-human world seems of value at best to the
extent that it can be marshaled to mitigate human suffering. So the idea of destroying
the sacred groves would seem a fit with Levinas’ agenda. Here one sees the element of
truth in criticisms of Levinas’ position by people like Lingis, that Levinas in the end is
too positivistic in his approach to the world, and Derrida, that Levinas cancels space. It
would appear that these claims have some truth to them.

6 DF, p. 232.
7 “Emmanuel Levinas,” Chapter 1 in French Philosophers in Conversation, Raoul
check the power of “the planetary movement of modern technology.” Regarding what
state can accomplish this he says, “I am not convinced that is democracy.” “The
Spiegel Interview,” in Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and
Answers, Günther Neske and Emil Kettering, eds. Lisa Harries and Joachim
am a democrat.” Is It Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas, Jill
RtB.
8 TI, p. 131. Cf. “The beauty of New York has to do not with its being a town, but with
the fact, obvious as soon as we abandon our preconceptions, that it transposes the town
to the level of an artificial landscape in which the principles of urbanism cease to
operate, the only significant values being the rich velvety quality of the light, the
sharpness of distant outlines, the awe-inspiring precipices between the skyscrapers and
the sombre valleys, dotted with multicoloured cars looking like flowers.” Claude Lévi-
Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, John and Doreen Weightman, trans. (Hammondsworth,
A second reason not to turn immediately away from Levinas is that a basic feature of Levinas’ philosophy is a refiguring of what constitutes freedom, a critique that zeros in particularly on a heritage he sees deriving from Parmenides. Freedom, he says, is not *aseity*, or freedom *from* influence by external reality, which would make one a *causa sui* entity,9 but rather freedom is freedom *for*, freedom engaged in the service of motivations not derived solely from freedom itself.10 Freedom in effect, ceases to be an absolute starting point for philosophy and is refigured in relation to one’s prior responsibilities, in relation to an other who does not merely resist our freedom, but calls that very freedom into question. Whereas traditional philosophy has begun with some kind of independent identity, then tried to reason out its obligations, Levinas claims identity happens through responsibility and so freedom is not entirely free. This qualifying of the human’s freedom in relation to the other human would seem to be quite like the kind of change in view some environmentalists call for in relation to the natural world with phrases like simple living, or treading softly on the earth. Perhaps Levinas’ picture of human agency is environmentally friendly, assuming of course that that kind of agency could obtain in relation to something nonhuman. Again, Levinas would most likely not warm to this appropriation of his thought. In the end, what qualifies human freedom so decisively is the other human. Though perhaps some flexibility can be found, as John Llewelyn seeks to do in regard to animals.11

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9 TI, pp. 58f, 147f, 223f, 252, 293f.
10 Ibid., pp. 84-90.
Finally, Levinas could be useful for considering questions about life in the natural world because he offers an intriguing description of human being in its environment, with a strong role for what he calls the elemental, an elemental that is not simply a wisp of nothing, or the lowest common denominator, or the furthest possible reduction, but a fullness of the Heraclitean kind I have tried to describe in the first half of this essay, an elemental medium that Levinas describes much more carefully. It is essentially non-possessable by us while at the same time being the very milieu of our being. We are, it seems, possessed by the non-possessable. Stated quite baldly and, I fear, unclearly, I am playing here with the idea that for Levinas the elemental is nearly as thingly as things, that this elevation of the medium called the elemental corresponds to a relativizing of thingliness that is a reversal of the priorities found in classical Atomism, and that behind this move is Henri Bergson.

In the end I will suggest that just as a welcome persists in the dwelling prior to the knock on the door, so a certain public quality persists in the elemental, insofar as it is described as escheat and non-possessable. Consequently a certain point of contact might exist between the elemental *chôra* and the social *chôra*. Just as the intoxicating world that Socrates finds beyond the city wall elicits an eros for the beautiful that participates in the same realm as the *dikaiosunê* and *sôphrosunê*, the elemental prefigures sociality and public life. Of course, Levinas’ does not put the public immediately first, as his notion of the “third man” suggests. The public moment arrives when negotiation between one’s responsibilities to others is required. Also, trust will emerge again in preference to anxiety over the nothing. The figure of this trust in its
relation to the elemental is sleep, the release of oneself into something other than being, a kind of nothing, that indicates this relation to the elemental that, in addition to being uncertain, we also must trust. Sleep is a relation to the elemental that indicates trust and brings recommencement in each morning.

A Bit of Bergson

I want to begin, therefore, with a discussion of Bergson, in order to try, at least for heuristic purposes, to set up a crude schema for making sense of Levinas’ taxing writings. This schema will play on fullness vs. emptiness, negation vs. affirmation, and pertains fairly directly to the discussion of the nothing in chapter two. For one can define Levinas’s terms and categories, such as the infinite beyond all being, both negatively and positively, and what this means I hope will become clear. Levinas’ cosmological talk about the elemental, the ‘there is,’ as well as his very style of argumentation seem to me to owe a great deal to Bergson’s analysis of negation.

In Creative Evolution, Bergson makes note of how philosophy tends to give priority to the naught. Nothing somehow finds its way into the first position in philosophy. “In short,” he says, “I cannot get rid of the idea that the full is an embroidery on the canvas of the void, that being is superimposed on nothing, and that in the idea of ‘nothing’ there is less than in that of ‘something.’ Hence all the mystery.”13 If the nothing is first then, if we follow Leibniz’ principle of sufficient reason, some explanation must be given for how any enduring thing can stand out against nothing’s

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power, can emerge without surpassing a certain threshold of determinacy or thingliness. To solve this puzzle of how to overcome such a powerful naught, philosophy has been prone to construct the cause of reality in a realm akin to the logical or mathematical realms—hence, creating metaphysics, the inevitable casualty of which is free will. Spinoza is Bergson’s example of such. Essential to Bergson’s own philosophy of intuition and *élan vital*, therefore, is the task of proving that the problem of the nothing is a pseudo problem. Bergson pursues a kind of thought experiment much like Levinas’ attempt to zero in on existence without existents, which we will hear about later.

In “What Is Metaphysics?” we saw Heidegger also interested in putting paid to the supremacy of the principle of sufficient reason. But he did so by emphasizing the nothing. For Heidegger, it seems, sufficient reason is not necessary in relation to Being because Being remains essentially questionable, always a question. One is not compelled to give sufficient reason why there is something instead of nothing, for to do so would treat the ‘why’ in this question as a call for some type of causality and would reduce Being to some kind of being in the world capable of having an effect. One is not compelled to give an answer to the question of Being but rather one is called to ask it. Or stated in another way that amounts to the same thing, Heidegger’s sufficient reason for Being is “the nothing.” From nothing comes the created being, he claims, and places the nothing beyond the reach of the intellectual act of negation that Bergson sees

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as giving rise to the nothing in the first place. This nothing is accessed not by thinking, for Heidegger, but through attunement. Though one could argue that it first comes to his attention to be sought in thinking, i.e. taking seriously the “nothing more” in his version of science’s description of its object—“beings and nothing more.”

Bergson describes his experiment where he tries to eliminate all perceptions, in effect, to experience nothing. Closing off of all externality still leaves one’s internal awareness, which one can again cancel from some imagined external standpoint.

“If I abolish this inner self, its very abolition becomes an object for an imaginary self which now perceives as an external object the self that is dying away. Be it external or internal, some object there always is that my imagination is representing. My imagination, it is true, can go from one to the other, I can by turns imagine a nought of external perception or a nought of internal perception, but not both at once, for the absence of one consists, at bottom, in the exclusive presence of the other.”

One can only conceive of either of the two relative noughts, the world annihilated or my own cogito annihilated. The two cannot be present synchronously. On this failure of synchronicity Bergson hangs his critique of the nought. “But, from the fact that two relative noughts are imaginable in turn, we wrongly conclude that they are imaginable together: a conclusion the absurdity of which must be obvious.”

But Bergson says thought has no access to the image of the suppression of everything. One’s mind switches back and forth between these two noughts in

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17 *Creative Evolution*, p. 279.

‘catastrophic’ leaps. We form the image of nothing at the brief point of transition between the two. But,

in reality, we then perceive both, having reached the point where the two terms come together, and the image of Nothing, so defined is an image full of things, an image that includes at once that of the subject and that of the object and, besides, a perpetual leaping from one to the other and the refusal ever to come to rest finally on either. Evidently this is not the nothing that we can oppose to being, and put before or beneath being, for it already includes existence in general.19

To the riposte that we can conceive of the idea of the Nothing, even if, like Descartes’ thousand-sided chiliagon, we cannot conceive of the image, Bergson replies that it would not be a functional idea, any more than is the idea of a ‘square circle,’ but rather a mere word. Bergson’s conclusion: “there is no absolute void in nature.”20 Later he expands: “there is more, and not less, in the idea of an object conceived as ‘not existing’ than in the idea of this same object conceived as ‘existing’; for the idea of the object ‘not existing’ is necessarily the idea of the object ‘existing’ with, in addition, the representation of an exclusion of this object by the actual reality taken in block.”21 Bergson even concludes from his argument that the ontological question “Why does something exist?” is meaningless.22

Aside from this question, it seems that Bergson has placed fullness before void and Levinas’ description of the elemental picks up on this move. First there is something, a positive reality, a fullness. This question of how to situate the void, the nothing, has a history in philosophy. Parmenides (or his interpreters) found the nothing to be unassailable, so much so that he insisted nothing could come out of it, and so an

19 Creative Evolution, p. 279-80.
20 Ibid., p. 281.
21 Ibid., p. 286. Emphasis original.
absolute beginning of any kind, i.e. the transition from nothing to something, is absurd.
One could read Parmenides as saying that where there is nothing, no being is possible.
Atomism sought to overcome this puzzle by reifying substance or being into
uncuttables, atoms, and making becoming only a change of location. They placed these
little, complete entities that they dreamed up on the model of dust within the great void,
itself perhaps just a dream, for on what grounds could they assume such a forceful
nothing to be the horizon of what is?23 Plato did not care for this cosmic non-milieu of
the void and so placed things in the mysterious chôra, neither place nor not. The Stoics
pushed the void out of the cosmos, which was itself pure continuum of a more
Heraclitean tenor. Bergson seems to fall in this Stoic/Heraclitean lineage, for he
privileges intuition and duration, a flowing fullness.

But does this cancellation of void put Heidegger’s analysis of the nothing out of
play? Of course, this intellectual exercise, which has a certain Cartesian flavor to it, is a
cancellation of the idea of the totality of beings, and Heidegger would insist that such a
move does not deal adequately with beings as a whole, does not attain to disclosing
Dasein in its there as a part of beings as a whole, which is in no way primarily an act of
intellect.24 Perhaps like Bergson’s analysis of temporality, his thought about the void is
not radical enough. In “What is Metaphysics” Heidegger seems to be addressing
Bergson’s analysis fairly directly when he says that mental acts of negation of the
totality of beings do not reach beings as whole, and consequently do not reach the

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22 Ibid., p. 296.
nothing. Particularly the problem does not yield to mental exercises, which can only posit all beings and imagine canceling them out. Temporality seems key to Heidegger’s discussion of the nothing, a temporality more pervasive by far than anything Bergson has proposed. Heidegger has said as much in the introduction to *Being and Time.*\(^\text{25}\) As heir to the Heraclitean/Stoic lineage, Bergson’s position may be an adequate critique of all forms of atomism. But Heidegger’s thought is much more complex. In atomism, temporality is defined spatially as change (movement of particles) across a spatial horizon, a frame of reference that still posits a stable totality that then yields change and time. Heidegger’s uniqueness arrives precisely from not *placing* time at all, but thinking the Being of beings from out of temporality. Thus death is not a terminus but the determines the nature of Dasein’s being. On the other hand, in chapter two we asked whether the phenomenon of anxiety really did disclose a nothing, and give us a whole, or whether we might follow along the lines of Merleau-Ponty and Alphonso Lingis, who seem to want to check the reign of this nothing.

**Levinas’ Adaptation**

We will see that this basic pattern of full/empty, positive/negative, fits many of the crucial moves Levinas makes, both in regard to the ‘elemental *chôra*’ and the ‘social *chôra,*’ that is to say, he challenges privative explanations and assumptions biased toward the void in favor of fullness and positive explanations. For example, Levinas says that innocence is not the privative state of having committed no wrongs (one imagines an atom in a void that has not collided with any others). Innocence is rather, having embraced one’s responsibilities, a positive definition in that it involves actions

\(^{25}\) Pp. 39, 49.
rather than a sovereign inward state that results from refraining from misdeeds.26
Happiness, likewise, is not merely the absence of distress, a kind of tranquility. Rather, happiness is an attainment, an accomplishment, the outcome of an action of enjoyment.27 Peace is not the absence of conflict, but a concrete welcome of the other and the condition of all conversation.28 Most importantly, and a revision that is pervasive for Levinas’ project, he defines freedom differently. The tradition has tended to see freedom as aseity or the capacity to avoid being affected by one’s surroundings, i.e. independence or autonomy.29 Freedom is complete in itself. It is, we might joke, being wearing sunglasses—all self-contained and unexposed. Levinas says this aseity is not really available, for one is already in a situation of being hostage to the other. That is to say, intersubjectivity or sociality means being in the power of the other in the ethical domain and so finally outside of the potency of self that we want to use to define freedom. “The human only presents itself to a relation that is not a power.”30

Levinas says at one point that the first individuation, the first single entity is the human egoism, all other individuals, whether stones or atoms are modeled on this self-satisfied human.31 We go on to grant a strong autonomy to these entities. But the imperviousness we ascribe to such entities might be interpreted as a function of the emptiness of their milieu, as if atoms needed to be uncuttable, needed the privative a- or

26 CPP, pp. 27, 29.
27 TI, p. 113.
28 Ibid., p. 197.
a-tomos, non-cuttable, to resist the caustic quality of the nothing in which they dwelled, as if the very absoluteness of the void pre-determined how adamantine the basic units must be, whether those units be atoms of humans. But if we tweak the nought a bit, as Bergson did, then perhaps everything changes with regard to what exists in the nought.

*Totality and Infinity* takes up the task of challenging *Being and Time*, a work that inspired profound respect from Levinas. But it would seem correct to say that no thinker receives unequivocal admiration from Levinas, especially not Heidegger, and Levinas sets out to correct *Being and Time* and does so with considerable animus at times. This defiance of the Heideggerian project seems true all the way down to the cast of characters Levinas evokes. Plato and Descartes, two figures of questionable repute for Heidegger, are lifted up by Levinas as supplying the two key ideas that guide his project. Plato speaks enigmatically of a good beyond being, and Descartes, in the third meditation, speaks of the idea of the infinite that is nothing I could arrive at from

31 TI, p. 59.
32 He tells of reading the book with a group in snowy field while they were all attending the famous Davos debate between Heidegger and Cassirer (RtB, p. 156). He suggests that his own discovery of the human, the other is probably not as important as Heidegger’s discovery of ontological difference (RtB, p. 131), and he includes *Being and Time* in his list of five great texts in the history of western philosophy (RtB, pp. 154f; *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, Richard A. Cohen, trans. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), pp. 37-8). “For me, Heidegger is the greatest philosopher of the century, perhaps one of the very great philosophers of the millennium; but I am very pained by that because I can never forget what he was in 1933, even if only for a short period.” RtB, p. 176.
33 Adriaan Peperzak says *Totality and Infinity* “can be read as Levinas’ anti-*Being and Time.*” *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1997), p. 204.
within myself but which is placed in me from outside of me. Levinas uses both of these moments in the history of philosophy to fix the other as beyond of being.

What is this good beyond being? The expression is a bit enigmatic, but let us suggest two moments in Plato as possible working explanations. First, the dialogue called the Gorgias finds Socrates defending the somewhat un-Greek thesis that it is better to be harmed oneself than to do harm to another. This formula seems to me to embody Plato’s sense of the social chôra. Here we have a clear suspension of the ethic of self-preservation, or of the will to be, a giving way in the sense of chôrei. Indeed, this resistance to doing harm seems to determine Socrates’ decision not to flee his own execution. He will not injure the laws of Athens, the city, even at the expense of his own existence, a position that baffled some of his Greek friends. I call the principle ‘better to be harmed than to harm,’ un-Greek insofar as the Greek honor-shame ethic, to caricature a bit, could not tolerate paschein, being a victim, suffering any kind of assault to one’s potency. Sophistry, also a part of the conversation in the Gorgias, was in part a system for minimizing one’s vulnerability within the newly emerged law courts. Power was valued, and language was power. Indeed, in the Gorgias, Socrates’ main adversary, Callicles, sounds positively Nietzschean at times, and we would expect Nietzsche, or at least a Nietzschean, to see in the formula “it is better to be harmed than to harm” a shining example of what Nietzsche called the ascetic ideal. On a strictly grammatical level, the formula Socrates defends, ‘it is better to be harmed than to do harm,’ elevates the passive voice of the verb ‘to be harmed’ over the active voice, to

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35 CPP, p. 53.
36 Gorgias, 469.
harm. We might suggest Socrates’ thesis renders the metaphysical formula of the good beyond being in ethical terms.

We might also say that Plato describes the good beyond being in a mythical or cosmological way in the *Phaedrus*, which we have already discussed in considerable detail. Here he describes the soul as a chariot pulled by two winged horses, one passion and the other reason. Passion is, of course, the difficult horse, for Plato knew his Heraclitus, that whatever passion wants it buys at the expense of soul. In the *Phaedrus*, passion impedes soul’s ascent to the *hyperouranion*, the beyond the sky. The goal of this ascent of the soul is to get a glimpse of the forms, but three particular forms: *sophrosunê*, which means wisdom or temperance, *dikaiosunê*, justice, and *to kalon*, which means the beautiful but can also mean the good. It is interesting to remember from the first chapter of this essay that for Anaximander what was beyond the rim of the heavens was the *apeiron*, the infinite, which governed or regulated the play of opposites so as to engender *isonomia*, balance of power, a feature essential to the new, democratic *polis* if it was to be governed with *sophrosunê*, *dikaiosunê*, and *kalos*, *kalos* in the sense of good order (*kosmos*). Levinas reads this good beyond being in terms of the infinite, though, as we will see, he distinguishes it from *apeiron*, picking up on the latter term’s sense of indeterminacy. Just as with the nothing into which Dasein is dangled in Heidegger, this infinite in Levinas casts off the crude spatiality of Plato’s myth. For Plato, it seems, the good beyond being renders an ethical sense and one that involves a modified view of agency and freedom.

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Regarding Descartes, in his third meditation he has the infinite be something put into us, which I take to mean not deducible, at least. Levinas borrows the formal structure of this Cartesian infinite, calling the idea of the infinite an idea overflowed by its ideatum.\textsuperscript{38} Rather than some kind of mystical voodoo, this idea placed in us seems important to Levinas in that it is a limit on the Same, or the self, a placing in check of the drive to comprehension. The infinite in Descartes is another, much more formal moment in what Levinas sees as a kind of counter-tradition in the history of philosophy.

How do this beyond being and this idea of the infinite play out for Levinas? Being seems to take two senses here that I will align on the one hand, with the existential sense of ‘to be’, i.e. ‘to exist,’ and, on the other with the veridical sense of the verb to be, to be the case or to be true. This distinction comes from studies of Parmenides, and I cannot resist a brief digression, that may nonetheless prove illuminating. One of Parmenides’ more famous fragments says that being and knowing are the same, or, as Heidegger and other’s translate it, the same is there for being and knowing. Heidegger’s genius, according to Levinas, is to have seen the links between existing or the now and comprehension,\textsuperscript{39} or in Parmenides’ language, between being and understanding, whereby the meaning of being is encountered by interrogating an existing being in the world, whose comprehension (noein) is already present in the act of existing (einai). Or put another way, the distinction between the existential sense of the verb to be (existing) and the veridical sense (comprehension) is not at all absolute and that Parmenides says this when he says to be and to know are the same.

\textsuperscript{38} TI, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{39} RtB, p. 155.
Being is often understood by Levinas as my effort to persist in being that he calls inter-estedness,\textsuperscript{40} literally within or among beings, but in the sense of pursuing one’s own interests. This kind of being he says is really a rather Darwinian idea in the end.\textsuperscript{41} Heidegger’s \textit{Dasein}, Spinoza’s \textit{conatus essendi} supply his main examples of it. One suspects his problem with it is the reduction of ethics to ethos, which seems to be what he means when he talks about a paganism of place that never attains the neutral space of Gagarin’s space flight—the ethical, or protoethical moment. This is the existential sense of the verb to be, being as existing, understood as the active pursuit of one’s being, one’s interests. The face of the other calls that existence into question, such that the question occupying one is no longer “to be or not to be?” but rather, “Is it righteous to be?” or “Do I have a right to exist?”\textsuperscript{42} One’s place in the sun is questioned. Levinas frequently quotes Pascal’s observation that seizing one’s place in the sun is an act of usurpation. He uses Pascal’s assertion to describe this question of whether it is righteous to be. “\textit{Dasein} never wonders whether, by being \textit{da}, ‘there’, it’s taking somebody else’s place!”\textsuperscript{43} To claim one’s place is to exclude another; thus being comes to appear almost like theft. Aside from the issue of who is actually entitled to this place, the problem is that the question is never raised; the social moment never occurs, assuming, of course, that the social moment needs to be so catastrophic as Levinas indicates.

\textsuperscript{40} See \textit{Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence}, Alphonso Lingis, trans. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), pp. 4f.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{RtB}, pp. 136, 145.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{43} Mortley, p. 19.
On the other hand, in regard to the veridical sense of ‘to be,’ being understood in terms of intelligibility, as the truth of reality, the face of the other is outside of being because it is not a reality or entity that can be made intelligible or whose rights can be justified logically. Said in another way, the other human cannot be mediated by a concept, a genus, or even the illumination of Being in which beings appear. One cannot arrive at a demonstrable understanding of the claim the other makes on me. It is prior to any demonstration of what is true. I cannot comprehend it, ‘prehending’ meaning, of course, a kind of seizing. The human other is a being it is impossible to possess. Even if I murder the other as an attempt to seize its freedom, I lose it in killing it. So here, too, it escapes my possession (and in this way, I would suggest, the social chôra mirrors the elemental chôra).

The difficulty with Levinas seems to come in when he begins to use the language of passivity, at which point he becomes quite critical of Heidegger’s middle-voiced Same. The other’s claim interrupts my happy and free existence and the justifications I give for myself for remaining neutral, and I can marshal no arguments against it without generating mere excuses. In Levinas’ language I am hostage and passive. The primacy of this passive in Levinas contrasts with what one might call the middle voice sense of Heidegger’s philosophy, characterized by letting beings be, which is itself a kind of ethical moment. But one lets be, rather than having one’s being challenged. That this challenge can occur derives from the uniqueness of the human, and Levinas’ complaint about Heidegger’s ethical moment of Gelassenheit would be that he does not make the imperative distinction between beings of various sorts, and

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44 CPP, p. 167.
the human being, but rather situates all these beings within the horizon of being. Of course human being’s uniqueness is essential to Heidegger’s thought from a methodological standpoint, and what’s more Gelassenheit releases beings into their being, so the being of the other human might be said to have force according to its being as human. But this does not seem strong enough for Levinas. From an ethical point of view, Levinas would say, Heidegger misses this distinction, which seems in Levinas’ frame of reference tantamount to bulldozing humanity, a claim that might stick out as awkwardly as Heidegger’s attempts to speak of the ontological sameness of agriculture and holocaust.

Levinas’ passivity has its own complexity. The important difference in Levinas’ view, the power of the face of the other, is not a force that defeats the force available to me, like a harder atom that I collide with or like a superior adversary, but rather one that calls my very force into question. Dasein asks the question of being, which means Dasein is a being concerned with meaning. Heidegger saw this meaning as dispersed throughout the context of my existing but at the same time gathered in intelligibility of language. Levinas’ formula for the other’s challenge to the meaning that is questioned after by the questioner is to say that face is “signification without a context.”45 In contrast, it would seem, to Heidegger, face does not have its meaning from within a referential totality or context, expressed in the language in which human being dwells. This would mean face is beyond language, a point Derrida challenges.46 This amounts to saying that ethics does not find its meaning from within ontology, historicity, or

45 TI, p. 23.
ethos. The face of the other escapes language, is otherwise than Being, in so far as language has a speaker. Luce Irigaray seems to be following somewhat in Levinas’ wake when she says of Heidegger’s middle voice image of the bridge, “The bridge abides, an unceasing conveying, but at its end there is no one.”47 Just as the image of the thing, according to Levinas, is modeled on the satisfied egoism, as essential to language, face is the first signification, from which all other signification takes its significance. As first signification, as escaping any context of signification, face does not equate with what is, either in the sense of existing in the normal meaning of the word or in terms of falling into place within some schema of intelligibility. The Other challenges being, whether we understand ‘to be’ existentially (in terms of existence) or veridically (in terms of meaning or sense).

‘Face’ is “the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me.”48 It is the human. Face refers not to the material features that allow us to distinguish one human from another, which would then serve the task of classifying otherwise similar entities into some total schema. Face, instead, is interpreted variously either in terms of murder and its prohibition, or in terms of language as the social or metaphysical relation par excellence. One can pick up on some language Levinas uses later, in an attempt to respond to some of Derrida’s criticisms of Levinas’ earlier works, to highlight this notion of expression. In Otherwise than Being, when face has given way to talk of proximity, Levinas contrasts the saying and the said, the said is the

content of what is said, the proposition that can be debated, or the facts that have a certain independence from the persons discussing them. The saying, or to say, however, is inseparable from the speaker, is what makes ‘the said’ her or his expression. Here the difference is between saying “How are you?” as a question of content and saying it as a recognition. “How are you?” is not a request for information. It is a greeting of recognition, a vocative, a salutation; it is an acknowledgement of the human. “Hale and well met.” We do not say it to trees or cars, even though the state of these entities can be a concern for us. We say “how are you?” to humans. Levinas often speaks of the simple ‘after you’ that happens when two people are going through one door at the same time. That ‘after you’ is acknowledgment of the face of the other which remains independent of the content of what we say to one another. In Plato’s language, we might say it is a moment of chorein, giving way as the defining structure of the human—social chôra. “A human being,” Levinas says, “is the sole being which I am unable to encounter without expressing this very encounter to him.” Face’s mode of ‘presence’ as also a kind of absence from being is that of a trace, which can mean a mark or an outline, but also the tracks left behind by person or animal, as when we say, “without a trace.” By contrast, ‘trace’ seems to take on a more historical (Geschichtlich) sense for Heidegger. “What properly remains to be thought in the word ‘usage’ has presumably left a trace in το χρεών. This trace quickly vanishes in the

48 TI, p. 50, emphasis original.
49 OBBE, pp. 5ff.
50 RtB, après vous (p. 106), also bon jour (p. 59).
destiny of Being which unfolds in world history as Western metaphysics.”

Here trace is a function of language and the destiny of the West, which would seem to be the kind of difference that gives rise to Levinas’ claim that Heidegger’s emphasis misses the existent, in favor of existence, for the face of the other is said by Levinas to signify apart from the meanings given by any epoch of being and to escape history. The point here is that the other is not in the world in the same way as other entities. The question might be whether Heidegger’s thought can accommodate such a claim without going to Levinasian extremes, the holocaust notwithstanding.

We have so far defined infinity negatively, as what escapes being’s net. But we must also deal with what Levinas claims is its positive expression, which is language. Language establishes an infinite relation with what is absolutely different. In simple grammatical terms Levinas speaks of the absolute asymmetry of the first person and the third person, that is, one cannot assume simultaneously the perspective of both I and she, or I and he. In a description that seems given more from the standpoint of subjectivity, Levinas says, “This moral experience, so commonplace, indicates a metaphysical asymmetry: the radical impossibility of seeing oneself from the outside and of speaking in the same sense of oneself and of the others, and consequently the

54 “Interiority is essentially bound to the first person of the I” (TI, p. 57); “To recognize the other is to give. But it is to give to the master, to the lord, to him whom one approaches as ‘You’ in a dimension of height” Ibid., p. 75.
impossibility of totalization.”55 We noted earlier an ostensibly contrary claim by Heidegger. Anxiety is not a state felt by ‘you’ or ‘I’ but by some ‘one.’ “Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom.”56 The contrast makes clear the different starting points of the two thinkers, an asymmetry basic to human experience on the one hand, and another kind of experience described elsewhere in terms of Sameness. In language, Levinas says, a relation is established that is neither visual nor tactile (neither of the hand nor the eye), is not bound by the unity of the genus, or the category, of history. Heidegger would say the same things in regard to Being; it is not a genus or a category and not the product of history, though it does have a unity. For Levinas, in the relation of language, a relation is established between what is absolutely different but both interlocutors remain absolute within that relation. To describe one’s situation in this relation of language as expression he speaks of being able to bring succor or assistance to one’s own speaking, to clarify, to respond, or to contest, a theme which, we saw above, he seems to derive from the *Phaedrus*. One’s own death becomes for Levinas, consequently, something more like its usual meaning offers: the termination of this capacity to attend to one’s speech. In this sense the presence of the other is infinite, in that the possibility of what he calls bringing aid to one’s own speech goes on indefinitely, and is by definition never closed off, and so is infinite.57

One can note here that this infinite relation of speech introduces a difference, raised by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, between written language and spoken language, for a

56 “What is Metaphysics?” in *Basic Writings*, pp. 103, 106.
57 *TI*, p. 66.
text has no speaker present to clarify or defend, though Levinas, the lover of the
Talmudic tradition of multiplying interpretations seems by no means dismissive of
textuality. Certainly one can challenge the content of what another person says, yet
another saying remains possible up until the point of death, which is the end of saying,
the end of what singularizes. Because of the importance of saying in Levinas’ thought,
the significance of death settles more firmly on the other, rather than oneself. The
possibility of the other’s death, the other as destitute, becomes an unjustifiable
inescapable calling of my existing into question. One sees here Levinas’ break with
Heidegger on the question of death. It is not what singularizes me, calls me out of ‘the
they’ as a possibility that is mine and mine alone, thus figuring in every decision I
make.\textsuperscript{58} Since I am in the infinite relation with the other, it is the possibility of the end
of the other’s infinity of speech, the last word, that calls me to my responsibilities and
thus singularizes.

Before discussing the elemental, we should note that Levinas’ critique of
Heidegger has in no way been universally accepted. Derrida goes as far as calling the
article in which Levinas most openly states his complaint, “Heidegger, Gagarin and
Us,” “violent.”\textsuperscript{59} He questions whether face really escapes language and thus is beyond
Being and the Same, suggests that Husserl’s fifth meditation, to which Levinas takes
such offense, actually preserves ethical alterity more adequately than Levinas’ notion of
the infinite. Husserl begins with the sameness of the other, the claim that the other is of
my kind, which is the only move that makes ethical sense to Derrida. The infinite does
not lend itself to the positive interpretation that Levinas ascribes to it, which in effect

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 55ff.
challenges Levinas’ distinction between the *apeiron*, associated with the elemental and the pagan deities, and the infinite, associated with face. Derrida suggests that the effect of this distinction is to neutralizes spatiality. According to Derrida, Levinas does not take responsibility for his philosophical language, and forgets the metaphoricity of his own image of face.\(^{60}\) To work through these criticisms would require looking carefully at Levinas’ response in *Otherwise than Being*, where face gives way to the more spatial notion of proximity. I did take up one such response, the distinction between the saying and the said, above. But as a whole this is a project for another day. For now I can say that Derrida’s response gives us pause in accepting Levinas’ critique of Heidegger too readily. I have tried to show, especially in chapter one, that Heidegger’s thought is not anti-ethical, but ethical differently, which still may not be enough.

On the other hand, Adriaan Peperzak, a well-known interpreter of Levinas, has asked whether Levinas’ charge of totalizing is legitimate. Peperzak comes to a tentative conclusion that it has some merit. He acknowledge that “the greatest difficulty of a confrontation between Heidegger and Levinas is that they do not give two answers to one and the same question, but ask two different yet kindred questions.”\(^{61}\) This is the point I just made at the end of the last paragraph, though Peperzak finds Heidegger’s moral thinking less conspicuous than I, asking, “how is it possible to criticizes Heidegger’s moral and political philosophy if these hardly exist?”\(^{62}\) Peperzak says clearly that Heidegger does not do justice to the phenomenon of the other, a claim that seems to garner agreement from many corners. But does this overlooking of moral

\(^{59}\) “Violence and Metaphysics,” p. 318, n. 79.
\(^{60}\) *Ibid.*, passim.
\(^{61}\) *Beyond*, p. 205.
questions amount to totalization? It might, says Peperzak. The emphasis on the whole of care seems to turn others into subsidiaries to “the prevailing self-actualization that belongs to being myself,” though Peperzak’s term ‘self-actualization’ seems a bit too psychological. The question of Levinas’ critique of Heidegger does pertain to the question of the relation between the social and elemental.

John Caputo suggests a tempered criticism of Heidegger. He describes the analysis of mood in *Being and Time* and in “What is Metaphysics?” as “an impressive demolishing of the empiricist notion of private mental states on the basis of a brilliant phenomenological interpretation.” He goes on: “I have no desire to detract from the importance and originality of this analysis . . . . But I am interested in a new set of eliminative and reductionist tendencies that this highly phenomenological-disclosive view itself sets in motion.” Not all feelings are moods, says Caputo. “There is considerable importance to be attached to feelings just insofar as they are not disclosive, indeed insofar as they remain, to use the most classical vocabulary, quite ‘inside’ the ‘psychological’ sphere.” He is thinking of pain, which does not indicate something else but is what it is. Pain “is an event of the flesh and hence precisely the factical datum in which Heidegger is not interested.” Disclosive phenomenology “consigns pain to something ‘psychological.’” The issue of the body is central to this criticism of Heidegger. In fact Caputo claims that Heidegger’s approach to the body, or lack

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62 Ibid., p. 206.
65 Caputo, pp. 69f. Also see pp. 128f.
Consequently Caputo pairs Sorge with what he calls Kardia, a Levinasian counterbalance. “To the myth of the sacred earth I oppose the myth of the holy, of the Other who calls from on high.” This pairing, or opposition, will define chapter seven and John Sallis’ questions for Levinas.

Charles Scott constitutes a contrary voice and he and Caputo have butted heads in print. Caputo calls Scott an “exemplary case” of a kind of “anti-religious totalizing.” Their differences seem to be not about whether one can, in Caputo’s words, “twist free of being.” One cannot. The difference between these two thinkers is about whether one can avoid mythmaking. Myths are unavoidable for Caputo. But one can mythologize differently from what he calls Heidegger’s myth of Being, the core of which is taking an antehistorical structure (alētheia) and fixing it in relation to a certain time and place (Greece). The difference between the two thinkers is in their attitudes toward purity. One does find in Scott’s thought a pervasive prophylaxis against all transcendence. “It seems that when we start to look for meanings behind appearances our imaginations take off like rockets, and we talk ceaselessly and confuse everything our imaginations produce with non-imaginative things.” He has radicalized, along Nietzschean lines, the aspect of temporality in Heidegger. For

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66 Caputo, p. 129.
67 Caputo, p. 215, n. 7.
70 Caputo, p. 186.
71 Caputo, p. 28. In the end Caputo seems to opt for a Derridean “hyperbolic justice” rather than a Levinasian infinite justice, see p. 199.
72 *Lives of Things*, p. 110. One notes the astronaut theme (Gagarin) creeping in again here. Scott’s attitude toward imagination seems quite distinct from Bachelard’s or even Sallis’. See chapters five and seven.
example, the opening paragraph of his essay “Institutional Songs and Involuntary Memory” contrasts self-sacrifice on the one hand with finding emptiness in oneself, which arises from “nothing” and happens in relation to nothing exterior to one self. Here one sees a kind of continuation of the themes of “What is Metaphysics?” In regard to the question of myths, Heidegger, in “What Is Metaphysics?, at least, seems to be with Scott, when he describes how “we release ourselves into the nothing, which is to say, that we liberate ourselves from those idols everyone has and to which he is wont to go cringing.” Scott has taken issue with Levinas on these grounds of giving in to pieties of transcendence.75

Luce Irigaray presents a much more critical view of Heidegger. Her treatment gives us the opportunity to ask again the question both of the elemental and the social, for like Lingis and Caputo she wants to put back in place a strong sense of the physicality of existence and relationality in the form of love, which like Heidegger’s anxiety is not simply one choice among others that we might decide upon from some neutral standpoint. For Irigaray Heidegger’s world is empty of any meaningful construal of the human. She claims that at the end of Heidegger’s bridge—his image of the world worlding—there is no one.76 Furthermore, she equates Heidegger’s thought

74 “WIM?,” p. 112; “WIM?,” p. 45.
76 Forgetting of Air, p. 23. Cf. in regard to Heidegger’s notion of the open expanse (Gegnet) “that which always so opens avoids a meeting.” Ibid., p. 56. Meeting would no doubt be Begegnung. On clearing, cf. Caputo: “On the view I would defend, the body in pain clears the clearing in an originary way, opens up the space in which we dwell from the start, generates the lines of force that are inscribed in human space,” p. 167.
with a certain strain of hatred.\textsuperscript{77} Her critique of Heidegger rejects the power of the nothing, and along with it any talk of thrownness. Such a position is a forgetting of elementality. Gestation (and with it dependence on ‘her’ in a union of continuities) means one is born, not thrown. Furthermore this being born is mediated through elementality in gestation. Emphasis on an existence defined by the nothingness of the always already of thrownness inevitably overlooks body, flesh, and the element.\textsuperscript{78} One is struck, in this regard, by the apparent harshness of Irigaray’s relating of the nothing to hate in Heidegger’s thought. She does so precisely in relation to the issue of the continuity of dependent opposition that has characterized my discussion of ancient physics,\textsuperscript{79} equating hatred with a kind of discrete opposition begun in Parmenides and love with the dependent opposition of Ionia, specifically identified as love by Empedocles,\textsuperscript{80} whose thought may well have been behind the role of Eros in the \textit{Phaedrus}. In Ionian physics, as in love, different entities are brought together, while discrete opposition draws like to like, the pattern she sees as hatred.\textsuperscript{81} Irigaray insists the nothing leads not just to a neglect of sociality, which can hardly stand in such a neutral position as mere neglect. Since sociality is inescapable and engendered from the beginning, Heidegger’s emphasis on the nothing and death as my ownmost possibility calling me to myself must lead to a supremely negative sociality—hatred. In the language of my project this would seem to mean that the social \textit{chôra} is inescapable.

All three of these critics of Heidegger—Irigaray, Caputo and Lingis—clearly follow

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., pp. 75f.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., pp. 99, 102.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., pp. 74f.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., pp. 52, 67, 71, 173f; cf. also, \textit{The Wisdom of Love}.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Forgetting of Air}, p. 76.
Levinas in privileging a social moment in their thought and in trying to reclaim, all
three much more clearly than Levinas in the end, the materiality of the elemental. Scott
holds to nothingness in the sense of radical temporality that defines all things as coming
to pass away.

The Elemental

Existence is challenged by the other, but what is this existence that is
challenged? For the answer to this question, we turn to part II of Totality and Infinity
and, finally, the discussion of the elemental. Here we are in what I consider to be a
choratic plenum, prefigured in the setting of the Phaedrus. The existent always ‘at first’
is in the elemental, which is the medium that one is in but is also what nourishes one.
So from the beginning a certain duality attends the relation to the elemental. One both
moves through it and ingests it, biting (morsure) into it.\footnote{Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l’extériorité (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), p. 135.} The relationship one has to it
is not simple in any way but has an ambivalence. This ambivalence of the elemental as
both one’s site and one’s substance is embodied, if you will, in the body. As embodied
beings, the relation we have to the elemental is one of ‘living from….’ This is not
strictly a biological notion. For example, we live from our labor insofar as it provides
us with necessities but it also fills up our life, makes it enjoyable or miserable, becomes
what we think about in the day.\footnote{Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l’extériorité (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), p. 135.} In this sense living from . . . seems aimed at
displacing or qualifying sorge in the Heideggerian scheme.

Sorge might only be qualified because, immersed in the elemental and
dependent on it, yet independent in that very dependence insofar as that which we are
dependent on constitutes us, causes us to stand as independent, we are also vulnerable to its uncertainty and its menace.\textsuperscript{84} There is no way out of the elemental, so the existent re-collects herself in the dwelling.\textsuperscript{85} The dwelling provides what Levinas calls separation, and which is meant to counter Heidegger’s idea of transcendence as being-in-the-world, about which more in a moment. The existent is not immersed in the world, but recollects himself in the dwelling within the world. This difference he calls an extraterritoriality,\textsuperscript{86} the way in which one separates from pure milieu or territory while at the same time remaining in it. This dwelling takes up a position in relation to one’s existing, and all of one’s actions henceforth occur in reference to this dwelling. If one fishes, it is in order to take the fish home to eat. If one works it is for the sake of securing this dwelling.\textsuperscript{87}

Unlike the golden age of Greece, when food appeared at regular intervals already cooked, the elemental is unreliable, does not provide in regular fashion. In response to this unreliability the existent labors and possesses. Possession suspends the relative otherness of what it seizes from out of the elemental and makes it a thing. The existent works and gathers things unto itself, depositing them in the dwelling in reserve, turns things into commodities that can be exchanged in an economy, can even be find a substitute in money. The dwelling nearly becomes the site of the kind of standing

\textsuperscript{83} TI, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., pp. 141, 143f.
\textsuperscript{85} I use the feminine pronoun accepting Levinas’ claims that the Feminine presence in the home is not dependent on the presence of a female (see below). Perhaps this also means the subject of recollection need not necessarily be male.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p. 131
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., pp. 158f.
reserve that Heidegger criticized in relation to technology.\textsuperscript{88} In addition, the dwelling is not an instrument one uses, part of the referential nexus; it is not a mere container in which to store things, it is rather essential to and of a piece with the interiority that is the individual, the egoism. It is a focal point for enjoyment.

In the dwelling persists the presence of the feminine (not to be confused, he protests, with the presence of an actual female human).\textsuperscript{89} The feminine is essentially welcoming and is the foundation of hospitality itself, the opening of the dwelling to the other, which is the truest purpose of the dwelling. Aside from the controversial nature of this notion, the important point about this welcoming of the other is that its possibility already exists in the dwelling. So Derrida’s claim that Levinas’ cancels space, a claim that seems to have some purchase, may also have its limits here. In the examination of the Phaedrus in chapter four, I suggested that Plato saw a link between the cosmos and the \textit{huperouranon}, spatial renderings of the relation between the physical \textit{chôra} and the social \textit{chôra} I am seeking to explore here. In this notion of the feminine which remains open in the dwelling “as the very welcome of the dwelling,”\textsuperscript{90} one might find an opening onto the other rooted in the world, granted the world focused by the dwelling that is extra-terrestrial. The feminine is integral to the intimacy of the dwelling, which grants this welcome. From this language it seems that the home is a site of welcome even before anyone knocks on the door. The other is not a cancellation

\textsuperscript{88} “The Question Concerning Technology,” in \textit{Basic Writings}, p. 298.
\textsuperscript{89} TI, pp. 157ff. Most generously construed, the feminine might be his effort to express the presence of nurture in the home. It is also an “intimacy with someone” (Ibid., p. 155) the sharing of the interiority of the dwelling, marked by familiarity, that seems necessary and for \textit{eros} for fecundity in its child-rearing form, both aspects discussed as beyond the face (Ibid., Section IV). But of course when he speaks of this “the Woman” as a kind of absence (Ibid., p. 155), the presentation begins to be problematic.
of the satisfied psychism, but has a place already prepared as the essence of the dwelling.

The above represents a potted summary of the existent as happy egoism. The point I want to emphasize is that the egoism is happy in itself, satisfied, and not somehow deficient such that it goes in search of the other. Its needs are satisfied. Negatively, this fact of satisfaction, it seems to me, makes possible the idea of freedom as aseity or *causa sui* that Levinas has criticized. Aseity first arises in the satisfied egoism at home with itself. In fact, as noted above, all other individuality derives from the satisfaction of the egoism.

From the start it is important to highlight two things about Levinas’ treatment of the elemental. First, he calls the elemental the *apeiron*, which is the ancient Greek word for the infinite, but the *apeiron* is not the infinite according to Levinas’ understanding of that term. *Apeiron* can mean either unbounded or indeterminate. It is usually rendered by the Latin term infinite, but, following Levinas’ lead here, one could perhaps leave that meaning aside momentarily. *Apeiron* means unbounded, in the sense that Xenophanes says the earth beneath our feat is unbounded, goes on without a clear termination.\(^91\) The earth comes to be for Heidegger an essential determination of Being, representing concealment in this quality Xenophanes describes as *apeiron*, but also representing a *peras*, a boundary that grants openness. *Apeiron* can mean indeterminate in the sense of not given to the grasp. Both of these senses, not graspable and not definable, are features of the elemental as Levinas describes it. The infinite, on the

\(^90\) Ibid., p. 158.
\(^91\) *Xenophanes of Colophon. Fragments. A Text and Translation with a Commentary*, Jay Lester, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Fr. 28.
other hand, has a different meaning for him, always involving what he calls face, his image for the human other. “Indetermination here is not equivalent to the infinite surpassing limits; it precedes the distinction between the finite and the infinite. It is not a question of a *something*, an existent manifesting itself as refractory to qualitative determination. Quality manifests itself in the element as determining nothing.” Then later he says, “The element separates us from the infinite.”92 For now we are in the domain that is descriptively prior to the encounter with the infinite, the domain of the happy egoism.

The second point regarding the elemental: it is not unambiguously good. One lives from it but it is never secured or guaranteed, so one has care for the morrow because of the uncertainty of the elemental. And though it is the medium of enjoyment that defines the human existent as happy egoism, the elemental is prone to be transfixed into what one might call, borrowing from the Hebraic tradition, idols of various sorts, for it is the medium from which the mythic gods emerge, the medium of nature worship, of what Levinas frequently refers to as paganism (which in real terms usually seems to mean Heidegger).93 In fact, very early, prior to the full development of his thought, Levinas describes the philosophy of Hitlerism as a concrete case of what he later calls “elemental evil,” a possibility that Western philosophy lacked the proper resistance to. Nazism was elemental evil insofar as is embraced biology and race (one’s

92 TI, p. 132. He seems to be using ‘infinite’ in this passage more broadly, as a feature of objectification, of scientific thought.
Levinas at times had considerable difficulty distinguishing Heidegger’s thought from such a philosophy, in spite of, or perhaps because of his admiration.

Our first task here is to describe the meaning of the elemental in *Totality and Infinity*. As already noted it is closely linked to Levinas’s criticisms of Heidegger. Levinas’ treatment of the elementals there is determined by his concern to present a different understanding of transcendence than Heidegger’s description in *Being and Time*. There Heidegger depicts *Dasein* as being-in-the-world, as always already engaged in projects and deriving its understandings from them a transcendence.

Levinas, however, sees transcendence not as the full immersion in being that he takes Heidegger’s hyphens to suggest, but rather something outside of or beyond being. “Does impassiveness opposed to commitment sufficiently characterize representation? Is the freedom with which it is linked an absence of relation, an outcome of history in which nothing remains *other*, and consequently a sovereignty in the void?”

True transcendence comes in the ethical relation, a relation to an exteriority, which is not a run of the mill innerwordly relation. And the void is no longer the defining horizon of the innerwordly. So the existent engaging with her or his world or context is not yet transcendence. In addition, being in the world for Levinas does not have the sense of transparency that it seems to have for Heidegger, where one’s essence seems coterminous in some sense with the activities that make up one’s existing, where to be

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95 TI, p. 169.
is to *wesen*, to presence, to essence. Consequently Levinas must describe human existing in the world differently.

Levinas’ being in the world will be separation. He will speak (in section II) of what he calls relations analogous to transcendence.\(^\text{96}\) This analogy is between what I am calling social *chôra*, the an-archic *après vous* that is human being and elemental *chôra*, existence pulsing in a lively plenum. They are not transcendence (the social relation embodied in language) but are founded on it and resemble it, and they seem to arise from within the plenum of existing. For the existing being, separation is such a relation. Separation is not transcendence understood as a being absorbed in a series of tasks, directed toward various aims, absorbed in one’s care. Separation arises not like Heidegger’s transcendence does, from care, driven by the nothing, but rather from enjoyment.

This difference seems to be a good place to recall the contrast we made with Bergson between fullness and void. Life is not a continual deficiency or passing to be coped with, a new day with its own inevitable demands.\(^\text{97}\) Life is a fullness, a plenitude, fully sufficient for the existent. One’s existing is primarily an enjoyment. Enjoyment reestablishes a kind of subjectivity that Heidegger makes secondary in starting with *Dasein*. Levinas’ word in *Totality and Infinity* for this subjectivity is interiority.\(^\text{98}\) We must not take enjoyment to suggest that Levinas sees life as all sweetness and light. The contrast here is to Heidegger’s model in *Being and Time* of *Zeug*, equipment. Our


\(^{98}\) *TI*, p. 104.
relation to our world is not mere use within the illuminated clearing that shows Being. Rather, we could say, things light us up. The hammer is not just a tool, but an object of pleasure. The pounding has its own satisfaction. Here we note continuity with Bachelard. For the hammer to be an object of pleasure requires, it seems material and dynamic imagination, or what Bachelard, in relation to swimming, calls muscular imagination, that is to say, a body.

To describe this notion of enjoyment we could use the illustration of food. Levinas implies that for Heidegger food is in reality only ever fuel. One eats with the aim of something else. One eats so as to have energy to . . . . Food is a means, even if only a means to forestall the failure of one’s means, namely death, though we might ask whether this is actually how Heidegger views death. Levinas’ counters that one does not eat to attain nourishment or even to avoid death, one eats to be sated, to be full. With this change he wants to change the terms by disrupting the reign of ends and of care that he sees typifying Heidegger’s approach. Food is not care, it is enjoyment. Consequently, he claims, quite famously, “Dasein in Heidegger is never hungry.”

Perhaps he would say that Heidegger sees bread and wine only as poetic devices to celebrate the bittersweet passing-away of time in dwelling, rather than true necessities of life, or anything that fills up life.

What might Heidegger say to these criticisms? Perhaps he would say that Levinas, and Lingis, are wrong to say that Dasein is never hungry. In fact Dasein is always hungry. Dasein’s nature as care, which reveals Dasein’s temporality would indicate that the substance of our eating comes to pass away, enjoyed or not, not just in

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99 Ibid., p. 134.
that we are mortal but in our need to eat again, and also in our need to always procure what we need, this mark of temporality on our lives. This ever-recurring need does not get answered entirely by turning labor into an enjoyment, or focusing on labor at all. Levinas should understand that the hospitality of the feast comes at a cost. Plenum greets us for a time, always for a time and is always passing. This being always hungry is the mark of the nothing’s priority to the plenum. The world is a shining forth more than it is a fullness. All things draw us earthward. To speak of plenum is to confuse the physical with the ontological, which passes more than it presses itself on us. These mistakes stem from taking Bergson’s thought experiments too seriously.

But if in fact Dasein is outside of the possibilities of being hungry or full, it is not just an amendable lack of attention to embodiment or a moment of confusion about the true motivations behind existing activity, i.e. whether we exist for the sake of certain ends or for the sake of the pleasures of jouissance. For it is not a matter of utilitarianism vs. hedonism. If Dasein can never be hungry, then Dasein can never be destitute, to use a favorite Levinasian word. If Dasein cannot be destitute, then it seems that there is no possibility of an ethical relationship, at least of the decisive sort Levinas seeks to describe, the sort that challenges one’s right to be. Dasein is never hungry, but even more, Dasein never faces the decision of whether to take the bread from her own mouth to give to the other who is hungry, i.e. to have her existential being, her right to exist, challenged. The description of the sensibility of the existing being in the milieu of the elemental has as its goal not an aesthetic dreaming as it seem to with Bachelard, but the depiction of a being capable of destitution, a being that can

\[100\] Ibid., p. 75.
make an ethical claim on me. Levinas sets himself the task of describing more adequately the sensibility of human existence, its rootedness in need and enjoyment, thereby seeing again in philosophy the possibility of suffering that is so obvious to every non-philosophical observer. It would seem that for Levinas, Heidegger misses this essential possibility of suffering and along with it the other as face in the nakedness of its destitution.

How the elemental relates to the void becomes clearer in *Existence and Existents*, or, as Peperzak translates it to bring out its polemic against Heidegger, *From Existence to Existents*. Here Levinas first clearly separates his own project from Heidegger’s. Heidegger questions beings in order to attain access to the Being of beings, whereas Levinas sees himself moving in the opposite direction. The book is a collection of phenomenological investigations written mostly during Levinas’ time as a prisoner of war. The section of this text to which Levinas seems to refer most often in later years is the section on the *il y a*, titled, “Existence without Existents.” *Il y a* is the French predication of existence—“there is” in English. In German the equivalent expression is *es gibt*, literally, “it gives.” Heidegger, in the later work *On Time and Being* makes considerable hay out of this expression in relation to his one persistent question, the question of being. This question can be stated as “Why is there

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102 *Beyond*, p. 3.
103 EE, pp. 57ff.
something rather than nothing?” Or if we Germanize the English here: “Why does it give something, rather than not give something?” Heidegger later also plays on the similarity in German, between Denken, to think, and Danken, to thank.106 The similarity comes through nicely in English as well, think and thank. So for Heidegger the “there is” is a giving to thought to which thought responds as a kind of thanking. Thinking is an act of gratitude. To whom, or what? To the anonymous ‘es,’ or ‘it’ that gives, and which, true to the ontological difference, remains necessarily anonymous—resists substantives.

According to Levinas, however, the there is “is like a density of the void, like a murmur of silence. There is nothing, but there is being.”107 Rather than nothingness producing an anxiety at the limit of being, being itself, as that from which one cannot escape, produces horror.108 Recognizing the modern philosophy has opposed the anxiety of death to Bergson’s critique of the nothing, a response to Bergson that seems closely to resemble Heidegger’s, Levinas counters with the there is. The philosophical position that invokes death, he says, still situates nothingness independently of the there is, and does not recognize the universality of the there is. Nothing is essential to Dasein as Dasein in Heidegger’s philosophy. “But we must ask if ‘nothingness,’ unthinkable as a limit or negation of being, is not possible as interval and interruption; we must ask whether consciousness, with its aptitude for sleep, for suspension, for epoché, is not the locus of this nothingness-interval.”109 Nothingness is not death but the welcomed

107 EE, pp. 63-4.
108 EE, p. 59, TI, p. 143.
109 EE, p. 64.
suspension of the there is by sleep embraced in trust that the plenum that welcomes will recommence. This intriguing reversal posits inescapable being on the one hand and the whole dynamic of falling asleep on the other, which is an act of trust and a release into a nothing that ends with the morning’s recommencement. We lay down at night and fall asleep, allow ourselves to enter into a nothingness that is not oblivion. Possession and labor arise because the elemental is not secured for the morrow. We must secure the morrow as much as possible by ourselves. But we sleep in trust in the morrow as well, in a trust of the elemental. As in the discussion of Heidegger’s nothing in chapter two, trust replaces anxiety as a fundamental human attunement. We greet the day with a recommencement that trusts, that more or less trusts others as it venture out into the world, but also trusts the world. The absence of this trust becomes pathology. Recommencement is a trait also of my reading of the *Timaeus*, which I juxtapose to Sallis’ emphasis on incessant beginning. The elemental may be unreliable, but we trust the elemental is seen in sleep. Sleep is a relation to the elemental world.

We can notice two things about this discussion of existence without existents, or a world without beings. First, there seems to be lacking in this text from the first half of the 1940s the *jouissance* of *Totality and Infinity* in 1961 that links the existent to the indeterminate and which yields also the insecurity or menace of uncertainty vis-à-vis the morrow, hence situating time in relation to the future. Here the menace is linked to a “pure and simple presence,”¹¹⁰ albeit a presence as a kind of absence. Second, and more significant in terms of content, there appears to be an effort to rethink nothingness.

¹¹⁰ EE, p. 59.
The first edition of this book was, we recall, wrapped in a band declaring that anguish no longer held the decisive position.\textsuperscript{111} Here being and nothingness cannot remain separate, it seems.

In short, Levinas takes this ‘there is’ out of the domain of Heidegger’s sense of the given. He questions the \emph{gibt}. Perhaps he is even questioning the German language, the one that Heidegger claimed French philosophers reached for when they wanted to think.\textsuperscript{112} The \emph{il y a}, for Levinas is nothing worthy of thankfulness. Thankfulness, gratitude and generosity are for human beings. The point of connection between the \emph{il y a} and the elemental seems to be that the elemental is ambiguous, and that this is not necessarily a virtue. It lends itself to overpowering us, as in the \textit{Phaedrus}, where Socrates was pierced by its appeal. It can distract and it can become evil, a paganism that subordinates the human, occludes the less luminous purposes of the human. Levinas never lets go of this suspicion and it disrupts an otherwise elegant Ionian vision of physical existence.

Here is where one must question Levinas’ radical separation of transcendence and the elemental milieu. In describing the elemental Levinas uses the term ‘escheat.’\textsuperscript{113} This word is a legal term referring to the reversion of a privately held property back to the public domain. In concluding I would like to pick up on this image. One could argue that Heidegger held the public domain in suspicion. “Now I had to submit my closely protected work to the public,” he said, of the move to publish

\textsuperscript{111} RtB p. 46.
\textsuperscript{112} “The Spiegel Interview,” p. 63.
\textsuperscript{113} TI, p. 131.
Being and Time.\textsuperscript{114} The opening of the Contributions to Philosophy muses over the two titles of the work, the public one, and the private one, Vom Ereignis.\textsuperscript{115} Though of course this musing itself is published, thus public, it reflects what seems a certain air suspicion regarding the public realm that gathers around Heidegger, present as early as the analysis of das Mann, in Being and Time.\textsuperscript{116}

In contrast, Levinas speaks of this \textit{il y a}. Of the elemental, Levinas says,

Things refer to possession, can be carried off, are furnishings; the medium from which they come to me lies escheat, a common fund or terrain, essentially non-possessable, ‘nobody’s’; earth, sea, light, city. Every relation or possession is situated within the non-possessable which envelops or contains without being able to be contained or enveloped. We shall call it the elemental.\textsuperscript{117}

I would like to seize on this situation in which we live from something that is non-possessable; it seems to be an inherently public dimension in the world. Within this public domain, which is not just offenbar, but is peopled, the other suspends my claim to this place in the sun. Much like Sallis will in the next chapter specifically in regard to Earth, I suggest that the elemental also suspends our claims of possession, even if only analogously to transcendence and therefore less forcefully, since it lacks the positive content of the face and cannot escape the bivalence of its nature as apeiron. Yet the challenge of the nonpossessable elements we consume is not in opposition to the other’s challenge, but perhaps in sympathy. Perhaps the elemental as escheat, and therefore a limit to what can be ‘mine,’ offers a more faint invitation to hospitality, to the suspension of aseity, just as the home, by the very nature having a door and housing

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\textsuperscript{114} On Time and Being, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{115} Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning), Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, trans. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{116} Being and Time, section 27.
\textsuperscript{117} TI, p. 131.
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an absent presence that Levinas clumsily calls the Feminine, houses a kind of prevenient welcome.\footnote{Ibid., p. 170.} This resistance of the enjoyed element is not exactly a suspension of enjoyment. Put in other terms, much as Levinas seems to foreshadow welcome in the description of the dwelling as already prepared for hospitality, as if waiting for the other, so too the image of the escheat quality of the elemental may foreshadow the sociality of existence important to Levinas. In this way, Levinas’ strict emphasis on the human and his claim in regard to Gagarin and Heidegger that the place, earth, is suspended in its primacy, in favor of the human other, that the earth should cease to be a mystery and become instead a place for the human to find food, drink, and shelter seems indeed too positivistic. “The earth is for that. Man is his own master, in order to serve man. Let us remain masters of the mystery that the earth breathes.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 170.} It seems there ought to be more room for a respect for this non-possessable medium that possesses us, earth, air, sun, and water. This criticism of Levinas seems to me to be request for a bit more tolerance between the elemental and the social, an interplay that Plato seemed to allow by placing the beautiful in that realm beyond along with the social virtues of justice and temperance.

The indication of a check on the freedom of the self in the nonpossessability of the elemental does not constitute a clear validation of an ethic in relation to the nonhuman. But it might lead to a realm of non-self that is not either the other human or nothing, where something that is not an other human can have exteriority. I am trying to introduce a bit of otherness into the Levinas’ Same. Sallis will attempt to describe the earth in such a way that it attains an otherness parallel with the human otherness, but
his move seems too much to cancel out the otherness of the other human, by grounding
the egoism and the other human on the Same earth. I am suggesting that if there were
not some otherness to the milieu from which I live, it could not be contested by the
destitute other in the first place, nor, for that matter, could I trust it enough to release
myself into its support in the emptying sleep. Such a claim would involve working
through the various senses of ‘other’ Levinas employs, a significant task. It does
provide a place for earth, but not as fully beyond enjoyment, as Sallis will want to
suggest in the next chapter. Earth is instead where I stand, but perhaps it already
questions my possessive grasp. It will be something other than the drive to earth as
revealing concealing from which all other elements (rizomata, roots) and humans grow.

119 Ibid.
Chapter 7

John Sallis: Other and Earth

I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems.

—Walt Whitman

What is present emerges by approaching and passes away by departing; it does both at the same time, indeed because it lingers. The ‘while’ occurs essentially in the jointure.

—Heidegger¹

We have described this nocturnal dimension of the future under the title there is. The element extends into the there is. Enjoyment, as interiorization, runs up against the very strangeness of the earth. But it has recourse to labor and possession.

—Levinas²

In his book, Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental, John Sallis provides an approach to the elemental from a Heideggerian orientation.³ For all of Heidegger’s talk of the fourfold, the earth and sky, and of phusis, the elemental is not a term that seems to fit easily into his philosophy. But Sallis has engaged the elemental from what seems a fairly Heideggerian standpoint. He puts aside the language of what he calls composition, which names the elements as what can be decomposed no further, as basic building blocks of the cosmos. Sallis talks instead of manifestation.

Composition came to the fore, he argues, as the Greeks moved from Empedocles’ image of roots (which still allowed for a moment of hiddenness, a trailing off into indeterminacy and a growth in two directions at once) to the image of *stoicheia* and *hulê*. This move initiated materialism and still funds compositional views of the elements. I consider this movement to be what I outlined in regard to Parmenides in chapter two. The move from Ionian physics to atomism, from dependent to discrete opposition is a move to elemental exposure and possession. I will here describe Sallis’ approach, which is in the lineage of Heidegger but has made space for talk of the elemental. I will examine Sallis’ criticisms of Levinas, and then discuss to what extent Sallis’ approach manages to deal with some of the questions I have raised about Heidegger.

Whereas composition seems to require some external plan to arrange the composition, i.e. metaphysics, *manifestation* happens without the need for any reference to a beyond. I consider this notion of manifestation to be continuous with Heidegger’s description of *alêtheia* in *Parmenides*, as a twofold of concealing disclosure. One no longer has two terms that correspond to yield truth. So he speaks of a unity of sense as perception and sense as meaning. This unity seems to function as the ‘limit’ he has in mind when he speaks of philosophy at the limit. It is not a limit in the sense of the furthest point, but something more like the jointure, the meeting of passing and arising wherein things have their whiling, as suggested in the quote at the head of this chapter.

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A limit is, after all, not that where one ends, but that from which one begins. Just as jointure inverts interpretations of Being as constant presence, so philosophy at the limit abandons stable correspondences between two kinds of sense. Sense as meaning is now situated in the “showing,” rather than some beyond as in Platonism. Sallis hints at a tragic tone to this discourse at the limit; one “must endure the loss of anterior signification.” This anterior signification is what has been called metaphysics, and what Sallis calls eidetic discourse, wherein enduring meanings are fixed in some position outside of the showing of things. In place of eidetic discourse, he will speak of horizontal discourse, wherein the sense of a thing emerges from its dispersion and gathering (retraction and protraction) in the horizons he will discuss. In place of metaphysics understood as the split between the perceptible and the intelligible one finds language from Sallis about doubling and duplicity. Here, again, the emphasis is on the ‘hinge’ the doubles rather than the terms, just as in the jointure Heidegger speaks of, symbolized by the hyphen between genesis and phthoron. This duplicity is the duplicity of images, which roam about as both sense and nonsense, descriptions similar to Bachelard’s claims about the motility of images. Imagination is a holding together of contraries, a hovering between oppositions, where opposites are again held together similarly to the Ionian physics discussed in Chapter One, but not at all as anything like ‘physics,’ we suspect.

4 “The limit (peras), as thought by the Greeks, is, however, not that at which something stops, but that in which something originates, precisely by originating therein as being ‘formed’ in this or that way, i.e., allowed to rest in a form and as such to come into presence.” Heidegger, Parmenides, André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, trans. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 82.
5 FI, p. 36.
6 Ibid., p. 122.
Sallis also confronts Levinas’ ethical firewall between the human and nonhuman by an attempt to add the elemental to Levinas’ exclusive list of what is Other, insofar as we shelter it, rather than appropriate it. It would seem then, if we are to activate the language of *chôra* here, as Sallis himself does in another work, that Sallis not only allows a bit more physicality into language of *chôra*, but brings it into play alongside the social *chôra*, though we will wonder if this latter term remains too faint. For Sallis the outer limit, the most elemental of the elemental is earth, and it is to earth that Sallis seeks to summon Levinas, back from his flight beyond with Gagarin. Levinas says the other human is not engaged by way of *jouissance* but places a limit to the enjoyment of my place in the sun. Sallis calls Levinas to attend to the earth, which in his view is nonappropriable much like the other human is. Heidegger interpreted *polis* to be a place before being anything political, and Sallis will follow suit in his move to draw all things back to the earth, what Levinas calls “the Place.” One could say that beneath the human *polis* Sallis finds earth before he finds the other human, and in this way Sallis is quite in line with the Hippocratic tradition of *Airs Waters Places* that Plato’s chariot ride in the *Phaedrus* sought to move beyond. The question will be whether the space this sheltering creates, prior to human otherness, leaves open some freedom that is incompatible with the kind of otherness one finds in the human in Levinas’ thought, an otherness which calls my freedom, all of my freedom, into question. Starkly stated, is there room for two masters: earth and the other human? In the language of the *Phaedrus*, the question for Sallis is whether with talk of showing or luminosity he is focused so strictly on the shining of the beautiful, which is readily available in the

7 *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, Seán Hand, Trans. (Baltimore: The Johns
aesthetic domain between earth and sky, that he cannot shake off his ecstasy, grab the reins, and get a good look at the less luminous things beyond the sky.

*Force of Imagination* continues Sallis’ demonstrated interest in the imagination, but draws the elemental into the discussion. The two most important points to remember about his depiction of the imagination in his work are 1) that the imagination is not a faculty possessed by a subject and consequently 2) imagination is not after the fact, operating on perceptions already given to that subject by a master mode of relating to the world called perception and understood as the primary mode of attunement to the world. Rather imagination is already active in constituting those perceptions. He describes this process by delineating a set of horizons of showing and their interplay in what he calls “tractive imagination.” In the classic view the pieces given by a stable and consistent set of perceptions, secured in truth by the rigorous work of epistemology (which defines the boundary between sense and nonsense), undergo arrangement and modification at the hands of imagination, which is generally considered a derived and deficient power. Here is a formally Democritean, rendering of imagination as the rearrangement of clearly defined givens against a stable field of what is not. Imagination is after all separate from perception.

But when imagination instead constitutes the process of manifestation, as Sallis claims, then intelligibility as correct correspondence between knowledge and its object no longer makes sense. Instead one could say that concepts and images can no longer remain separated. Truth is bivalent, open-ended, wandering.

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Sallis will want to suspend, perhaps, the motif of the soul’s chariot ride away from the earth. For this ride seems to recapitulate the way the classical schema elevated intelligibility over sensibility and thereby created a separation or distance across which a correspondence could be established; Sallis calls for a return to the sensible and wants to understand sense both in terms of meaning (making sense) and of sense perception. This ‘duplicity’ of sense calls forth the image of shining, about which more in a moment. In the wake of this reorientation, Sallis is arguing that imagination, far from yielding the unreal, unproductive, and fantastical, may actually be a privileged mode of access to the elemental, which the classical schema was unable to recognize because the elemental is precisely not of the nature of discrete component parts under our perceptual or technical control, the kind that Bachelard relegates to the formal imagination. “Does imagination inevitably fall short of the secret strength of things, touching only their surface, and never apprehending them in the flesh in the way that perception seems to do? Or is it rather only to imagination that the secret strength of things is disclosed?” To look at a mountain is to have one experience of that object. To imagine oneself on its heights, struggling against its slope is another. So it seems that with the phenomenological repositioning of imagination the elemental can come to light again.

Force of Imagination is complex. In the space available here I will 1) summarize his descriptions of the activity of imagination in terms of various horizons of manifesting and their drawing (traction), 2) question his critique of Levinas on the

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9 FI, Ch 5.
elemental and raise some questions about the extent to which the emphasis on manifesting and shining overlooks substance, body and need, and 3) consider his description of elemental as such and the element of earth, which takes priority for him, in part by bringing into the discussion his work on the *chôra*.

**Force of Imagination**

The emphasis he places on imagination does not mean that Sallis eschews what he calls “rigorous determination.” He still values it and precisely at this point distinguishes his approach from Bachelard’s. If Bachelard lacks rigorous determination this probably refers to his ‘dispersive’ approach. Sallis attempts to give determination to the workings of imagination and does so by describing the assemblage of moments in the manifestation of things, the spacing of showing. Of spacing Sallis quite cryptically says elsewhere, “Spacing—reiterated lapse, almost without limit; slippage into the open, spreading truth even into untruth, separating it from itself in a way that would once have been called separation *as such*, the advent of crisis, a crisis of truth, of reason. It is also the condition for a preface, the lodging of the preface.”

‘Spacing’ seems to be a term that would facilitate differentiation once the modern schema’s differentiation by way of the fixed reference points of subject and object has been abandoned. Spacing is,

> a movement that is such as to open the very space in which it occurs. One could call it a ‘relation’ of space to itself, a self-opening of space, providing it is

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10 *Ibid.*, p. 11. This notion of flesh appears at points (123, 203, and 212) but it does not seem to move into a central role in his presentation. Perhaps it is somehow blocked by other aspects of the work, like the highly visual notion of shining.

11 FI, p. 8.

12 *Spacings*, p. ix.
distinguished sufficiently from the dialectical relation to self that would be elevated into spirit so as to effectively cancel both space and spacing. Spacing is rather a self-relation that is eccentric. Spacing always includes that obsolete sense still listed for it: to ramble, to roam.¹³

Bachelard said images are mobile.¹⁴ ‘Spacing’ would seem to suggest the same. We might interpret Spacing thus: as no longer a function of rigid geometrical space with defined frame of reference, but instead as brought to life by imagination’s force, space explodes into and onto itself. In Heideggerian terms this notion seems quite close to the idea of whiling determined by genesis-phthora. The hyphen cancels out any sense that arising and passing can be measured as processes across a stable spatial grid. Thus, as the base of the word, ‘while,’ suggests, whiling has its sense temporally occurs as, as time-space.

Sallis’ idea of spacing relates to his interpretation of Plato’s _chôra_, which he has commented on extensively under the rubric of “chorology”¹⁵ and which I will bring into the discussion briefly in closing this chapter. Within _Force of Imagination_ this spacing is the spacing of showing. We might call the space of spacing, which is space under and in the force of imagination, ‘active space.’ Its activity, ‘traction’ in Sallis’ vocabulary, transpires according to certain limits. These limits, the ‘spacing’ of ‘showing’ consists of 1) the frontal aspect or face of a thing, 2) the lateral horizons, 3)

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¹³ _Ibid.,_ p. xiv. Aside from its continuity with Heidegger’s notion of erring, this description also lifts up the sense of eccentricity one finds in Bachelard’s description of the elements as dispersed homogeneity, which I rendered as ‘eccentric.’ _The Philosophy of No: A Philosophy of the New Scientific Method_, G. C. Waterston, trans. (New York: The Orion Press, 1968), p. 75.


the peripheral horizons and 4) the elemental from which the thing arises, in which we might say, using the Empedoclean notion Sallis has already invoked, showing is enrooted. The activity by which these moments occur together is called drawing or traction.

The frontal image is what fills out attention or apprehension. It is the look that usually is taken for the thing that is present, typically called an eidos. The lateral horizon of a thing is made up of other possible aspects or views of what shows itself. A lateral horizon can never be the object of immediate attention; these lateral horizons can never be taken up directly. Lateral horizons are never present. Rather, since they are always only possibilities of other perspectives on might assume, they hold open the future in every presence, as well as the givenness of each presence, its ‘always already.’

Frontal image is a presentation in its appearance, i.e. occurrence and locus; “whereas a lateral image is such a presentation as nonoccurring, as displaced from the there.”16 Consequently lateral horizons, and showing itself perhaps, are thoroughly temporal, linked to past (given) and future (possible).

Now we can speak of the lateral horizon as a spacing of images, how images unfold before us. The various lateral images are linked but do not belong to the same ‘there,’ are not there together, “do not constitute a common locus, not even one dislocated from the locus of the frontal image.”17 Sallis seems to link them essentially with what has been called ‘the many’ in the sense of polla or, no doubt more accurately, panta. We can pause for a moment and point out the use of the term locus here.

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16 FI, p. 111. We might note that although Sallis places imagination outside of the control of the subject, the idea of a ‘frontal’ image itself seems to imply a subject, and even an intentionality, though a virtual one.
Spacing involves, it seems, both locus and refusal of locus, what Sallis must mean by duplicity. Already its similarities to *chôra* emerge, a space both receiving and receding from view. As spacing, the horizon effects the dispersal of images that is not a distribution in homogeneous space, but “a determination more abysmally resistant to any movement of assembling them before one’s vision. The spacing of the lateral images, the effecting of the horizon, sets those images apart in an apartness that leaves open the differences between them, that lets those differences persist in their opposition.” Note that spacing refuses the power of a subject as perceiving entity gathering all to itself, even scientifically as wielder of the tool/abstraction of homogeneous space. The abysmal, something like the refusal of things to refer beyond their context—the inscrutable sphere that arose in the discussion of Parmenides in chapter two—seems to bear the task of disrupting the linearity of correspondence that occurs in domesticated and homogeneous space and its accompanying form of temporality. It is like Heidegger’s leap with no running start.

In anticipation of the arguments to come, we can note that Levinas on the other hand disrupts linearity socially, with the notion of curvature, the “curvature of the intersubjective space.” In what is perhaps the same idea inverted, he speculates that the idea of a straight line is founded on the experience of the face to face relation. Sallis too invokes curvature, even so far perhaps as to be circular, but without the priority of the social moment; the lateral images “circumspace” the frontal image, “so as

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20 TI, p. 291.
to offer to apprehension an opening onto the thing itself as itself. Thus does the
delicacy of the image give way to the density of the thing itself.\textsuperscript{22} Later he associates
density and depth with presence. Presence is there in addition to shining, thus giving
the thing that shines its force as a thing, to anchor it rather than letting it dissolve in a
wave of shine. Here it seems we have a less poetic, more analytic depiction of the tone
of the thing, \textit{das Ding}, that rings like a dingy bell sounding a while in the ‘sonority’ of
Being.\textsuperscript{23} But the value of Sallis’ discussion of these various horizons seems to be his
willingness not necessarily to \textit{ground} them (for we are bearing the loss of anterior
signification) but to let them \textit{draw} along with them something of the elemental, as we
will see.

In addition to the frontal aspect of a thing and the lateral horizons, manifestation
involves peripheral horizons. These are various and, unlike lateral horizons, can come
to presence to some degree. A peripheral horizon can be the background in which a
thing shows itself, or it can be what he calls the utilitarian horizon, where the item has
its unseen sense in relation to its context of use. Here would be the understandings of
the hand, the walking stick that is understood in the grip more than it is in the gaze.\textsuperscript{24}
Another example of this peripheral horizon could be the lighting in which a thing
appears and which affects its appearance. This third feature of showing, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Is It Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas, Jill Robbins, (Stanford,
\item FI, p. 111. ‘Circumspace’ instead of ‘circumscribe’ provides a telling alteration given
the way \textit{stoicheia} meant both alphabet and elements, and therefore functioned as an
inscribing. \textit{Stoicheia} is a term that founds the compositional approach Sallis seeks to
move away from (\textit{Ibid.}, p. 156).
\item I am thinking of Heidegger’s essay, “The Thing,” in \textit{Poetry, Language, Thought},
\item FI, p. 115.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
periphery/background/margin against which a thing shows itself is always to a greater or lesser extent presented in the frontal image. The fact that it is to a degree presented in the thing distinguishes this background from the lateral horizon. It is “presented in and as the imaginal margin.”25 What various kinds of peripheral horizons have in common is that “they bound the frontal presence of the thing in such a way as to refer it beyond itself.”26 But in manifestive discourse it will never refer beyond its context, which is ultimately the sphere of earth and sky. Instead of anchoring things in some otherworldly forms in which the true resides, sense will arise internally, holding things together in their separation, a separation in which the peripheral horizon plays a role. This peripheral horizon is no less determinate for the showing of a thing than the lateral horizon.

The shining involved in spacing cannot be stabilized, i.e. fixed eidetically, but this does not make it meaningless or senseless. It is outside of the opposition between meaningful and meaningless and so is “abysmally untranslatable.”27 It is like a vanishing moment, which again, sounds choratic. But shining does not occur all by itself; it requires presence.28 This presence is the occurrence of the frontal image in a locus, but it is not an unambiguous presence. For example it is immediately “dispersed” by the binary nature of the senses, which introduces the slightest deviation into the presence of the thing there through its spacing. He seems to mean that the presence of a thing changes if one looks at it with the right eye, then the left eye, then both eyes. That presence is dispersed ever so slightly. Thus the body is implied again, as it is in

25 Ibid., p. 111.
26 Ibid., p. 115.
27 Ibid., p. 122.
discussion of the senses other than vision. This deferral of full presence is not the deferral of the absent original that one gets in Platonistic metaphysics. The thing in itself is there in what one sees, determinable in its depth and its involvement in its setting but resistant to determination, so it has a presence but one which is indefinitely deferred. The *eidos* could not be present (as an aspect of a thing is present) nor constitute a locus of presence (as frontal images are).

Essential to showing as Sallis seems to describe it is a kind of following on, the importance of context. This idea of following on he calls ‘eccentric.’ So it seems akin to Ionian physics. One might venture to say that Sallis offers here a description in concretely experiential terms of Heidegger’s interpretation of *alētheia* as withholding unconcealment, describing how things come into unconcealment (i.e. indelibly embedded within a context) and at the same time recede and withhold themselves. What shows itself “remains constitutively linked to what lies beyond the margin.”

*Eidos* in the traditional sense would seem not to have this contextual quality but to be something like Bachelard’s gathered heterogeneity, i.e. the atomism that Sallis battles against, though it seems that the focus in Sallis on the frontal image amidst all this manifestive drawing is an attempt to avoid the pure dispersion of Bachelard’s imagination in the name of some rigorous determination. So to speak of truth in relation to a non-contextual *eidos* one must align it with some anterior representation (correspondence) and this involves a fixed frame of reference across which one can establish its ‘sense’ (meaning). Perhaps this frame of reference is what Heidegger

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means when he speaks of Gestell.\textsuperscript{31} It is entirely too discrete for Sallis’ tractive way of thinking. Hence eidos can no longer name a commanding and surpassing entity, and he replaces eidetic discourse with horizontal discourse, which I would call concentric and eccentric, respectively. “Let it be said that what draws forth one’s vision into its passage beyond the image (in and as which the thing is present) to the thing itself (as itself, as it shows itself) is not the radiance of an eidos but rather the effecting of lateral and peripheral horizons.” This process of drawing beyond has a limit. “The limit of the limit, the elements that finally delimit the space of all showing are earth and sky.”\textsuperscript{32} As with Heidegger, the earth and sky provide what could be called a ‘surcontext,’ the final limit within which showing occurs. Here it seems that the unsurpassable sphere of the Same that Heidegger thought he had found in Parmenides’ poem provides the space (and limit) of showing. I will take up Sallis’ claims about the elemental shortly.

Spacing is in no way static, but involves what Sallis calls traction or drawing. Drawing, read by Sallis through Derrida’s ‘trace,’ brings into play the notion of Zug. Zug can mean the traction of a tractor or the drift of cloud across the sky, but seems to be intended by Sallis in a middle voice sense, as non-transitive happening, if you will, or self-instantiating instance. This middle voice quality comes through when Sallis distinguish the force of imagination from any kind of power.\textsuperscript{33} A power would introduce precedence, one thing acting on another (hence active and passive voice). Power produces effects, it would seem, while force draws. Force is vectorial.\textsuperscript{34} Again

\textsuperscript{32} FI, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 129.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., pp. 129, 132, 133.
in a parallel to Bachelard, for whom thought and imagination proceeded by saying no
and through contradictions, the force of imagination exceeds “even if singularly and
obliquely” the force of “what is called the law of noncontradiction.”\(^{35}\) It holds together
utter opposites in a kind of Heraclitean moment, much as imagination hovers between
opposites. As with Bachelard the connection between force and imagination seems
esential. Imagination is not bound by noncontradiction, but hovers between opposites.
It almost seems that if it had to choose between the opposites it would cease being
imagination, or at least tractive imagination. To choose would introduce prior-ity and
thus linear temporality; it would offer a running start to the leap, and violate the middle
voice sense of imagination.

This middle voice sense is described also in imagination’s functioning as both
originary (bringing forth or manifesting) and memorial (acknowledging the priority or
givenness of what it has just been brought forth, acknowledging its sense of rightness).
The imaginative act is not derived from some pre-given look or idea that precedes it, but
nonetheless takes a sense of rightness or propriety that makes it seem established
already. This simultaneity of *present for the first time* with *re-cognized as appropriate*
seems to typify tractive imagination. He uses the Derridean image of tracing, or the
trace that creates the picture of which it is in turn a part.\(^{36}\) This same force, traction,
animates, so to speak, the horizons of showing, showing not externally driven, showing
with nothing exterior to it.

Earth as Other?

Before describing Sallis’ own depiction of the elemental, I will turn to some of his critique of Levinas’ elemental. In an article preliminary to *Force of Imagination*, Sallis overtly engages Levinas on the elemental. In Levinas’ thought the I who lives from the elemental, which that I appropriates unto himself thereby canceling its otherness, runs aground on the human other, who absolutely resists appropriation. This absolute resistance is the ethical. *Jouissance* meets its limit here. Sallis seeks to delineate an additional encounter that is not governed by *jouissance*. Sallis asks if perhaps the *il y a*, the there is, as the coin of the elemental, might not become another alterity. This question seems aimed at making the elemental also something one does not simply reduce to the same, but instead “shelters.” Sheltering would seem to be a way of preserving a thing’s difference or otherness. Levinas claims this relation between the egoism and the elemental is “analogous” to the transcendence of the infinite (social) relation. It is like the infinite encountered in the face of the other, though not the same, since it lacks the positive content of face (manifest in spoken discourse), and therefore the elemental can only be *apeiron*, not infinite. One might wonder if the elemental might remain different from the other, but still be unique. Sallis seems to want to make it an other. Sallis might be pushing the sense of this analogy, pressing the point of what constitutes otherness, though he does not raise his

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38 Irigaray might also be seen as expanding the role of the elemental in relation to the social relation when she says, “air is what is left common between subjects living in different worlds. It is the elemental of the universe, of the life starting from which it is possible to elaborate the transcendental.” *The Way of Love*, Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček, trans. (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 67.
questions in these terms. His method in the article is to do to nature what Levinas does to being in *Existence and Existents*, to imagine its cancellation and see how it keeps returning. Levinas tried to imagine (in a renegade way, according to Sallis, since he does not pause to define imagination) all beings fading into nothing. The result is the *il y a*, the ‘there is,’ which comes to be inescapable and a horror. Insomnia is the experience that typifies the horror of the ‘there is.’ Sallis suggests that what is returning here is not just the there is but the elemental, and so nature returns as well. Historically, this return occurs after philosophy, in the person of Socrates, has sailed away from it. But nature returns not as it had been but as sublime and terrible, as the elemental. He is going to suggest that the elemental and the *il y a* can be aligned in Levinas, and that it is a second limit on enjoyment.

What, then, of nature?

Not only in its immediacy but, even more, in that guise in which, after the turn from it, it nonetheless returns. For philosophy—ever since it set out on its *deuteros plous*—has invariably turned away from nature, and always it has been a question of nature’s return. Almost as if nature imitated being itself, at least that moment that Levinas outlines with such unprecedented clarity: the cycle by which being, refusing utter negation, returns always in the guise of a phantom, in the elusive form of what Levinas calls the there is (*l’il y a*).

*Deuteros plous*, second sailing, refers to Socrates’ recounting of his philosophical itinerary, where he describes his disappointment with Anaxagoras’ materialism (*Phaedo*, 99ff). The reason for his disappointment is that such a natural philosophy cannot account for the kinds of purposes and activities that are essential to the life of the city, particularly his immediate situation in prison, sentenced to death by the *polis* he

sought to serve. By speaking of the turn away from nature, Sallis seems to accuse Levinas of Platonism. But nature returns.

We saw a partial return of nature in play in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates, fully embarked on his voyage away from natural philosophy, ventures out into the natural world, or at least the non-poli-tical world, outside the walls of the city, and sat down on the earth. This setting seems something like the wild nature Sallis seeks to return to, and it was certainly disorienting to a Socrates fully embarked on that second sailing. Perhaps he would like to imagine himself sitting with them there, if only Socrates would not insist he can learn nothing from a tree, which Levinas certainly seems to echo: “They say that in my philosophy—I am often criticized for this—there is an underestimation of the world. In Heidegger, the world is very important. In *Holzwege* there is a tree; you don’t find men there.” Levinas here strikes a pose that is perhaps rather too frequent in his comments, characterized by a certain indignation that does not really address the issue. Absence of an encounter with men in Heidegger would not give Levinas license for an opposite kind of monomania. Trees might not have registered on Socrates’ philosophical radar, but Plato does not permit him to escape an encounter with one, one that might even have had a voice. Perhaps the question is how to do justice to the tree without losing the human, or put in terms that we have employed so far, how to bring the cosmic chôra and the social chôra into a meaningful relation to each other, even if in any meaningful sense of the word a dialogue between the two might be excluded.

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42 “Levinas and the Elemental”, 152
43 *FI*, p. 25.
44 *RtB*, p. 177.
Granted, for Sallis, the return of nature is not a pure restoration, but a return in a different guise. Nature is strange now to the human world. Again we think of Socrates beneath the plane tree. It would be, he says, nature capable of evoking feelings of sublimity and terror, and hence akin to the there is (which inspires horror for Levinas), the elemental. What of this different guise? Is it an admission that the experiences of this second sailing cannot be forgotten? Is it an acknowledgement that the discovery of the human finds a place? Note here that in defining nature’s return as not a mere restoration of an original state, Sallis accepts the situation of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates’ situation, the existence of a wall between what is now the proper human domain, the city, and the natural world, now natural in a different way than it had once been, for the wall exists for purely human reasons. But he will ground this situation on the earth.

Sallis seems on solid ground in asking how Levinas can extract the *il y a* from the elemental, but he seems to miss one aspect of Levinas’ concern. To point out that aspect I will stay with the images provided by the *Phaedrus* for a moment. Within that strange milieu of wild nature, Socrates and Phaedrus contemplate the action of walking all the way to Megara (227d), a neighboring city, a city that was in no way without philosophy. Megara is poised at the isthmus that is the land passage between Athens and Sparta, cities sometimes in conflict. Socrates and Phaedrus discuss walking up to this city, a strange city; so cities, the human abode, can be strange as well as nature. Here we can point out an interesting quirk of Lingis’ translation of *Totality and Infinity*. On page 39 of the translation, in the midst of the discussion of how ‘we’ is not merely a collective form of ‘I,’ the translation seems to skip a line of the French text (on page 28

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45 “Levinas and the Elemental, p. 152.”
of *Totalité et Infini*). So one gets, with the omitted line in parentheses, “Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts link me (à autrui. *Absence de patrie commune qui fait de l’Autre—*) the Stranger, the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself [le chez soi].” The missing line describes the process by which the other becomes Stranger and violates the ‘we.’ This violation is possible due to the absence of a common homeland. It is something like the difference between Megara and Athens. Sallis’ analysis seems to operate out of a ‘we’ that is as unquestioned as Levinas’ use of imagination in the thought experiment regarding the nothing. This omitted factor is the *polis*, but not the *polis* in the sense that Heidegger uses it in *Parmenides*, as the *topos* of a people’s or epoch’s *Dasein*. All of this human strangeness may be beyond the look Sallis opens up with his criticism of this second sailing.

On the other hand, Sallis highlights Levinas’ claim from *Totality and Infinity* that “only man” can be strange to me. Sallis marvels that for Levinas nature cannot be strange, that there is no other alterity except for others of “my kind.”46 ‘My kind,’ which Derrida questions Levinas about,47 seems to be a problem for Levinas because it might risk reabsorbing the I into the we. Sallis highlights the sustained way in which the *il y a*, an impersonal verbal construction, is connected with nature in Levinas’ exercise in imagination, with the elemental.48 Especially he links it to darkness, which Sallis ascribes to the rhythm of night and day, a reprise of Gadamer’s depiction of *apeiron*, which is of course the source of the elemental for Levinas, with periodicity, the

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cycling of days or of seasons. But Sallis does not take up the connection of the *il y a*,
emerging in the darkness, with insomnia, which arises not just from the presence of
darkness, but from the failure of relaxation into the sleep that brings the possibility of
the morning’s recommencement. In contrast, for Levinas, “The *there is* lacks
rhythm.”49

Sallis points out that the human mode of *jouissance* is governed for Levinas by
the notion of alimentation, the reduction of the other to the same. Sallis seems to
consider this a kind of permission for the human to exploit the non-human, which seems
a legitimate criticism and would certainly be reason for concern. But Levinas’ position
may also have some positive value in relation to Sallis’ concerns. The greediness of the
human in the element, the proclamation of a place as “my place in the sun” at the
expense of all other comers, seems to be Levinas’ implication here. He says that
*Dasein* can never be hungry. Perhaps we can say that if *Dasein* is never hungry, *Dasein*
is also never gluttonous, which takes away a tremendous descriptive example by which
to expose such greediness. Maybe Levinas’ position is even an improvement on
Heidegger’s critique of the rather anonymous holding sway of the power of *technê.*
Behind all voracious exploitation of nature is a hungry body that is both fully in the
world and consumes the world. Levinas does not elaborate this implication.50

49 EE, p. 66
50 It would be of some interest to pursue the question of the human being fed upon, as
Alphonso Lingis discusses it in what might be called a strange merging of being-onto-death
and the elemental. “The Dreadful Mystic Banquet,” in *Trust,* (Minneapolis, Minn.: The University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 139-147.
At this point Sallis footnotes his own article about eating, entitled “Bread and Wine.” He cites the article to point to the notion of eating as sheltering gifts given rather than appropriation of what is other by the same. “Bread and Wine” seeks to break with this kind of appropriation by speaking of eating well (drawing on Derrida). Eating well means eating with another, thus giving food rather than merely ingesting it into oneself. This giving Sallis takes to break free from eating as mere appropriation into oneself. He posits a time of eating and a bread that are outside of economy, since true giving could not be the result of an exchange. Gifts by definition cannot be appropriated, but the presence of the destitute other suggests that the freedom of gifts from appropriation can be challenged by something other than free exchange. In “Bread and Wine,” one eats among friends, with whom one shares the gifts of the earth, to which all things refer back. This depiction seems to me to be Athens without Sparta or Megara. That strangers live on the earth, that the earth is contested and so not finally a oneness, goes unregistered. It seem to be a ‘we’ without a ‘they.’

In both articles Sallis’ objection to Levinasian view of the elemental seems to be that such a view of alimentation violates the outcomes of the Heideggerian analysis that things withhold themselves from appropriation, “as do, for instance, the sky and the earth. And perhaps even everything elemental in—or at the limit of—nature.” Heidegger’s analysis has been criticized for overlooking the body. One might object

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51 Philosophy Today, Spring 1997, pp. 219-228.
52 “Levinas and the Elemental,” p. 156.
53 Hubert Dreyfus acknowledges this problem with Heidegger’s analysis but seems to think it is not pernicious but only “unsatisfying.” Being—in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), p. 137. The Heraclitus Seminar muses over the difficult problem that the body phenomenon is (Charles H. Seibert, trans. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University
to Sallis that it is unclear what kind of body it is that shelters the alterity of things it eats rather than appropriating them outright. It would seem to be a body that is first and foremost at leisure, at leisure from hunger, which of course is no body. It would seem to be a body that does not require nutrition. But given Heidegger’s critique of constant presence, one could make a defense of this sheltering by reference to the defining feature of humans for Heidegger, their mortality. From the perspective of the alimentary canal there is at best partial sheltering, for some twenty-four hours. But of course the alimentary canal is not simply a tube, but is porous, brings the aliment and elements into our flesh, to be our flesh. But still time is the horizon of Dasein’s being, and time reveals Dasein to have been only sheltering its being for a while in its lingering, before it passes away. Sheltering may necessarily be acknowledging the whiling of all beings, even ourselves and those we eat.

One problem with Levinas’ notion of the elemental, from my perspective, seems to be that in spite of a fine description of the elemental milieu as that in which we bath and which we eat, he perhaps does not go far enough, perhaps due to his ‘positivistic’ attitude toward the natural world. The elemental also is us, in a way Levinas might not adequately describe. Sallis may or may not intend the notion of sheltering to indicate this elemental constitution of our being, i.e. that the elemental to a certain extent whiles (in) us, but it certainly could open the door to an even deeper determination of our relation to the elemental milieu. In this light one might even ask if the dwelling ceases to be so entirely a refuge from the elemental, though it certainly would still be a zone of

Press, 1993), p. 146). John Caputo claims that all of Heidegger’s stumbles have to do with his inability to deal with the human body, Demythologizing Heidegger. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 129.
intimacy and hospitality. Also such a move might also require that we soften Levinas’ rejection of Heidegger’s view of mortality. The problem is whether Heidegger attains the kind of embodiment in the milieu of the element necessary for such a notion of sheltering to gain traction.

It is around this issue of the body that the differences between Levinas and Heidegger come into play. Levinas reads time as a postponement, the not yet of possible violence against one’s being, and that violence presumes a body that can be injured by violence.\(^5^4\) Time seems to arise from the vulnerability brought with embodiment. Time is bound up with bread and wine, since in addition to being enjoyed, bread and wine forestall the threat of starvation. They give time. Rather than finding their sense from being given, bread and wine would themselves give, give time, and would also carry within themselves the obligation to give, to give time to the other, to give one’s own bread/time to the other. So on the one hand food relates to time because in sheltering rather than simply appropriating the elemental food one recognizes one’s ever present mortality. On the other hand, as elemental nourishment food forestalls mortality conceived as a specific threat, and gives time.

Sallis traces the chain of features that Levinas ascribes to the elemental. It is non-possessable, because it only offers one side, but in fact it offers no side, since there is no interval upon which one could be beside it. The elemental for Levinas shows no connection to a supporting substance, but comes from nowhere, and thus carries a concealment or withdrawal associated with the mythical, and this depth is a bad infinite or apeiron. This recession is linked to the ‘there is’,” thus establishing to Sallis’ mind

\(^5^4\)TI, pp. 115f.
that there is a proximity between the elemental and the *il y a*. He goes on: “Again Levinas refers to enjoyment, but now as encountering a kind of limit in the *there is*, or rather, in the element that Levinas appears in this regard to privilege: ‘Enjoyment, as interiorization, runs up against the very strangeness of the earth’ (*TI*, 116).”

Important here is that Sallis believes Levinas has offered, unintentionally, a second limit to enjoyment in the elemental, and specifically the earth. Sallis seems on solid ground, so to speak, with this observation. Levinas’ comments regarding earth are difficult to place in his philosophy. Let us take a look at some of Levinas’ comments in *Totality and Infinity* with reference to the earth. We will find they have a couple of characteristics. First, the earth is a domain that falls outside of thematization of intelligibility; it displaces the priority of noematization, which puts the earth into the context of “an absolute past not receiving its meaning from memory.” So on this count Sallis may have a point when he links earth and other. Second, the earth has its meaning for us in relation to the body. It is that on which one stands. It is also that upon which I find objects. It does not function as a limit in the sense of a restriction, preventing me from going further, but in the sense that it suffices, it satisfies. One might say it fills up from within, via the enjoyment of bodily sensibility. Furthermore, Levinas speaks of autochthonous existence.

The originality of influence lies in that the autonomous being of enjoyment can be discovered, in this very enjoyment to which it cleaves, to be determined by what it is not, but *without enjoyment being broken up*, without violence being produced. It appears as the product of the medium in which, however, it bathes, self-sufficient. Autochthony is at the same time an attribute of sovereignty and of submission; they are simultaneous... Freedom is presented here as one of the possibilities of the

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56 *TI*, p. 130.
primordial equivocation that plays in the autochthonous life. The existence of this equivocation is the body.\textsuperscript{58}

Body is essential, and here one gets a sense that for Levinas earth is part of the whole event of being a body. \textit{To be a body is on the one hand to stand [se tenir], to be master of oneself, and, on the other hand, to stand [tenir] on the earth, to be in the other [l\textquoteright'autre], and thus to be encumbered by one\textquoteright s body. But—we repeat—this encumberment is not produced as a pure dependence; it forms the happiness of him who enjoys it.}\textsuperscript{59}

It seems one could use sport to illustrate what Levinas means here. The infielder in a baseball game, if we can use a sport primarily of the Western Hemisphere, has the goal of catching the batted ball. If a hard ground ball is hit and the fielder lunges and catches it, the player has done so as a body, and this is his/her triumph. If a ball is hit and despite the fielder\textquoteright s most extreme effort it passes by out of reach, it was unreachable by the fielder because the fielder\textquoteright s \textquoteleft body\textquoteright prevented \textquoteleft him\textquoteright from reaching the ball. The player fails or succeeds as a body and this is precisely where the enjoyment of the game resides. For the earth to be beyond enjoyment, as Sallis seems to want, it seems one would have to remove the body from the equation. For its very movement across the surface of the earth, its constant dance with gravity seems part of enjoyment. Unfortunately this seems a problem in the Heideggerian framework and as I have suggested, the body is only present in a virtual, indirect fashion for Sallis, as the unmentioned position one has before the frontal horizon of things in their showing, or as the gathering site for the five senses he discusses. The primary mode of

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 164. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 164. Tel, 177. Emphasis original.
comportment toward the elemental for Sallis seems to be the imagination. For Levinas it is the body. With our bodies we know the earth, a point that repeats Bachelard’s material and dynamic imaginations and which Alphonso Lingis will take even further in the next chapter. Such a relation to earth would seem to prevent it from encountering the earth as the same kind of other that the other human is. But does it prevent the earth from being other? The mystery the earth breaths, is for the human. It seems Levinas’ answer is yes. This is a kind of utilitarianism that seems to betray his discussion of the elemental.

Sallis concludes “Levinas and the Elemental” by asking whether one could not still maintain from within the house a relation to the elemental, as sheltered, rather than merely reverting to animal complacency, as Levinas seems to describe it, though it is difficult to reconcile this notion of animal complacency with the home as a zone of intimacy and hospitality as described in *Totality and Infinity*. He raises the question specifically in regard to the mythical, whether there is not some mode of relating to the gods that is not merely enjoyment. “Or could the elemental—as the elements extending into the there is, as the coupling of the elements and the there is—provoke an ekstasis irrecoverable by enjoyment and its interiorizing movement? Could the elemental provoke a comportment that, rather than leading to self-reversion, would be drawn along in the withdrawal, responsive rather than reactive to the very strangeness of the earth?”

“The very strangeness of the earth,” refers to the last lines of Levinas treatment of the elemental, quoted at the head of this chapter. The earth may be strange, but it defines the body; we belong with it. The other human is not opposed to the earth

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60 See TI, p. 170.
either. “The face in which the other—the absolutely other—presents himself does not negate the same, does not do violence to it as do opinion or authority or the thaumaturgic supernatural. It remains commensurate with him who welcomes; it remains terrestrial.”  

In the end of the Phaedrus, I suggested, Socrates and Phaedrus walk away like two horses linked, repeating on a social level the chariot image that Plato applied to the soul. They walk on the earth, a point that perhaps Levinas recognizes but does not quite do justice to.

**Sallis’ Elemental**

We now turn to Sallis’ own description of the elemental in Force of Imagination. The elemental will be framed by his elemental surcontext, earth and sky, each of which, according to Sallis, eludes or breaches the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible. In the end for Sallis earth will be foremost. So we will give some features of the elemental, then describe the priority of earth, after which we will look at his treatment of chôra to see how earth takes priority even over the political and social, continuous with Heidegger’s belief that political questions come after the question of Being, symbolized in the opening-concealing limit that is the earth.

The turn to the elemental “is a turn that passes through nature toward the hypernature in nature.” But philosophy at the limit would “venture to augment the return by releasing nature from the bond by which philosophy after Plato, with

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61 FI, p. 159.
62 TI, p. 203.
63 FI, p. 172.
remarkable consistency, kept it secured at the limit of being."\textsuperscript{65} To approach the elemental one needs first to free nature from two bonds that imprison it in the model of composition. The first is \textit{hulê}, which fuels the materialism that has dominated our epoch. The second is what he calls “mimetic ascendancy,” which pushes intelligibility beyond nature.\textsuperscript{66} Once these bonds are removed, one is left with the puzzle of how to question nature newly freed from its shackles. Part of this question, now freed from the hegemony of compositional thinking, is the newly discernable elementals. They were not discernable before because they by nature exceed the determinations that register in discrete eidetic thought’s view of the elements. He calls this characteristic of the elements their exorbitancy and what seems to mean the non-discrete, excessive character of roots, their growth and their hiddenness. I find this moment in which Sallis has placed us to be welcome. It seems to me to represent the appearance of a constructive version of Heidegger’s critique of technology, but includes also the kind of continuity of the elemental, if perhaps not as much of the substance, that seems to me to be attractive in Levinas’ treatment of the elemental, but Sallis’ version seems to preserve some possibilities that Levinas precludes with what Lingis calls his positivism in regard to the natural world. Sallis preserves some of the Heideggerian astonishment before beings in their standing out,\textsuperscript{67} rather than treating the elemental something like a medium for extraction. However, one term that Levinas uses in relation to the

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{FI.}, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 149-50.
\textsuperscript{67} The term dominates Scott’s \textit{The Lives of Things} (esp. Ch. 1), but also comes out in Heidegger’s \textit{Parmenides}: “The astounding is for the Greeks the simple, the insignificant, Being itself. The astounding, visible in the astonishing, is the uncanny, and it pertains so immediately to the ordinary that it can never be explained on the basis of the ordinary,” p. 101.
elemental that is missing from Sallis is enjoyment. One would want, in addition to an astonishment before things, to have a mode of engagement that need not be exploitive.

Another feature of the elemental is its anteriority to natural things, what Levinas might call their nonpossessability.68 Things show themselves encompassed by an extended medium which encompasses differently for different elements. The elements do not reveal themselves as determinately bounded like things, and they have a certain expanse or ‘monstrosity’ to them.69 “Offering in most cases little more than marginal traces, this indefinitely extended background encloses the thing itself as well as the operative horizons. In other words, the thing shows itself not only as bound by horizons but also as encompassed, beyond its horizons, by an indefinitely extended medium or element.”70 The elements have a one-sidedness to them, and withdraw into depth, which is the source of the mythical. One lacks distance from the elements, and is “bathed” in them.71 The word is found in Levinas’ description, as is Sallis’ next term, extraterritoriality, clearly from Levinas’ idiom. For Sallis, extraterritoriality refers to ways one can limit one’s immersion and “gain a certain extraterritoriality from which vantage point the elemental can be deployed in a way approximating that of a thing.”72 His example is having a standpoint from an aloof lookout. Some elementals yield to the suspension by extraterritoriality more than others, e.g. forest and sea more than light and wind. The most resistant, and the ones to which all other elementals eventually lead back are earth and sky. Sallis sees the extraterritorial as a general means of

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68 FI, p. 155.
69 Ibid., p. 158.
70 Ibid., p. 157.
71 Ibid., p. 160.
72 Ibid.
suspending the sway of the elemental, turning it into quasi-thing so as to gain a vantage point over the elemental. In the end, however, the limits of extraterritoriality one must finally simply endure the elements.73

The issue of extraterritoriality condenses the main conflict between Levinas and Heidegger. I mentioned above the possibility of sheltering of the elemental, indicating that we are the elemental as bodies, might limit the dwelling’s power to remove one from the elemental. But Levinas’ description of extraterritoriality seems to be more apt here to the extent that it preserves the site of hospitality, keeps a distinctively human space clear in the elemental. One wonders if with this weaker view of extraterritoriality Sallis is really in the end proposing not a second Other to Levinas’ Other, but a different Other, since extraterritoriality as dwelling seems essential for hospitality toward the other. For Levinas extraterritoriality does relate to the elemental in this way of things, but always with reference to the dwelling as the zone of separation and intimacy.74 It is accomplished by separation, which constitutes not just dwelling but the dwelling, a definite place which is the site of interiority, and all labor and possession take their significance in relation to it, perhaps precisely the labor and possession that give the existent reprieve from the strangeness of the earth that Sallis mentioned. Again polis and cosmos have more separation in Levinas’ thought. We have here a fundamental difference, it seems, encapsulated in the definite article that Levinas adds to Heideggerian dwelling. This extraterritoriality is not a rootedness in the earth, nor a partial removal from it, but precisely the opposite, a disengagement.75 Sallis seems to

73 Ibid., p. 161.
74 TI, pp. 131, 150, 162, 170.
75 Ibid., p. 172.
forego this connection between extraterritoriality and the dwelling, leaving a kind of free floating appropriation with no clear subject other than the unspoken one opposite the frontal image. Perhaps he wants to keep this notion free of such an exclusive determination, which may be too prone to being interpreted in terms of subjectivity.

Philosophy at the limit is palintropic. One begins again, palintropically. It must turn back to elements as the ‘from which’ of manifestation rather than composition. It must “return to the elements as they bound and articulate the expanse of the self-showing of things themselves.” Such return recovers the exorbitant sense of element in play in early Greek thought “but that also survives in the common discourse that refers to wind, rain, snow, etc. as the elements,” elemental nature, the elemental. The elemental will have been in place in the shining forth, “delimiting the very expanse in which enchorial things can shine forth from within their horizons.” Here chôra surfaces again, as a kind of site of the elemental or at least of the spacing in which the elemental is a decisive moment. We notice here that elements are the from which of manifestation. This from which of emergence (phuein) can be contrasted with the elements as that from which one lives in Levinas. The difference may again be whether a body is present or not, and will appear below in regard to the role of bread.

How does the elemental relate to the other horizons? The surface and depth of the elemental differs from lateral and frontal images of a thing. Both thing and elemental hold something in reserve, but what is held in reserve in the elemental is not

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76 Regarding this ‘again’ of Sallis’ approach to the elementals, compare the description of enjoyment in the elemental from Levinas: “each happiness comes for the first time,” TI, p. 114.

77 FI, pp. 154-5.

78 Ibid., p. 156.
another series of possible profiles but “a withdrawal into a depth that, in its gigantic indefiniteness, borders on the fathomless.”80 At this point Sallis directly addresses Levinas’ depiction of the elemental in *Totality and Infinity*.81 He claims that Levinas’ elemental is immediately assimilated into a global opposition between the existent and existence. His main complaint seems to be that this global opposition effaces the difference between the elemental and the depth of the thing, since both are opposed to the existent. This criticism seems akin to Lingis’.82 The response to the elemental is labor and possession, a kind of wresting free of useful things from a milieu. If we interpret the phrase “the depth of a thing” as Heidegger’s “Thing” in its *haecceitas*, then Sallis seems to have met Levinas half way, in so far as he brings together the kind of discussion of the elemental that Levinas has also offered, but wants still to keep the Heideggerian thing in its self-sameness or depth. Both of these differentiations from Levinas are justified in my opinion as far as the elemental itself goes.

But finally Sallis invokes the human, which is Levinas’ obsession, yet differently than Levinas does. The elemental setting of *King Lear* has a bearing on who we ourselves are but not *humanitas* as it has been conveyed, but by the allusion to humus, an exorbitant sense that links the human first to the earth. Humans remain defined, and the elemental also, in relation to mortality, a definition consonant with the idea of sheltering discussed earlier. Here we belong to the elemental in such a way that outside of the elemental we could not be the beings we are and he even mentions “the

79 TI, pp. 110ff.
80 FI, p. 159.
81 See FI, p. 159, n. 17.
life-supporting air that in various guises fills the expanse between earth and sky.”

Here Sallis seems to broach the sense of possession by the elements I had looked for earlier when he says we belong to the elemental. But it is unclear whether the elemental has a hold on us or is merely the proper setting for human being (gehören), the ‘where’ in which one finds our kind of Dasein, as opposed to the where that has hold of humans. The elemental is merely the site that shows our being as the kind of being it is. Outside of the elemental, our being fails. I have to wonder again if that being has a body. Are humans of humus merely because one finds them on the earth, it is where they walk for a while, or because of earth they are made, are created, in Levinas’ language. Again, this is the question of the body.

He offers his elementology. Earth is the common view (“the demotic opinion”) of the first element in Greece, even if none of the phusiologoi made it such. Hesiod has earth generated first. Philosophy at the limit, which seems to carry out Nietzsche’s call for a return to earth must reclaim the earth as elemental, not a thing. “Though all things are earth, earth is not a thing.”

‘Of the earth’ is not to be taken in the sense of made out of earth, which does not escape the fateful moment in philosophy when the schema of production was extended to all things. Rather things of the earth are of the earth by growing from it. Yet water, air, wind, mist are of the earth as is even

83 Ibid., p. 171.
84 TI, p. 85.
85 FI, 173f.
86 In addition to Xenophanes calling the earth apeiron, (Xenophanes of Colophon. Fragments. A Text and Translation with a Commentary, Jay Lester (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Fr. 28) Diogenes claims that Parmenides was a student of Xenophanes and that he considered earth and fire as the two elements (stoicheia), IX 21.
87 FI, p. 174.
the sky, though not by growing from it but by running together with it, “by their
distinctive concurrences.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 176.} All the elements, as in Hesiod, are founded on earth.

Earth is also of the earth, which seems a tautology, tautology being a downward
descent as opposed to the upward ascent that would yield an ‘as such.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 176.} Earth is absolutely non-recessive. It remains and supports such that all other remaining and supporting will be measured against it. One builds upon the earth. Earth is not experienced as a thing and does not show itself as a thing. Earth is therefore literally radical, things are rooted in it, and to the same degree so is its self-withholding and self-closure. Precisely as supporting terrain the earth withdraws. Hence earth displays in a more radical mode the same kind of resistance that things do. He cites Heidegger’s discussion of the stone from \textit{Kunstwerk} and sees stone as perhaps unequaled in being like earth. Split a stone and one merely has two withholdings rather than one, two of the same resistance. One is reminded of Zeno in this turn to the withdrawing hiddenness of the earth. Zeno critiqued pluralism’s claims of infinite divisibility. Sallis, and Heidegger, might say to Zeno that one can divide things, but one cannot divide withholding, which is, apparently, what makes earth ever a one. Cracking the stone in half accomplishes nothing in terms of penetration. Earth resists all attempts to penetrate. It withholds in a way different from paradox and so Heidegger might be said to put Zeno aside, or even prove Zeno’s point of the incommensurability of division.

Earth is the expanse of showing but withholds itself. It is self-secluding and offers its closure to things. “The holding sway of natural things—that is, \textit{phusis}—occurs as a self-unfolding emergence that is paired with a retreat into closure; in its
large compass, these are paired as origination and end, birth and death, coming to light and passing back into the seclusion of the earth. The earth is that to which the things that arise, that come forth into the light, are brought back, sheltered, and finally entombed. One might say that the Earth supports the coming to pass away of things.

Elemental ground accompanying things and the horizon of their self-showing describes earth in its unobtrusive mode. Earth can obtrude as prodigious (though not being disclosed directly). Earth is disclosed in various respects, but always only to a degree, through its concurrences with other elements (e.g. reverberation of thunder, coastline of the sea). Various elements and events oppose earth but while still being of earth. Volcano, earthquake, sea, all withdraw the earth’s supporting function but while remaining of earth.

In spite of some valuable contributions, which I have mentioned, in the end Sallis’ concern is with ‘showing’—an ‘aesthetic’ moment in so far as showing is an offering to experience (aesthesis). Accordingly, he returns to the Platonic figures of the beautiful as the most shining ekphanestaton (most because it is about shining itself and not a particular thing. It is also erasmiötaton, enrapturing, hence taking one outside oneself.91 In this sense, Sallis’ notion of the elemental suffers from the same difficulties of its Heideggerian inheritance, particularly the fixation with earth because of its qualities of concealment. Its emphasis on manifestation in terms of shining, an effort that seems driven by a concern to avoid any hint of substantialist thinking, leaves the

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99 Ibid., p. 178.
90 Ibid., p. 179.
physicability of the elemental out of play and even undercuts in the end the thingliness of things. Though he insists that the force of imagination is not of the order of vision, it is still what lets things be seen.92 One often feels while reading his analysis that one is an observer; one never gets out of one’s chair. Imagination is the mode of access to the elemental, but the Heideggerian disquietude with substantialism leaves an appreciation of the Bachelardian material imagination out of play, not to mention Levinas’ question about hunger, though Sallis’ attempt to link sense as meaning with sense perception might constitute a move in the direction of body. Cast in terms of the language of the *Phaedrus* his notion of tractive imagination, simultaneously protractive and retractive, seems to leave no beyond or height from which another claim could come. We are left with too much evanescence, which is constantly in danger of being without substance. So though I have suggested some aspects of Sallis’ thought that might prove constructive, these are the criticisms I would offer.

### Choral Ending

I want to end this discussion of Sallis’ work by briefly considering his treatment of *chôra*, specifically how it relates to *polis*. In chapter three of this project, I mentioned his invocation of Heidegger’s assertion that there is nothing political about the *polis*.93 He seems to accept this definition. Though consider his assertion that *chôra* is bound by place, land and country, and “it is imperative to bear in mind that the larger context is explicitly political.”94 This statement would seem to break from Heidegger’s pre-political *polis*. But I do not think so. By ‘political’ he refers on the one hand to the

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92 FI, pp. 138, 144.  
overarching plan of the three dialogues—*Timaeus*, *Critias*, and the unaccomplished *Hermocrates*—to describe the just city at war, and on the other hand he means the descriptions of the *polis* in the *Republic*. The aim of this trilogy is to describe the ideal *polis*, which makes the frame of those dialogues political. They sought to construct the ideal city starting from the ground up, from the beginning, beginning being of course what Sallis says the *Timaeus* is all about. Yet in the end he seems to opt to stay on the side of *chôra* that is “linked to what is other than the city.” So *chôra* comes to be described as “the place of being, as the place of its shining, its brightness, for which only the philosopher, it seems, has eyes.” Given the primacy of earth in his treatment of elements, and the fact that he links *chôra* to earth, we can conclude that, aside from its anti-metaphysical role of hiding and deferring and demanding constant rebeginning, for him *chôra* remains primarily elemental. In chapter three, I argued that rather than seeking to employ the notion of *chôra* to accomplish what Sallis calls Plato’s undercutting of his own initiation of the metaphysical separation between *eidos* and sense, *chôra* in the *Timaeus* holds Athens to the standards of *dikê* that we encountered in Ionian philosophy and more vaguely in Parmenides; it is not a deferral of metaphysics setting forth the task of infinite beginning, a perpetual return to the elusive Same that resists reduction into matter or idea, but a judgment on Athens for its *hubris* in Sicily and in the court of law in convicting Socrates. But in the end Sallis downplays this political nature of the *Timaeus*.

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98 “Double Truths,” 112.
When Sallis describes this political nature under the idea of building the city from the ground up, he is drawn outside of his starting point, the *Timaeus*, to the discussion in the *Republic*, where the ideal city is a point of contention between Socrates and Glaucon.\(^9\) From the beginning Sallis emphasizes place. While mentioning that the discussion in the Republic has the aim of seeing justice and injustice more clearly, and that Socrates begins describing the incentive for the city on social grounds, “no one of us is self-sufficient,” Sallis ignores these concerns and determines that the significance of this coming together into a *polis* is “a common dwelling place.”\(^1\) The concern for justice and community seem the focus of Sallis’ description of Socrates words, but place is what he takes from them. In this section Sallis works his way back through the description of the city all the way to the ground, the place, the site of the city. The city is defined for Sallis from the ground up, i.e., in relation to the earth.\(^1\) “The first two citizens gathered into the city bear in their very occupations reference to the city as a place of dwelling on the earth, a place where dwellings will be needed and where men will live from the earth, by cultivating it, by tilling the soil.”\(^2\) So before it is a society, the *polis* is a site. It may be a site with a certain recoil onto the inhabitants there, as in *Airs Waters Places*, where climate shapes character. This site would seem to be Heidegger’s *polis* that is not political, a *polis* that defines a people, a *Dasein*, but which one could argue is not a sociality. I think that the city assumed by the recommencement that commands the beginning of the *Timaeus* is a city already under the cycles of day and night, already under the obligations of

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\(^9\) *Republic*, 372a-374e. See *Chorology*, 138ff.

\(^1\) *Ibid.*, pp. 139f.

hospitality or the strains of conflict and war that arise from having a place on the earth and from the existence of foreigners that arises with the inception of that place. It is a city in which the question of justice, when one must give way (chôrein), is already in play. This is a different kind of chôra.

Only with war does the city become genuinely political for Sallis, since the desire that initiates the creation of the cosmology of the Timaeus is the desire to see the good city at war. But as I argued in chapter three, the readers of the Timaeus may already have seen this good city in Hermocrates’ Syracuse, or at least have seen the negative example of Periclean Athens at work in Sicily. The remembrance involved is not theoretical or mythical, but is real. This critique of an imperial Athens in which the Greeks already live when the Timaeus begins is the political. The overarching plan of the discourse along with the city described in the Republic, not the historical background evoked, seem to define what Sallis means when he says the Timaeus is political. It takes its meaning from place, from earth, the human place; geology defines politology and as in Force of Imagination the final horizon is earth and sky. One could say he drives the polis into the earth, into the ground, linked as it is to the receding, groundless chôra. This is precisely what Sallis sought to do in his article, “Levinas and the Elemental.” He wanted to see if there was perhaps something else, besides the other human, that could call a halt to the pulsing of the enjoying I. He looked to the earth, opting for an elemental chôra rather than a social one.

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102 Ibid., p. 140.
103 Chorology, p. 142.
104 Ibid., p. 145.
Levinas would probably say this kind of Nietzschean return to the earth is a lapse.\textsuperscript{105} “To place the Neuter dimension of Being above the existent which unbeknown to it this Being would determine in some way, to make the essential events unbeknown to the existents, is to profess materialism. Heidegger’s late philosophy becomes this faint materialism.”\textsuperscript{106} This materialism would mean, in the language of a recovered Presocraticism, that the earth is \textit{archê}. “Whatever Aristotle and the various \textit{phusiologoi} declare, the demotic opinion is that all things are earth. Whatever shape things may assume, they are of earth and originate from earth. . . . To turn back to the earth is to rediscover this archaic earth that will always have given nourishment and support.”\textsuperscript{107} Is this faint materialism that is Heidegger’s later thought a materialism because it grounds everything on the earth? What things are not of the earth? The other human, perhaps, but in Sallis’ favor we might ask how can one give the bread from one’s own mouth if there is no earth to give such nourishment? Levinas may not do justice to the earth, but Sallis seems not to have quite accommodated the city.

\begin{flushright}
\texttt{105 On this Nietzschean inspiration, see FI, pp. 22-4.}
\texttt{106 TI, pp. 298-9.}
\texttt{107 FI, p. 174.}
\end{flushright}
Chapter 8

Directed Flesh: Alphonso Lingis

“Sensation is thus a property of substance: there are substances that have sensations.”

--Nietzsche

“Our point of departure shall not be being is, nothingness is not nor even there is only being—which are formulas of a totalizing thought, a high-altitude thought—but: there is being, there is a world, there is something; in the strong sense in which the Greek speaks of to legein, there is cohesion, there is meaning. One does not arouse being from nothingness, ex nihilo; one starts with an ontological relief where one can never say that the ground be nothing. What is primary is not the full and positive being upon a ground of nothingness; it is a field of appearances, each of which, taken separately, will perhaps subsequently break up or be crossed out (this is the part of nothingness), but of which I only know that it will be replaced by another which will be the truth of the first, because there is a world, because there is something—a world, a something, which in order to be do not first have to nullify the nothing.”

--Merleau-Ponty

I have suggested the Sallis brings us into proximity with the elemental, but that we still lack the sense of embodiment necessary for both the elemental chôra and the social chôra. Alphonso Lingis seems to supply a clear depiction of embodied existence in the elemental, going beyond even Levinas. In addition he brings the two forms of what I have been calling chôra together under the language of ‘directives,’ which come to us both from the world and from other humans, two spheres that cannot be separated. So he offers the promise pushing Levinas’ elemental a bit further into our bodies and


suggesting a way to bring the human and natural together where Levinas seems to have refused to do so.

This project has been concerned with being ‘in place’ on the one hand and the dangers of provinciality on the other, with appreciation of the unconstructed luminosity of the natural world but also proper attention to other responsibilities, with the pleasure of animated things but attention to those things that kill all liveliness. Alphonso Lingis’ sometimes eccentric works seem to offer a means of recognizing these various, important moments. Whereas Sallis took up the epistemologically and ethically suspicious strains of Nietzsche that seek to twist free of false pieties and call us back to the present world, Lingis takes up a strain in Nietzsche that celebrates the energy of the body and turns to the world as a fleshly place. In this chapter I will survey one work by Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility and Sensibility,*\(^3\) and bring in other writings by Lingis. The goal will be to situate his thought in relation to the thinkers we have already discussed and to see what resources he may offer regarding the questions of element and community and their relation.

Both Sallis and Lingis speak of resisting decompositional philosophies. Sallis challenged these kinds of hermeneutics with the counter notion of manifestation, things showing themselves in a self-withholding openness. Lingis seems to push this question into a different register. He singles out the decomposition of fact-value thinking.

The fact-value theorists such as R. M. Hare decompose these concepts into a descriptive element and an attached prescription (a statement of what one ought to do). Yet a life, and a society, which would analyze behavior in value-free terms, and then add the general and abstract notions of obligation to certain

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forms of behavior would be quite different from a life and a society that understands itself and interacts with the undecomposed terms.\textsuperscript{4}

Sallis spoke of the untranslatable sense of the sensible that shines forth in manifesting.\textsuperscript{5} In \textit{Sensation} Alphonso Lingis brings sensibility into focus. He announces his break with what he calls existential philosophy and, most specifically, Heidegger.

At this point I propose to spend some time treating Lingis’ \textit{Sensation}, using it as a means to focus the discussion from previous chapter. In some ways Lingis’ writing has the same intoxicating force of Bachelard’s reveries. He seems to forgo the sometimes clumsy apparatus of a rigid conceptuality. His words come like waves of images, but images that come together to make claims. One might even call his writing concrete reverie, insofar as he insists on not holding what he says to the standards of holism and integration. Like Bachelard’s reveries, Lingis seems to feel free to disperse things for the sake of greater understanding. He is taking up some aspects of Levinas’ philosophical pluralism,\textsuperscript{6} but letting them spill over into the non-human domain. One finds that the prominence of the void is repeatedly questioned, the body emerges as a defining feature of existence in the world, body understood as a substance rather than a

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{The Imperative}, (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 223, n. 3. The context of this comment is a discussion of the work of Bernard Williams. Cf. pp. 20f.


\textsuperscript{6} When asked if there is a philosopher who has been a great influence on him that he does not overtly mention, Lingis replied, “Levinas is someone that I didn’t write anything about for a very long time and I haven’t written much about him. But he was a very, very profound influence. In so many ways he illuminated things for me.” Alexander E. Hooke and Wolfgang W. Fuchs eds., \textit{Encounters with Alphonso Lingis} (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003), p. 36; on pluralism in Levinas see \textit{Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority}; Alphonso Lingis, trans. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 204, 208, 220-226. Hereafter TI.
“praktognostic” nexus or diagram of force. A return to substance might be said to characterize Lingis’ work. He questions whether death is really the defining and singularizing event, “the imperative that makes imperative all the imperatives that thought and action recognize.” He wonders whether the “instrumental layout envisioned in practical action and the weight of landscape sensed in mood,” come to constitute world. He questions the whole conception of the primacy of world over any interiority and existential philosophy’s determination of the other in relation to oneself, a criticism to which both Heidegger and Husserl have been subjected by Levinas. In what is probably the most decisive move he makes Lingis asks if perhaps the world is “not given in perception, but imperative.” This formulation seems as close as one might get to Lingis’ ‘theory’ and it seems to be an extension of Levinas’ ideas about the other to the world in some way, without any specific justifications being given. The world confronts us with directives, and these directives have some of the tone of Levinas’ description of the command that comes from the other. Thus perhaps Lingis’ thought offers some integration of what I have been calling two kinds of chôra, the elemental and the social.

The book in which he expands most fully on what he accomplishes in Sensation takes the title The Imperative. Rather than being and nothingness, he seems to want an

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7 Sensation, p. x.
8 Ibid., p. ix.
ontology that takes “difference, distance, gradation, and otherness,” as primitive notions. Here in addition to Levinas one clearly hears the voice of Merleau-Ponty: “The more one describes experience as a compound of being and nothingness, the more their absolute distinction is confirmed; the more the thought adheres to experience, the more it keeps it at a distance. Such is the sorcery of the thought of the negative.”11 With this renewed emphasis on plenum and embodiment, Lingis rejects the definition of sensation as “a sensitivity for the possible.”12 Regarding the critique of subjectivity, he claims existential philosophy has “lost self-consciousness as an active responsibility.”13 Consequently, for existential philosophy discourse is reduced to communication without asking, “How does communication communicate the difference between interlocutors?”14 Here one sees the reprise of the fundamental Levinasian distinction between the first and second person pronouns.

In critiquing the Heideggerian view, in chapter 1, “We Mortals,” he follows Levinas’ view of death as not a passage into nothingness but rather an encounter with the unknown. He also picks up the theme of one’s responsibility before death, the responsibility not to let the other die alone.15 Chapter two carries out an interruption of the world as a unity of purposes and goals by the notion of enjoyment. Quite clearly indebted to Levinas here, Lingis emphasizes how enjoyment interrupts the dialectic of aims. As I suggested in discussing anxiety in Heidegger in chapter two, perhaps

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10 Sensation, p. x.
11 Cf. VI, p. 87.
12 Sensation, p. x.
13 Ibid., p. xiii.
14 Ibid.
existence in relation to the whole does not account for human being in the world. “The
one that grasps the hammer does not comprehensively envision the carpentry of the
whole world. The practicable fields are limited and discontinuous. Between and
beyond them, there are innumerable impracticable fields. Does anyone inhabit the
universe?”\textsuperscript{16} This last question is not merely a rhetorical point, it would seem. Rather it
hints at Levinas’ critique of Heidegger’s thought as a totalizing, but also in removing
the goal of access to the whole, the mode of access would seem to be displaced as well,
viz. anxiety. This move opens the way for other moods and feelings to play prominent
roles. For Lingis that means trust. One reason he rejects the move the beings as a
whole is that if I inhabit the universe then I have presumed myself into all space. It is a
usurpation of the world. Notice here that rather than a whole manifest in relation to the
indeterminacy of (the) nothing, one has a dispersed plenum, like Bachelard’s dispersed
homogeneity articulated by negation.\textsuperscript{17}

Consequently, responding to directives, as Lingis’ philosophy seeks to do,
seems to require “resisting all forms of holism.”\textsuperscript{18} He grants that the circuit between
things and world gets reversed in the later Heidegger, but still this circuit remains in
tact. By this assertion he seems to mean that whereas in the \textit{Being and Time} era, the
nexus of things bring forth the world, later for Heidegger the world seems to cause
things to show forth, such as the uncanniness of the watchers who look into the world
thus illuminating things—the gods. Contrary to Heidegger’s praktognostic approach,

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Sensation}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The Philosophy of No: A Philosophy of the New Scientific Method}, G. C. Waterston,
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Imperative}, p. 3.
Lingis suggest rather that, ‘the finality in things also comes to an end in them.’ Here is of course Levinas’ enjoyment. Here is Bachelard’s claim that fire is of value not just because it is useful for cooking food to be eaten, but because it makes the food crispy, a quality which is not necessarily useful, but only enjoyable. “Action then does not lay out the axes and determinations and instrumental connections of the world. It stakes out a zone of the practicable, and in inhabiting it, this zone transforms or unforms into an unpracticable density in which one rests and dreams.” As Levinas put it, the earth suffices for us. Heidegger’s analysis loses substance and body. His instrumentality misses the substantiality in objects, his world of intentions misses the sensuality of the body. These critiques I also tried to press against Sallis. Shining never gets to substance. Neither does the kind of deferred presence he invokes to ground shining’s evanescence. While he talked of the depth of things, it was always a depth deferred, and sheltering things as opposed to appropriating them seems an activity that will suffice only for those who do not hunger.

As we have already anticipated with his rejection of the whole and the nothing, Lingis also critiques the Heideggerian view of the world disclosed in mood. The given crowds in on us, weighs on us. “For us to find ourselves (sich befinden) is to find ourselves as subjects, and this does not mean as spontaneous or creative source-points; it means as loci of subjection.” For Heidegger through the weight of things we feel the whole world in its nothingness. It is “the weight of the void itself. The pressure of the void breaks down our purposive stances before tasks at hand into the staggerings of

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19 Sensation, p. 21.
20 Ibid., p. 22.
21 TI, p. 137.
anxiety. Anxiety is equivocally the sense of the massive weight of the totality and the sense of the void behind and in the weight of the world.”

The domains of hand and feeling are united, says Lingis, by nothingness. “Nothingness itself would totalize all being—that extended before us as an instrumental layout and that weighing massively on us in mood—as the world.”

But Lingis counters this view, claiming that,

> It is not an external but an internal factor that could make what is contained within contours an individual and what is excluded from nothingness a whole. The open-ended field of action gets its unity from the dynamic continuity of its instrumental connections. The nothingness over which it is extended threatens it at every point. The sense of nothingness besetting the environment that is felt pressing down on one would not make the environment so much a whole or a world as a bounded exteriority.

Lingis implies that Heidegger’s playfulness with regard to (the) nothing is deceptive. Heidegger offers a “paradoxical ontology that works with the concept of a real possibility made of actuality and impossibility, with the concepts of being and nothingness.” This ontology is unintelligible and “phenomenologically unfaithful.”

Rather than the world extended in the abyss, “we think there are multiple and discontinuous practicable and impracticable fields, extended not in the void but in the sensuous density.” Here the void is rejected for the plenum, and immediately the language of elementals encroaches. Light shines not as a network of references but “a sensuous medium.” The sky, city, the night emerge. The jug is not an intersection of axes but glows in the tranquility of the home. Here we note Lingis is with Levinas.

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22 Sensation, p. 23. This point is reiterated in The Imperative, pp. 120, 180.  
24 Ibid.  
25 Ibid.  
26 Ibid.  
27 Ibid.  
28 Ibid.
The home is separation and peace. One dwells not generally on the earth but in a
dwelling separated from the world, not as a moment of worlding. This difference
appeared even in Sallis’ appropriation of Levinas’ term, “extraterritoriality,” which is
the home for Levinas, the only possible egress and distance from the elemental milieu
and the source of selfhood. For Sallis extraterritoriality referred to always partial
attempts to gain some distance from the elemental, attempts that, like dwelling itself,
ever seemed localized.

Much like Irigaray, Lingis complains that Heidegger’s “antisubstantialist
ontology”29 misses the sensuous density of our milieu, and in an apparent expansion to
all beings of Levinas’ claim that Being in Heidegger occludes the individual human
existent, Lingis says that mood is commanded not by the whole but by one particular
thing that occludes the others. We noted that John Caputo made similar claims about
pain, as a feeling that is different than anxiety and affects the human differently, but in a
fundamental way.30 Whereas Caputo sought to include other phenomena alongside
anxiety, Lingis seems to want to break it up entirely. But it is totalizing for him not just
in terms of the occlusion of human others, but non-human things as well. Lingis
acknowledges the role played by joy and the traces of the divine in the later Heidegger,
as giving direction to our actions in an otherwise groundless existence, a joy felt in
things given in and giving location.31 But Lingis again goes back to substance, “the

29 Ibid., p. 27.
69ff.
31 Heidegger does mention joy in Being and Time, along with other moods such as
hope, but by defining it as joy für sich he seems to draw it into the network of care.
Being and Time, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (New York: Harper and
sensuous materiality that sustains and nourishes.”32 Here locations materialize. His example is again related to the dwelling as a point of tranquility, where friends gathered find separation from their cares. His specific, and slightly dramatic, example is guerillas having taken refuge in the peasant hut, savoring rum that has been offered.33

I suggested in chapter six what Heidegger might say to this claim of Dasein never being hungry. With Lingis the question is no longer just about reliance on Bergson. For Merleau-Ponty’s thought is in play here. With chapter three Lingis introduces themes that appear in his later book, The Imperative. Here we find talk of levels, a terms which comes from Merleau-Ponty.

Perception is unconsciousness. What is the unconscious? What functions as a pivot, an existential, and in this sense, is and is not perceived. [sic] For one perceives only figures upon levels----And one perceives them only by relation to the level, which therefore is unperceived----The perception of the level: always between the objects, it is that about which. . . .”34

Lingis will expand the term ‘level’ into an entire chapter in The Imperative and make frequent use of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of pivoting, though perhaps not in the strict sense of being part of a kind of unconscious schema that it seems to take for Merleau-Ponty, “the existentials by which the world becomes visible.”35 In The Imperative, he says, “the levels are sensory data that do not occupy a here and a now to the exclusion of other data.”36 Like elemental chôra, this description hints at a more dynamic spatiality, but seems to avoid the evanescence of Sallis’ ‘spacing.’ I would describe the

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32 Sensation, p. 29.
33 Ibid.
34 VI, p. 189.
36 P. 26.
notion of a pivot in the phenomenal field as a point in enfleshed space that focuses movement and draws along its world with it. The idea seems to me to capture the sense of what I have tried to talk about as elemental chôra, a kind of space that is active and somehow continuous with its surrounding place. Sallis’ horizons and elements rigorously described such a space, though of course, not quite capturing a sense of flesh.

Lingis, however, seems to understand flesh. He brings forward the sense in which “our body, that sensitive-sensible element that moves itself, moves toward things.” One can detect in this quote a play on Heidegger’s all-important phusis, the self-moving for Aristotle, which Heidegger seems to link to self-showing itself. Lingis relocates the self-moving into our own flesh. Also in the description of the body as the sensitive-sensible element that moves itself we hear the echo of Merleau-Ponty’s flesh of the world, with which our flesh is continuous. Particularly, the movement toward things is a function of our drive to find coherence and consistency among things in the world. Whereas Bachelard seemed to find in reverie the drive of an imagination that attunes itself to the inherent mobility of images, for Lingis the drive to the world arises because we seek clarification of what is at first perceptually unclear. This movement toward things is not optional, not a freedom. Perception has to perceive things as coherent and consistent beings. One gets a sense of what Lingis means when speaking of directives in the world when he says that things in turn are compelled not to exhibit all their sides. This is a direct description of the directives of our perceptual life, commands to our freedom. Things have to coexist in a field together and these fields

37 Sensation, p. 31.
38 Cf. VI, p. 250.
39 Sensation, p. 32.
have to coexist with the fields of other possible things, says Lingis. I would suggest that this imperative of things to coexist with fields of other possible things is the reason we find certain drawings by Escher to be startling and captivating. They violate basic imperatives in us and things.

But these differences are not merely unrelated moments of perception. Rather one believes in their consistency across moments. We might consider the painting style of pointillism as evidence for this claim. Sallis found time itself built into what he called lateral horizontality. Time seems to have a unity for Lingis. And here he brings the levels to a definition.

The world in which we perceive extends in a space-time that is not a priori apprehendable in the formulas for Euclidean or non-Euclidean geometrical dimensions and the objective time of successive moments. It extends on levels—the level of the light which our gaze adjusts to and sees with as it looks at the illuminated contours that surface and intensify, the level of the sonority our hearing attunes to as it harkens to sounds and noises that rise out of it, the level of the tangible our posture finds as our limbs move across the contours and textures of tangible substances, the level of verticality and of depth and of rest that emerges as our position becomes functional in a layout of tasks. The level is found sensorially, by a movement that does not grasp at it as an objective but adjusts to it, is sustained by it, moves with it and according to it.40

These levels push aside geometry, formal imagination in Bachelard. Note that the ‘senses’ are not resident in our bodies, but extended through the world. Duration so much the structure of our experience, like Bergson might have it, but is one of the levels. Time is not a t+1 dimension of a conceptual nature. Present and future are horizons. The future is not a unit about to displace the present but “a directive toward which and with which we turn.” “The world is not a framework, an order, or an

40 Ibid., p. 33.
arrangement, but a nexus of levels."\textsuperscript{41} As Bachelard said, "Existence is not a one-toned function; it cannot affirm itself, everywhere and in the same tone, all the time."\textsuperscript{42}

While in regard to Sallis’ descriptions one had a sense of being a bit of a spectator, Lingis’ descriptions, like Bachelard’s, seem to carry in themselves the implications of our own movement. But our access to these levels is not something external, such that we would move toward them. We access them by moving with them, much as we are not external to the elemental in Levinas’ description. The level is determinate not in a formal sense of surveying or diagramming but as a “style.” “My perception is this power to attain from the first the intersensorial coherence and consistency of a thing, a transcendent ess-ence or way of being there, which no intersensorial exploration will every make definitively given.”\textsuperscript{43} Merleau-Ponty also links style with essence, in the verbal sense of the word ‘wesen’ given by Heidegger.\textsuperscript{44} Style finally comes together with flesh in Merleau-Ponty’s description of flesh as element.

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term ‘element,’ in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{42} The Philosophy of No, p. 46, emphasis original.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Sensation, p. 32.
\item \textsuperscript{44} VI, p. 115.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid., pp. 139-140. Regarding the similarities with Bachelard, cf., “Being and the imaginary are for Sartre ‘objects,’ ‘entities’----
\end{itemize}

For me they are ‘elements’ (in Bachelard’s sense), that is, not objects, but fields, subdued being, non-thetic being, being before being—and moreover involving their auto-inscription their ‘subjective correlate’ is a part of them. [sic] The Rotempfindung is part of the Rotempfundene—this is not a coincidence, but a dehiscence that knows itself as such.” VI, p. 267. This dehiscence would also seem to capture something of what Sallis seeks to illustrate in speaking of the duplicity of sense necessary for philosophy at the limit, this limit being the tissue of cohesion between sensing and sensed, or in other terms, prehended and prehending. Force of Imagination, pp. 77f.
Within these notions of style and flesh seems to lay the assertion Lingis will make in Dangerous Emotions that we apprehend the world through body postures and resonances. “Not only do emotions discharge their forces on the outside environment; they have their source in it.”\(^{46}\) We have to perceive a field of compossible things, a world.\(^{47}\) The levels bring this to be, and bring things to be, which are not givens but “tasks to which perception finds itself devoted. A thing arises as a relief on the levels of the world which extend about it and harbor other things, to which this thing turns its lateral sides: these outlying things invite us as standpoints from which those sides can be seen.”\(^{48}\) In comparison to Sallis, where lateral horizons seem to be only other possible, nonpresent vantage points for viewing objects, for Lingis “things witness one another and each contributes to the consistency and coherence of all.”\(^{49}\) So in addition to fixing us more securely as bodies in the world, Lingis also brings beings into relation with each other independent of humans. If a tree falls in the woods, the other trees hear the sound. Of course in Bachelard’s reveries everything he looks at looks at him. Merleau-Ponty echoed this sentiment in reference to painters. The vision the seer exercises, “he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by things, my activity is equally passivity.”\(^{50}\) Lingis, however, conceives of things looking at each other, a point made in emphasizing the coherence of the world, a coherence that seems to not come solely from our own synthetic activities, if this image of ‘seeing’ can be trusted. In fairness to Heidegger, we might want to

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47 Sensation, p. 34.
48 Ibid., p. 35.
49 Ibid.
remember his statement that beings grant reck to each other, although this granting of reck may amount to a mutual referentiality granted by language, and he did say that things having to do with humans “are even more in being than mere things.”

Since the world’s unity does not arise from our mental activities, then the world can be there as an imperative, a directive, that “weighs on the mind as an exteriority prior to the exteriority of the world of extended objects it presents.” Thought follows imperatives, must think along the lines of the universal and the necessary. Kant saw this. “Thought is obedience. . . . Thought is commanded to be in command.” He notes that Merleau-Ponty says, “thought finds itself commanded to think the consistent and the coherent because it is destined to think of real things and the real world.” In discussing Levinas’ elementals I suggested that the kind of subjectivity he described in relation to the human, freedom bestowed by a kind of subjection to the other, might be applied as well to the nonhuman world. Lingis seems to have made this move. “The subjection of the mind to an imperative is first the subjection of perception to the imperatives in things and the imperative ordinance of the world.” One might venture to express this relation between thought and world by saying (with Parmenides) that the same is for being and thinking. One becomes a subject in being subjected to the exterior “as an ordinance which directs the intentional focus of its sensory powers and its exploratory positions and movements. The imperative is first in the world, to which

50 VI, p. 139.
52 Sensation, p. 36.
53 Ibid. Cf. also The Imperative, Part II.
54 Sensation, p. 36.
55 Ibid., pp. 36-7.
the sensitive-sensible flesh finds itself ordered...” 56 It is the world “not as a multiplicity of identifiable things a posteriori affecting the mind, but as an ordinance a priori laid on the mind. Or, more exactly, laid on our existence, which exists as destined for the world.” 57 So whereas Sallis finds perception already animated by imagination, Lingis suggests a world full of what he will in the Imperative come to call “directives.”

He contrasts Kant, for whom understanding receives the world-imperative in conflict with sensuality, with Merleau-Ponty, for whom the world-imperative command is received on our postural schema, “which integrates our sensibility and mobilizes our efficacy.” It orders our competence. Lingis is now prepared to say “perception is praktnognosis.” 58 This is the word he used in rejecting Heidegger’s philosophy of Being. The difference now seems to be that the praxis involved is much more fleshly, rooted in the body and its complex responses to what it encounters. In a statement that sounds quite a bit like Bachelard’s dynamic imagination, Lingis claims, “sensation itself is behavior: to sense the green and the blue is to adopt a certain posture and to contract a certain muscular tonus; to hear a sound is to turn to it and follow it . . . It is with a posture of one’s mobile body that one perceives the position of a thing in the landscape, its up-down axis, its sens—its meaning and orientation.” 59 As I said, this praktognosis seems quite different from the Heideggerian schema to which he applies that term negatively. Perhaps Lingis would suggest to Sallis that the unity of sense perception and the sense of our understanding requires a body.

56 Ibid., p. 37.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.

Lingis then turns to the question of objective knowledge and claims that scientific hypotheses, such as atoms, are theoretical instruments, no more real than rocks and trees. Again we remember Bachelard’s description of atomic theory teaching us as it is entirely negated. But also, Lingis picks up a certain tone that might be construed as personification, or animation as in Bachelard’s sense. The structure of things commands our perceptions and motivates the theoretical attitude. The levels support our gaze and draw it in. “This is the experience that makes me see each side of the thing as determinate: all its sides are kept determinate by the determinate forms of the other things of the world.”⁶⁰ Note that determination is not a function of a form being applied to a substance to yield a thing. Determination requires other determinate entities. Time even seems to require these things as well as other moments of time. Things look like they were there a moment ago and will remain. “Each moment of duration invokes, as its witnesses to anticipate and to confirm its presence, past and future moments.”⁶¹ In spite of his criticisms of Heidegger, Lingis is close here to Heidegger’s whiling jointure, which interpreted presence as containing past and future. But Lingis’ presence seems a bit stronger than the showing Sallis described, in which things seems to attain only the virtual presence granted by a deferred depth continually drawn away.

Lingis’ depiction here might seem to be rather mild or ineffectual at first. But can we perhaps argue that the force of presence here described, the sense of rightness the perdurance of a state of affairs carries would be able to account for the startling

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⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 38.
⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 41.
⁶¹ Ibid.
force of a suddenly falling tree branch. In a world of constant change, on the other hand, there are no surprises. One expects that if a gigantic fish jumped out of Heraclitus’ river, it would seem just more of the same. Things startle precisely because they break the existing milieu that assumes our capacity to anticipate and the perdurance of time.

His metaphor for this presence, much firmer than shining and even than Merleau-Ponty’s botanical metaphor of dehiscence, is crystallization. Things appear as crystallized among other crystallized things. Heraclitus’ claim that one can never step into the same river twice bites against this sense of crystallization with which things situate themselves. Does this notion of crystallization suggest a limit to the fluidity of Ionian physics? Lingis is critical of Levinas’ tendency to bring the human into relation to the elemental by way of possession and labor. Sallis seems to want to speak of the elemental along with things in their depth of being, though still with the sense of virtual being. For Lingis, the presence of this (tode) thing, its presentation, finds its support in large part due to the presence of other things around it, more so that from the perspective of the one who stands opposite the frontal image. Thus one again has the sense that things constitute each other. The other trees witness the falling tree, and these witnesses are not simply stand ins for humans, for our position or approach to a thing “appear incidental to its being there,” no more and perhaps a bit less necessary than the presence of the other things around it.

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62 VI, pp. 117, 123, 128.
63 Sensation, p. 42.
Objectification is motivated by “the incipient perceived closure that directs perception to things.”\(^{64}\) It is interesting to pause over his description of objectification as practiced in science, in which past and future appearances are rendered present. “The sensible pivots are stabilized into points, the levels converted into lines, the horizons into planes, the depths into volumes, the space between things into potentially observable things, the murmur of silence into a multiplicity of tones.”\(^{65}\) This space is that of Democritus and Zeno, cuttable almost everywhere or everywhere. The field of experience becomes decomposable into psychic facts. “The ipseity that forms in the reciprocal inscription of postural schema and body image” becomes “a psychophysical object,” located “everywhere and nowhere.”\(^{66}\) One has a total disengagement from the practicable field that is the original context of the body. Note that this description of scientific activity does not construe it as alienation. Quite the contrary is true. Such disengagement is commanded by the world imperative.\(^{67}\) Could we interpret Lingis to say that the world demands atomistic thinking? Lingis questions Merleau-Ponty’s view of objectification, saying that rather than a continuation of what is given in the practicable field, scientific observation creates new fields and obeys new imperatives. So science is not alienation, but neither is it benign, simply descriptive.

The imperatives that scientists find in the micro- and macrocosmic theaters they enter are no longer the imperatives the natural perception of our species found in things. These imperatives are recognized and obeyed with other competencies that [sic] those which enable our bodies to perceive things.\(^{68}\)

\(^{64}\) Ibid.
\(^{65}\) Ibid.
\(^{66}\) Ibid., p. 43.
\(^{67}\) Ibid.
\(^{68}\) Ibid., p. 49.
Objectification changes reality, a point that Bachelard the philosopher of science also emphasized. Lingis is again avoiding, it seems, holisms, now in defining thinking and its domains.

Merleau-Ponty’s focus on competence excludes fantasy, and he also offers no word on death, the imperative of letting go. Heidegger recognized our having to die but fixed it dialectically to resoluteness of care. Lingis rejects this second move.

Does not the one that dies to the things and to the world know the imperative, not of becoming-nothing, but of becoming elemental, following the light beyond every direction following the depth that deepens without end, following the reverberation of the vibrancy beyond one’s situation and every situation in the world?\(^{69}\)

This seems a description of how one would describe death in a plenum. In this analysis of death we can see how Lingis rejects the priority of the void over the plenum. We see how death consequently changes. The dissolution of death is not a pervasive nothingness, a launch into a mystery or emptiness, but a becoming elemental, almost, Bachelard might suggest, an extension of reverie, which is itself a way of being drawn into the elemental.\(^{70}\) Sallis’ move to come back to earth, to draw thinking earthward, also suggests a lure to become elemental. But perhaps the route is too indirect, or put another way, we seem to be of the earth for Sallis because it is our site, but not necessarily our substance. We might say that the lingering questionableness of the body for Heidegger may be a function of (or a necessary condition for) the emphasis on Being as locus of meaning and the importance of language. Death brings silence.

\(^{70}\) Bachelard recounts the story of the *Todtenbaum*, the tree of death. In certain Celtic communities, each person had a personal tree. At death the person was either burned with its wood for fuel, set in its branches to be eaten by the birds of the air, buried in the hollowed out tree, or set afloat in it on the Rhine. *Water and Dreams: An Essay On the*
Levinas too speaks of death in terms of the end of language, but as the lack of a response from the other. “There is here an end that always has the ambiguity of a departure without return, a decease, but also of a scandal (‘Is it possible that he is dead?’) of no-response . . . and of my responsibility.”71 Language ends but precisely the language of response. But in Lingis’ model it seems that in death one dies physically. The end of language is not the sole concern so much as the way that in death we become elemental, or recognize that we always were. In another context Lingis drives home this point by describing a hallucinatory Tibetan ritual in which the participant encounters spirits that are consuming his flesh. Lingis suggests this ritual reflects more accurately new scientific narrative that take an ecological perspective integrating humans into the natural commerce.72 But this ritual drives home the physicality of our bodily existence and our continuity with the elemental milieu. Lingis seems to suspect the same overlooking of the substantial body in the emphasis on in Heidegger language. He asks whether in Heidegger’s attack on subjectivity there might not be a hint of a non-worldly subject in the bodiless questioner of being? Perhaps the same might be true, to a lesser degree, of Levinas’ interpretation of death in relation to the end of response. In the final chapter of Sensation he will make this separation of body from language, and thus his difference with Levinas, more clear.

Even at this early point in Sensation Lingis distinguishes communication, an abstract process, from contact, which is “to perceive the postures and gaits of things directing us. . . . The sensuality in us that diffuses as our performative mobilization and

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71 God, Death and Time, p. 37.
ego-control slackens makes contact with the materiality of things which induce transubstantiations in us.”73 Levinas uses the term “trans-substantiation” in the context of fecundity, the engendering of the child.74 “By a total transcendence, the transcendence of trans-substantiation, the I is, in the child, an other.”75 In the context of Eros, the other major aspect, along with fecundity, of what he speaks of as ‘beyond the face,’ Levinas say of trans-substantiation, “this unparalleled relation between two substances, where a beyond substances is exhibited, is resolved in paternity.”76 Lingis gives considerably more attention in his work to eros than to fecundity. One does find moments of fecundity. “The citizen-activist, statesman, or guerrilla” may not enjoy the results of her risks and labor but others may.77 But overall Lingis seems to leave fecundity aside, at least in regard to its unique focal image of the child, which is not trivial but bears on time and death itself. It is in relation to fecundity that “the I survives itself,” says Levinas.78 The task of gathering up fecundity with as much imagination as Lingis gathers up eros may be left to other authors.

While transubstantiation has this fairly specific sense for Levinas, Lingis expands it to talk about the effect that the world has on us, by way, again, of our bodies. Sensing is not registering a point of red, a moment of red. “The sensed is not a momentary inextended impression or sequence of discrete impressions.”79 The body is

72 Trust (Minneapolis, Minn.: The University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 139-147.
73 Sensation, p. 53.
74 TI, p. 266.
75 Ibid., p. 267.
76 Ibid., p. 271.
77 Dangerous Emotions, p. 125.
78 TI, p. 247.
79 Sensation, p. 53.
an assemblage of vectors.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 57-8.} To be sensed a thing cannot be a point but must endure. Sensation is not the gathering of impressions and subsequent fitting them into a schema that philosophy has always suggested it is. “The most elementary sensing already actively follows up patterns.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 54.} One is struck by the convergence of this statement with Sallis repositioning of the imagination in the process of perception. The difference seems to be that for Lingis, imagination seems to be first a bodily event, not a hovering, but a collection of resonances in the body. He brings forth Merleau-Ponty’s claim that what perceives things as such is our body’s postural schema. It “comprehends the essence or unity of things,” and “converges the sensory surfaces and movements.”\footnote{Ibid.} It is “a dynamic gestalt” in its own right, not a mental representation. Anticipating some of the enlivened writing of his later works, he speaks of the vast eye of the lake the ear of the canyon, the body builder who knows the true essence of steel, our own bodies as terrestrial know the earth, the liquid crystal of our eyes is drawn to the stars as to brothers. “For our sentient bodies are not only vectors of force but substances. And transubstantiations are possible.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 59.}

Transubstantiation is our elation to the world. It might be the pulsation through the flesh of the world we share with all things as elemental. It might be a material imagination, or a dynamic imagination or both. Heidegger sought to move past Cartesian philosophy and he did so by means of being-in-the-world and by resisting any lingering substance, any res, whether cogitans or extensa. Lingis pushed past Descartes
by going in the opposite direction, but diving into substance, by a substantialist epistemology.

If we are of one flesh with this world then would it not makes sense that Lingis would speak of lust for the world? He tries to move beyond merely psychoanalytic treatments that see genital orgasm as the model for human behavior.84 In discussing the Phaedrus, I tried to show how this kind of excitement or eros for the world, which itself was charged with eros, since it lured Socrates out of himself after Phaedrus had lured him out of the city, was a dynamic force, a beauty that linked the world to a common realm with justice and temperance, a passion that reached beyond the limits of passion by Parmenides’ reckoning. “Plato,” Lingis says, “had seen in this ‘solipsistic’ sexual excitement an exstasis that opens one to the outside, to the most remote dimensions of the universe.”85 According to Lingis sex is, among many other things, lust, “the corporeal transformation itself—the shattering of the form that frees the substances, its transubstantiation, and the voluptuous pleasure of this transubstantiation.” In words that echo Bachelard’s material imagination, Lingis calls his analysis “a material phenomenology of the corporeal transubstantiations experienced as lust.”86 This description, along with his reference to Plato, calls to mind the kind of depiction of Socrates one gets in the Phaedrus, an alluring world that draws one out through the luminosity of beauty, then on to other engagements less obvious and colorful. In the Phaedrus, even words themselves seemed to have this eros. Libidinal excitement and lust involve an “exposition of one’s carnal substance to the outside . . . a distinctive

84 Cf. his treatment of Michel Tournier’s novel, Friday, in Foreign Bodies (New York: Routledge, 1994), Ch. 11, “Elemental Bodies.”
85 Sensation, p. 62.
contact with the materiality of the outside."\(^{87}\) Let us consider for a moment this idea of exposition. The ego is not first a grammatical representation, or even a postural schema as in Merleau-Ponty. “The primary ego is not that of a body positing and positioning itself; it is the exclamation of a body in abandon exposing itself. The eddies of egoism form in the taste for enjoyment by which our skillful and armed body becomes sensual flesh. The ego is the nakedness of our body. This nakedness is not lived as vulnerability and in timidity and precautions, but beneath its garb and its armor, as sensuality of life exposing itself to the elements, enjoying its exposure.”\(^{88}\) In light of Lingis’ move away from Merleau-Ponty, we might suggest that the ego arises not from posture but from exposure. The baby is exposed before having any kind of posture, exposed even in the fluids of the womb while it is only borrowing the mother’s posture. And even after attaining its own posture he still relishes exposure as the child strips off his clothes and runs through the garden naked.

Legis says something similar about lust. Lust is the posture become dissolute. “The body emptied of itself closes in like an infant to entrust itself to the anonymous forces that will reproduce its energies and its lusts.”\(^{89}\) And here trust emerges as a theme. Rather than an excess of tension being discharged, pleasure, orgasm, is “the passage into the uncontainment and unrest of liquidity and vapor—pleasure in exudations, secretions, exhalations.”\(^{90}\) Here is something like a merging with the elemental—liquidity and vapor, water and air. To understand these

\(^{86}\) Ibid.
\(^{87}\) Ibid., p. 63.
\(^{88}\) The Imperative, p. 18.
\(^{89}\) Sensation, p. 63.
\(^{90}\) Ibid., p. 64.
‘transubstantiations’ it is essential to recognize that they are provoked from outside, in what he even describes as a suffering.91 We presume that ‘suffering’ here is meant in the Greek sense—undergoing. Such suffering, even suffering pleasure, requires a body, substance, which endures and enjoys. Essential to the case here is the merging of other as lover and other as world. The one who plunges into the aimless night of lust descends into a Heraclitean cosmos, or rather chaos, not even ordered by the Law of Eternal Return of All Things, where earth becomes water and water becomes earth, air becomes fir and fire becomes air.92 The sleep it sinks or dissolves into is not a sleep of death but of trust. We will return to this theme of sleep and trust.

After a chapter on the face that seems to follow a Levinasian frame, Lingis turns to sensuality. He recounts the Heideggerian equation of being-in-the-world with being-unto-death, such that sensibility arises from contact with nothingness. We remember that in “What Is Metaphysics?” the nothing caused beings to recede from us but turn toward us, to stand forth in their being. In Parmenides the uncanny came to be associated with the gods, who pointed. Lingis contrasts this with Levinas’ view of sensuality, that from the first one is in contact with a sensuous medium, not an empty space, but a plenum. “The sensuous element—light, chromatic condensation and rarefaction, tonality, solidity, redolence—is not given as a multiplicity that has to be collected or as data that have to be identified, but as a medium without profiles, without surfaces, without contours, a depth, an apeiron.”93 It is the elemental, both sustaining and sustenance, “goodness of being we enjoy before any practical intention arises to

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., p. 65.
93 Ibid., p. 80.
locate means for our pursuits."94 Note that goodness persists within the world, and sensuality is not intentionality. We remember that in order to contrast enjoyment with transcendence and intentionality Levinas used words such as ‘coiling’ and ‘involution’ to describe it.95 One’s contentment with the plenum is enjoyment, “the vibrancy and excess of our openness upon the elements.”96 Heidegger’s notion of projective transcendence and opening onto being, says Lingis, presumes from the start a free project, room for the hand to move. Lingis seems to prefer contact as the first moment, contact wherein “the contours of things are not limits beset by nothingness, but delineations of alterity, reliefs in the elemental plenum.”97 He identifies two kinds of sensibility in Levinas’ thought, “a sensibility for the elements and things of a world, sensuality, which is appropriate and self-appropriation, and a sensibility for the face of another, which is expropriation and responsibility.”98 Here we clearly have a sense of elemental chôra and social chôra related to each other. Sallis sought to pose this relation, too, by making the elemental, Earth, other as well, but in the treatment of extraterrestriality and the dwelling, if not also in grounding polis so exclusively in earth, he seemed to loose track of the other human. Regarding this elemental and the social, one will not find either of these singly, he says, especially in Otherwise than Being, where the word ‘proximity’ comes to describe the relation to the neighbor. In Levinas’ description of what once was called ‘face’ in terms now of proximity, responsibility to the neighbor already holds a sense of a ‘here’. But from Lingis’ earlier

94 Ibid.
96 Sensation, p. 80.
97 Ibid., p. 82.
comments about the world as a dispersed variety of fields, as opposed to a single totality disclosed by the unifying nothing, we can see that his attempts to bring responsibility to the other into relation to a site, a ‘here,’ will not be like Sallis’ efforts to ground it in the earth as a unifying horizon of all human being. Rather Lingis seems to approach this mutual proximity of other and sensual world through the avenue of pain and pleasure, a possibility opened up by our sensual existence, but which he also wants to link up with the proximity of the other, having one’s here appealed to and contested. Sensuality as a link of place and other seems to preserve the pluralism essential to Levinas’ philosophy.

But the chapter entitled “What is Passed Over in Communication” amplifies the questions he raised about the scope of language when he was speaking of death and institutes a distinction between language and body that seems to risk losing the focus of Levinas’ persuasive analyses of language as the locus of the other’s appeal, a locus that is not governed by power over. This chapter describes the way language can in Heidegger’s sense become inauthentic, avoiding singularity of being. It describes how, in Nietzsche’s estimation, the language of self-consciousness is a pathetic means of posturing oneself subserviently. But Lingis also raises up the language of “self-consecration.” Here one sings, pronounces, affirms, with all the absence of teleology characteristic of a dance. We find in this chapter the kind of move to the world we

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98 Ibid., p. 84.
99 Ibid., p. 95.
100 One finds a similar theme in Merleau-Ponty again. “In dialogue, narrative, plays on words, trust, promise, prayer, eloquence, literature, we possess a second-order language in which we do not speak of objects and ideas except to reach some person. Word’s respond to words in this language, which bears away within itself and builds up beyond nature a humming, busy world of its own. Yet we still insist on treating this language as simply a variant of the economical forms of making statements about some thing.”
have come to expect in Lingis’ formulations, one with a Bachelardian tone, though much more concrete than Bachelard’s writing. Bachelard intimates that humans learned to speak from the birds. Lingis says that the joyous exclamations of self-consecration “function not to record and retain a passing insight, but to intensify a present and future power. Evolving from the chant of insects and birds, these intonations gave their meaning to all the noble and ennobling words of language. Intensifying the gratuitous radiance and rhythm of superabundant life, speech chants and dances in them.”101 This language can be a “relapse into babble, into infantilism,” that leads to a speech that is itself sensual, enjoying itself, its carnal reverberations, its rhythm, a “murmur that delineates and condenses a zone of intimacy and hospitality.”102 Notice that, much as Levinas pointed out a zone within language that is not a content in a communication, the saying, Lingis is also moving language away from a concern with communicated contents, but in a way that does not preserve a rigid distinction between human and non-human. He then pushes this line of thought further, to a kind of speech that leads into another zone only described vaguely. “Joining the incantations of the frogs in the swamps, the celestial birds, the insects swarming in the night. A voice in which the forms of things dissolve as it drifts into the elemental. And babble resounds with another truth.” This other truth is something different from that kind of speaking which “fixes insights into things and delineates the ways of the world.”103


101 Sensation, p. 95.
102 Ibid., p. 96.
103 Ibid.
Can one break down the wall between human and cosmos much further than one does by granting language to the world? Plato hinted at it with the voice from that place where Socrates sat talking with Phaedrus. And he even left a path from the beautiful splendid world that day to that place beyond where one sees those things that ennoble the soul. But in the end Socrates’ pulls the reins on such ecstatic immersion in that place.

The closing chapter of book is entitled “Surface Effects.” In reading it one might do well to remember that one way Levinas described the elemental was as a surface. Lingis here differentiates himself from Levinas, taking up the appeal of the face differently, but seeking to retain the positive contributions of Levinas’ phenomenology of the face. Lingis considers Levinas’ phenomenology to be undermined somewhat by what he calls the very negative metaphysics of Levinas’ description of the face (we can say of it only that it is beyond being, otherness itself). The negative metaphysics is the counterpart to Levinas’ “positivistic phenomenology, which finds no appeal and demand in the earth and skies, plants and animals, and describes sensory things as substances whose contours offer them to removal, usage and appropriation.”

So Lingis will describe face without the divorce from the elemental that he calls a negative metaphysics. The human and the elemental now are together. Face will in fact be the elemental addressing us. Here is the infinite in the flesh. Lingis has moved beyond Levinas, or rather blended Levinas’ thought with Merleau-Ponty. Lingis’ description now, of the face as the elemental addressing us, would seem to one

\[104\] Ibid., p. 103. Lingis’ criticism is somewhat akin to that of Sallis, who claims that Levinas’ elemental is undercut by Levinas’ “global opposition between existence and
way to construe the meaning of such a title: the human (infinite) is in the elemental (flesh).

One might want to ask, since I suggested in the introduction that the difference between Merleau-Ponty and Levinas is the chiasm and the handshake, one flesh or flesh alien to itself, whether the handshake has been preserved by Lingis’ move to the infinite in the flesh. Lingis says, “describing more closely the appeal and demand with which the other faces makes it possible for us to avoid this negative metaphysics and determine the alterity of the other in the physis that is reality and apparition.”

However, he initiates this move by bringing a certain Heideggerian tone to the issue, particularly the distinction between care for oneself and the concern for the other that is most true when it does not take away the other’s care. He says, “the other who reaches out to me reaches out for the skills and resources of my hands. But he does not ask that I take over his tasks for him.” In Lingis’ description the other finds shape as a desire for contact, a quest for a sociality that is what humans are, but not, we might observe, with the kind of destitution that calls forth all my resources by challenging my freedom. The other he describes seems free to appeal elsewhere if I do not respond in the proper way. We seem here to be back in the domain of free subjects that Levinas associates with the aseity of Parmenidean being. I am faced with my choices about the best style of response, a choice that seems short of the ethical exigency that characterizes Levinas’ descriptions of sociality. Lingis seems to have introduced a layer of deliberation into the infinite relation that distorts its infinite nature, its immediacy, its ability to single me

existen.” *Force of Imagination*, p. 159, n 17. Notice Lingis seems to be at odds with himself on Levinas, cf. p. 84, cited above.

105 *Sensation*, p. 103.
out through an appeal made urgent by the other’s looming mortality. Levinas’ analysis may suffer from its enduring context, the concentration camp. The imagined context of Lingis’ description is much more sedate and at ease. He is seeking to put a positive element into the solicitation by the other.

The separation, absence, absoluteness, transcendence, and infinity or infinition with which Levinas characterizes negatively the otherness of the other is revealed positively in the dark light that refracts from his eyes to solicit the light in my eyes, in the resonance held back which seeks its voice in my silences and questions, in the warmth and susceptibility of his or her bare hands disengaged from the things to reach out for the tact and tenderness in my hands. The face of another is a surface of the elemental, the place where the elemental addresses, appeals and requires the involution in enjoyment which makes my eyes luminous, my hands warm, my posture supportive, my voice voluble and spiritual, my face ardent.107

Lingis seems to want to resituate the encounter with the other into a domain or resonances that are erotic, broadly understood.

The key to this move may have come at the beginning of the chapter, where he cites Jean-Luc Nancy’s claim that the imperative is possible only in language.108 This claim would probably fit well with Levinas’ emphasis. Lingis, though, counters, “but language is a second-order conventionalization of the expressive body. It can no more condense in its formulations all that appeals and demands in that body than it can tell all that one sees, touches, and feels as one walks in the forest. The other appeals and requires me with a look, a gesture, a pressure of the hand, a shiver of the skin.”109 I have suggested that the body is the missing element in Heidegger’s thought. Here we seem to have body displacing language’s priority and then being read through Merleau–

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., p. 104.
108 Ibid., p. 100.
Ponty’s flesh of the world, thus linking beings and the world itself. Can there be too much flesh?

One would expect that animals would find more of a place then, though Lingis does not seem quite ready to ascribe face to the black lab that sensuously presses its crown into one’s open palm then practically completes the petting move itself. We wonder what the difference would be for him. But this dog’s action would certainly seem to be a directive, if not an imperative, an imperative that is the surface of the elemental just as the face of another as described above is the surface of the elemental. But if the face of the other is a site where the elemental addresses and appeals to me, then we may well be in danger of making the elemental a neuter, a kind of resubstantialized being within which face appears. Perhaps we have bumped into its limit. We would then be back with Levinas, perhaps stuck with only negative expressions of ethical transcendence.

The human to human relationship may retain some of its distinctiveness for Lingis, but this relationship seems now based on similarity rather than otherness. “The one that singles me out addresses to me the sensitivity, susceptibility, vulnerability, and mortality of his or her presence in the world, to require from someone equally exposed and insubstantial light, ardor, warmth, and support.”110 The word ‘equally’ suggests a certain divergence from the asymmetry that Levinas insists characterizes the infinite relation. Here we have fragile compatriots, not necessarily marching together as Levinas suggested Mitsein does,111 but equally engaged in the human undertaking,

110 Ibid., p. 104.
111 Is It Righteous to Be?, p. 177.
which is also an elemental vector, if not project. Perhaps Levinas’ exteriority was a moment of philosophical hyperbole.

There is one more aspect of Levinas’ description of what we might as well call now the social elemental. He cites Nietzsche’s rejection of self-consciousness as conveying and securing the dependent and servile, and his preference for the noble that exclaims itself, taking a stand as artists working in the medium of their own flesh and blood. Lingis counters the Nietzschean view by saying the bodies do not occupy their spot in space and time, filling it, such that their beauty would be statuesque, holding their own integrity and inner coherence. What he seems to mean here is that the laughter and blessings that resound on human faces are produced in the interplay of the vulnerable. Blessing and affirmation happens here between people, not from self-assertive affirmations. “Not so much the force available in it to effect changes on the things as the somber light that glows on its bared surfaces and in the involuntary grace of its gestures makes us see another’s bodily presence as a blessing in the midst of things.” Intersubjectivity, if we can foist this word on Lingis, seems to be the locus of the liveliness of human existence, “another’s bodily presence as a blessing in the midst of things.”

Laughter is a common theme of what Lingis might agree to call, if he were asked, elemental sociality, sociality below the level of language, that can happen between people who do not speak the language. Laughter might be what links the two kinds of chôra together. Laughter creates trust.

112 Ibid., p. 106.
113 A man who had fought for Germany in the Second World War once told me that he knew Stalin was trouble because he never laughed.
We “divine a coherent implantation in the wide world,” Lingis says “in the rigor and solidity of another’s words.” If we can take his own words to be coherent, remembering his claim about language originating out of bodily existence, then it would seem that the other, in spite of all the luminosity of her presence, comes mostly in language. But language also is somehow secondary. So while the other is truly important, perhaps even having a dominion of sorts over us, he is not first; ethics is not strictly first philosophy. Perhaps Lingis’ goal is to dismiss the whole hegemony of firsts, the rigorous holisms of philosophy.

William Butler Yeats’ father told him, “A man does not love a woman because he thinks her clever or because he admires her, but because he likes the way she has of scratching her head.” Lingis now says the same about all humans. Their presence is idiolectic. The language that conveys the other to us is not language as an ordered system of reckonings but a language unique to us in the meanings we give to it. To conclude this book, he addresses again it seems the untimely and solitary walker, Nietzsche, saying that “words of consecration” do not fix forms that can be maintained, but “function to intensify a surge of vitality generating excess energies,” sent forth in expression “in expenditure without return. The one who exclaims ‘How happy I am!’ already catches sight of friends and strangers, trees and skies upon whom to discharge the warmth and light of his happiness. The one who hears that exclamation feels a surge of happiness in himself straining to release itself. They are traces of departure,

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114 Ibid.
116 Sensation, p. 106.
departing traces.”¹¹⁷ Perhaps we could even take this rebuff of Nietzsche as a culmina\tion of Lingis’ divergence from Heidegger, in saying that the proper defines not my own being faced with death, but the force of the face to face, forged in the idiolectic. Sensation offers a rich expansion and redirection of Levinas’ thought with special attention to the elemental and sensibility.

Lingis’ work seems very ably to indicate the nature of our existence in the flesh. We are not isolated form the world as autonomous subjects, free from whatever engagements we wish to be free from, and even able to be free enough to have perspective on our very freedom from the world. But we also are not defined by our extension into the world. We are not free from other humans, such that our responses to them come only after deliberation. We respond before we think, with laughter, with smiles, with a leap to catch a falling child. This is how we are in the world. It may not be as rigorous in keeping the human and the non-human separate as Levinas might want. But as bodies, upon which Levinas insists, our relation to the ‘non-human’ is not an opposition driven by the exclusive ‘or’ that arose with Parmenides. Levinas said that the psychism is the model for every individuation, every tode ti.¹¹⁸ It seems clear that by letting nature hold directives that define our freedoms, Lingis sees this statement from Levinas as too exclusive.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 107.
¹¹⁸ TI, p. 59.
Conclusion

I have tried to point out a certain tension across philosophy’s history between the cosmos and the polis. Within this task I have sought to single out a certain Ionian assessment of cosmology that seems to me to more adequately depict the world we experience on the every day level, if not on the level of certain twentieth century scientific models for the structure of material reality that animate Bachelard’s philosophy of science and to some extent his poetics. Heidegger’s reading of the pre-Socratics appeared to me to capture much of the nature of their thought. But I sought hints of a counterpart to their functioning under the common moniker of phusikoi. This counterpart was the political, or when it needed a broader label, the social and it seemed to me to be lacking in Heidegger’s thought in part because of an absence of the kind of substantiality that permitted seeing bodies in the flesh. On the other hand I have tried to suggest that Levinas’ thinking about the material world missed some of the richness of this Ionian tradition and even the implications of his own thought about the elemental, which saw a welcome prefigured in dwelling and the hospitality he values so highly present already in the public, escheat character of the elemental in his thinking. It was this public character of the elemental, its non-possessability, that allowed the pre-Socratics and Plato to see justice lingering along the perimeter of the heavens and trying find the same eccentric presence in the interior that appeared in the elements due to apeiron’s presence at the cosmic boundary.

Consequently, I have spoken here of chôra and pushed it in two different directions. One direction is worldly and physical and sought to describe how we experience the world in a kind of fullness. In spite of the force of Levinas’ arguments
about the uniqueness of the other human and the other’s inescapable moral claim on us, something in the non-human world pulls us along in ways even stronger than his description of the elemental, ways that do not necessarily yield idolatry and murder, and the world around us does not have its meaning simply with reference to the needs of the other, is not only there for us to enjoy, but engages us in its own way so that they may give us the sense that our eyes were made to see this, as Lingis likes to say. So in spite of all his criticisms of Parmenides, which usually meant Heidegger, Levinas seems to fall into the exclusive or that seems to have its start in Elea.

But it does not seem right, on the other hand, to let the human slip into the general mixture of beings we find in our world, beings which happen to include ourselves. Levinas, despite whatever conceptual problems attended his presentations, has spoken eloquently for the uniqueness of the human other among those beings in this world. This uniqueness seems to me to need to be maintained, even from dissolution against so noble a ground as the earth. Perhaps even Lingis’ description of face as the elemental addressing us loses this uniqueness, the handshake, even though Lingis’ depictions of the intimacy of the elemental and social chôra, seems to approximate the meaning of “the infinite in the flesh.” Perhaps there is no satisfaction to be had on this matter, or perhaps, as may have been implied by the complicated interplay between cosmos and polis in the Timaeus, the relation between these two is itself dispersive and eccentric, like a dance more than a demonstration.

By way of conclusion I would offer some examples of what my discussion of the two kinds of chôra whose relation to each other is at least not one of domination, might play out.
The more physical version of *chôra*, on the one hand might come to view in certain unusual moments in nature. In the far southwest of Australia are forests of karri trees. These trees shed their bark, leaving the trunk a luminous light tan that shines in the afternoon sun. The karri is the third tallest tree in the world and when you look at them your eyes are drawn up, and then still further up, and again up into the canopy. The height does not fit; it almost seems to explode its own space. As one observer said, “It shocks the form of tree.” Plato’s demiurge informs the forms, or paradigms, into the silent and unseen *chôra*. Shock the form and you may glimpse *chôra*. One might almost say that the karri tree shows somehow the spatiality of *chôra*. To be in the midst of a whole forest of karri only startles one all the more. One might even go so far as Lingis does and say, “the immense solitary tree requires you to stop and hear the music, wisdom, counsel, and immortality it whispers.” One might say that *chôra* whispers in this tree, if one wanted to risk making the tree into a human-like presence, but it is not. It is a tree, uniquely what it is in that it startles without speaking. Humans speak. But even still if while walking through these forests you encounter another hiker, it is as if you have spoken with that person of the trees as soon as you see her. Immediately upon heeding that person the trees are present for both of you in their rupturing height, demanding to be spoken of by the two of you. Your encounter with that other is inflected unavoidably by the trees.

In so far as *chôra* refuses uniform and inert spatiality, what Bachelard calls congealed heterogeneity, in so far as it is rather a dispersed homogeneity, these trees which confuse the idea of tree may show it. So too the minute hummingbird, which

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119 Alphonso Lingis, *Trust* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2004),
wants to be a bug but is a bird, also might whisper of a *chôra* in a different way that might make us actually give thanks for Zeno.

Colors, the bright yellow of the goldfinch like a shout against the deep blue of the sky, the red cardinal, the harlequin lorikeet, function as what Lingis, drawing on Merleau-Ponty, calls a pivot.\(^{120}\) In these colors space jumps in place. Or is it possible for the *chôra* to be still beyond stillness? The silent *chôra* might be in the whiteness of snow across an open expanse, which Max Picard calls “silence become visible.”\(^{121}\)

Compared to this pure stillness Newtonian space is a cacophony. This *chôra* is never discrete, though it seems ever discreet. It is nonpossessable in possessing us and all things.

One can see a curious blend of the social and elemental nature of space in the case of terrorism. Terrorism comes as if from nowhere, as if space itself would attack us. Its very force is that it could happen any place. So it disrupts the very spatial maps that organize our coping in the world not just by disrupting the predictability and familiarity of our world but by forcing the space of our existence to betray us. Terrorism also seems to reinforce our essential spatiality as embodiment, its main goal being to cause from its invisible plane the highest degree of visible carnage, or rupture of flesh, disrupted flesh, for mere death yields not enough terror. In one more sense terrorism seems to bring to the fore the nature of spatiality, at least human spatiality. To

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the extent that terrorism is in any way really an assault on ‘freedom’ it is such in the sense of freedom that describes an open society. Terrorism exposes the extent to which human existence functions on trust. The terrorist uses that openness that trust gives, which is its own kind of clearing, to create a situation where what we take to be our well-being seems incompatible with trust. Terrorism resists exposedness, and it potentiates any and every location. Law enforcement seeking to disrupt terrorism in a sense reminds us of Zeno’s puzzles, parsing space into nothingness. But of course the space in question here is not space per se, but occupied space, like we saw in chapter three chōra was. But within that sphere of occupied space terror strikes precisely at the limits of our capacity to govern (archei or Heidegger’s roman imperium) space, the same limit that potentiates trust.

Science may tell us that atoms are elemental, and the molecules they compose basic, but the fact that these molecules, say from the production of plastics, can be found in the tissues of most people on earth says otherwise. Something else is more elemental than atoms and their empty space, and that is a medium, not a discreteness, a medium we are within and which is us, even if we may have to ask about this ‘is’ at some point. The elemental we revel in is the elemental in us and of us, it is us, and more than just carbon, oxygen, nitrogen and a few other ingredients on the lab shelf. These industrial atoms in our flesh do not fail to be elemental just because they are in flesh, have assaulted the human in spite of itself. They fail to be elemental because they did not accomplish their journey into the human body. Greater movements command them.
It seems clear that we live in this medium rather than the void, or even the nothing. If a child gets cancer is it the intervention of the nothing, the void, to be accepted resolutely in its temporal evanescence? Or is the cancer there because of being a body, and of having been a body and having “lived from . . .” so that she was vulnerable to environment, or genetics, and to the actions of other human beings in that plenum? If a child dies of cancer induced by human carelessness, is it a summons to resoluteness or is it a breach of trust? Are not environmental lawsuits attempts to redress these breaches of trust by which we live? The cancer happens in the midst of a possession by the elemental, and this possession by the elemental does not render technology abhorrent, but amplifies its potential for violating the trust of the polis, which seems not quite adequately described as a site for the eventing of an epoch. Possession by the elemental, being flesh, gives the lie to the dream of atomistic personhood. The elemental seems inclined toward the social and it roots each person in a public domain.

In terms of cosmology as we usually think of it, atomism seems to want limits not usually allowed. Perhaps this case cannot be made rigorously, via the slow and necessary march of discrete pieces of the truth. So much written of it is evocative and fanciful, a wisp of a dream. But some value seems to be here. Some value seems to lurk in displacing our reigning practical cosmology of atoms in a void, of discrete individuals adrift in their freedom, of radically opposed private and public realms, the latter being minimal at best. This dream is destructive and, even more, with the exception perhaps of a few economically privileged individuals, in reality none of us even approaches life in that world. At the very least, it seems that a notion of the
continuity of the elemental will make it easier to understand some sense of responsibility between persons, or the fact that my individuality is not discrete in relation to the warming of the earth, no matter what technological devices might be marshaled to reinforce that boundary between myself and the element of fire. Perhaps a reasonable depiction of the elemental will help us put aside the fantasy of self-possession and see where we are possessed by what we cannot possess.

We shook hands with the infinite under the teaching of Levinas. He said the mathematical idea of a straight line might just derive form the face to face relation. He might also have said that the idea of n+1 arises from this touch of the flesh that is neither our flesh nor flesh we can possess. It was flesh that raced away from us in coming to greet us. It is not derived from experience, but we encounter it, which is, he says, an epiphany. Despite the paradoxical nature of the infinite, it seems that we live with the infinite every day, in the flesh, the flesh of others and our own and the world’s only somewhat less alien flesh.

But in addition to the infinite in the flesh of other humans, who speak, in the end Heidegger has suggested that the things of the world seems to want a voice as well. Trees want to ‘speak’ of something other than lumber. Earth wants to ‘speak’ of something other than ore and corn. Sky wants to say more than just flight paths. Heidegger tried to hear these voices. This kind of listening may not have to obscure the cry of the other human. The song of the earth might be able to harmonize somehow with the song of the other human. Though I have not seen such yet. To talk of the infinite in the flesh seems to mean that, along with Lingis and Sallis, we reject Levinas’
overly rigid differentiation of the *apeiron* and the infinite. This means that his criticism of Heidegger’s philosophy as a paganism of place, a paganism that serves the gods who emerge from the elemental *apeiron*, is somehow inadequate. At the same time, Heidegger’s critique of technology as standing reserve the destroys the Being of beings suffers for want of the elemental.

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