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The Responsibility of Nonwilling: Martin Heidegger and Indian Buddhism

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The Responsibility of Nonwilling: Martin Heidegger and Indian Buddhism

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An abstract of
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Abstract

The Responsibility of Nonwilling: Martin Heidegger and Indian Buddhism

By Roshni Patel

This dissertation project links the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and Indian Buddhism in their critique of *the will*. The will is constituted by the ontological categories, practices, and dispositions of self-assertion, preservation and enhancement. This peculiar definition differs from standard interpretations. Rather than private or personal, the will exists in norms, practices, and shared understandings that span the social space of our world. I argue that the thrust of these philosophies' critiques is that the will obscures a relational, interdependent ontology by imposing boundaries around the self and around the various entities that serve the self. In the first two chapters I develop this ontology through the paradoxical trope of *unbounded finitude* using the insights of each philosophy in turn. While distinct in many respects, both Heidegger and Indian Buddhism argue for an understanding of all beings as interdependent and co-constituted. This mutual involvement among beings does not unify them into a single existent or grant them a shared identity. Finitude remains and provides exposure to the way beings continually and necessarily traverse their limits. In Chapters Three and Four, I present each of their accounts of what the will is and some of the problems they highlight in their criticisms of it. Heidegger presents the will as a historical arising that escalates in the era of modernity, while Buddhist philosophy locates it in beginningless cyclic existence. Both of them consider the will to have reductive capacities that enable its pursuits of willful assertion.

While I allow both Heidegger's and Indian Buddhist philosophy their own separate accounts in Chapters One through Four, I conclude Chapter Two and Chapter Four with a synthesis of their accounts on unbounded finitude and the will, respectively. These sections explore how their accounts complement and deepen each other as well as implications that arise from these ideas on specific ethical issues. To conclude, I provide a brief discussion of an ethics of nonwilling—a decisive move away from the binary of activity and passivity. I suggest that this movement requires a new categorical topography and argue that unbounded finitude is fitting for this.

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Introduction

I. An Ethics of Nonwilling

This project explores what it would mean to have an ethical framework that is void of a locus of power. It imagines the process of realizing a manner of existence in which one does not assume a power-possessing position as an ethical being. Rather than predicating ethics on the power to freely and independently accomplish moral acts, I understand ethics to be possible because of our interdependence, meaning that it is *because* we are thoroughly and continually—even constitutively—affected by that with which we do not identify (a so-called *other*)[1] that ethics is an original and fundamental part of our existence. In light of this feature of our being, I formulate an *ethics of nonwilling*.

On some philosophers' accounts, such an ethics is inherently contradictory. The standard ethical model starts from the fact that we are free and thereby have power to realize ethical aims by directing our freedom with our will. Thus, philosophical reflections on ethics or morality answer questions about the practical means of cultivating the best set of desires to orient our will, how to claim as much of our freedom as possible to realize our ethical aims, and why we consider some aims to be morally better than others. When we predicate ethics on freedom, the way the world or others affect us (rendering us the patient) poses a limitation to our freedom and the range of issues relevant to our moral lives. On

[1] I repeatedly use the language of a "so-called" other or self. Throughout this project I am critical of the sort of separation that the binary of self and other implies. While the argument in the first two chapters on unbounded finitude begins to problematize thinking self and other as separate, I develop an argument explicitly about this in Chapter Four. Inserting "so-called" is my way of referencing the dichotomy without reinforcing it.

this account, morality is only operative with respect to the situations in which we are free to be moral, and rather than ethical life stemming from our being affected, it flourishes when we overpower such effects as agents.

This project deviates from the basic presuppositions involved in this model, and yet it is decisively about the ethical matter of fostering felicitous events.

I engage two main sets of works in this project: those written by Martin Heidegger and those within the corpus of Indian Buddhist philosophy. While different in a number of respects, both of these collections are critical of upholding the structure of power in ethical agency that subtends the standard model described above. Their philosophies critique what is metaphysically presupposed by claiming this sort of power and how inhabiting the position of possessing power creates related structures of seeing and understanding. However, they are concerned not only about what *is* seen or understood, but also about what is *not* recognized or received from the orientation of power. In particular, they are critical of the way that emphasizing a power-wielding locus obscures a relational or interdependent ontology. Secondly, they are critical of the way that such a model lends itself to corruption. The same sort of agential power involved in our ethical understanding can be easily deployed toward selfish pursuits of mastery that are conducive to suffering and that heavily deviate from any normative good. When ethics is a combination of being efficacious and being focused on a particular goal, then we can easily imagine the accomplished efficacy being misdirected toward corrupt ends.

For example, a central claim that Max Weber makes in his account of the Protestant Work Ethic in the early twentieth century is that capitalism engages a value system in which maximizing one's power as a producer becomes a moral objective. Observing

prevalent social trends, he argues that economic values of productivity are mistaken as moral values. There is a sense of "obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, no matter in what it consists…"[2] This sense of duty in which one feels that labor is "an absolute end in itself, a calling" is itself the "product of a long and arduous process of education."[3] By Weber's account, modern capitalism is a case in which a positive valuation for efficacy has become an end in itself such that it is able to preserve its esteem even when a normative good is absent.

Similar concerns have surfaced within our contemporary economy with the rise of "hustle culture" and the way that entire industries promote their incredibly lucrative enterprise as not only a career, but a virtuous and fulfilling lifestyle. The virtue lies in "hustling," or in working long hours and doing whatever it takes to streamline one's life for the sake of this work. The moral corruption is especially evident when long hours justify the concentration of wealth in particular roles in the production process without just compensation for others' labor or skill necessary to the process. To facilitate what Weber called an "arduous process of education," sectors of our contemporary economy praise the virtues of being driven, ambitious, or hard-working—namely, virtues extolling the maximization of one's freedom in relation to productivity—to provide moral justification for inordinate amounts of profit among company elites.[4] The empirical reality of examples like this, in which efficacy displaces a normative good (rather than them being conjoined),

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[2] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London; New York: Routledge Classics, 2001) 19.
[3] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 25.
[4] Erin Griffith, "Why Are Young People Pretending to Love Work?" *New York Times*, January 26, 2019, sec. Business, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/26/business/against-hustle-culture-rise-and-grind-tgim.html.

encourage us to question whether sovereign control is in fact the ideal quality for maximizing one's ethical being.

In addition to avoiding these corruptions, an ethics of nonwilling is more encompassing in terms of what is included within the domain of ethics. By way of realizing ontological insights of interdependence and relationality, an ethics of nonwilling understands the ethical dimensions of our lives to be operative in the whole of our existence because we are always already in relation to the so-called other. Moreover, an ethics of nonwilling does not focus centrally on matters of moral credit or blame because these appraisals require that actors are sovereign in their accomplishment of some act. The primary issue with a focus on this sort of responsibility is that it obscures other ethical features of our lives, most especially, the myriad and ongoing ways that entities affect, condition, and bear upon each other. Thus, an ethics of nonwilling recalibrates our ontological categories to move us out of the topography of sovereign actors and passive receivers and into a more dynamic relatedness.

This initial orientation to some of the broad concerns and motivations for this project prepares us for a more explicit discussion of what the will is and what problems emerge from it. In addition to this conceptual orientation, this introduction to the project will describe my methodologies with respect to cross-cultural philosophy, the works I engage in both bodies, and the conventions I use for citations and translations.

II. The Will as a Problem

The philosophical idea orienting this project is that of the *will*. This term proliferates in western philosophy and has a number of different senses, including rational

deliberation, desire, volition, and power. My particular usage of it comes out of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger as he diagnoses the problems of modernity. The operative definition for the will in this project is *the assertion, preservation, and enhancement of a sphere claiming a particular identity, namely, a self*.[5] However, the will is not merely what we can readily recognize as actions that constitute assertion, preservation or enhancement. It also includes the broader metaphysical apparatus that disposes one toward such projects and that upholds the ontological topography of the will more generally. I use the language of *topography* to bring our attention to the way that the will establishes the shape of existents and the relations that occur among these existents. In a conventional sense, topographies give us a representation of the shape of land or water masses with respect to relevant variables, such as elevation. Similarly, the will creates particular forms or shapes that allow for willing, such as subjects, objects, action, truth, and knowledge. While these particular forms will be discussed more fully throughout the dissertation, correlating the will with a topography helps us begin to comprehend that, in the context of this project, we must divest from common understandings of the will as a faculty in the possession of any individual or as a personality trait that can be stronger or weaker. The will shapes a number of the categories and semantics infusing the space of the world.

In Heideggerian terminology, the will is a fundamental attunement (*die Grundstimmung*). As Bret Davis explains, this means that the will comes prior to the determinations of subject and object.[6] The German word for "attunement," *Stimmung*, is

[5] Heidegger articulates the problem largely through preservation and enhancement. I add assertion to the operative definition in this project because assertion of a particular self is always involved in preservation. In other words, there has to be a particular thing which one is interested in preserving or allowing to grow through enhancement.

[6] Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007) 7.

closely related to the word for the verb for "to determine," *bestimmen*: an attunement provides the set of determinations for what exists and in what way. We can also say that an attunement determines the shape of beings. While the will is the assertion, preservation, and enhancement of the self, its occurrence goes considerably beyond the limits of any particular, individual self. The fundamental attunement of the will grants an entire field of determinations that enable willing and these also are signaled under the signifier of *will*. Throughout this project, particular determinations will be exposed as willing, such as those of activity and passivity, self and other, and identity and difference. Moreover, there is an extended discussion across Chapters Three and Four on the way in which rigid determinations that construct unbending boundaries between entities are part of a willing apparatus to seize power.

The fact that the will is an attunement is closely related to the fact that it is a historical arising. In Heidegger's thought the determinations of the will are not absolute or inevitable, nor should we think of the will as endemic to human existence. He grew concerned about the will after a long engagement with Nietzsche's philosophy on the will to power and after witnessing the horrors of a distinctly modern apparatus of warfare in World War II. However, the core of the problem of the will that he diagnoses and understands is not entirely unique to twentieth century Europe and America, despite his own robust theory of the will as a historical arising in the west.[7]

I argue that there is a considerable critique of the will in Indian Buddhist philosophy, which begins in South Asia two and a half millennia prior to modernity. A central theme in Buddhist philosophy is that all beings lack an independent nature. Because

[7] Chapter Three has a longer discussion of how the will arises and escalates throughout history.

of this lack, there are considerable problems that arise when we cherish a particular claim to a stable and unique identity such that we not only assert a self, but also live in such a way that we are continually oriented toward preserving and enhancing the self. The Buddha highlights these problems because of the prevailing and undeniable disposition toward self-cherishing in our world. This disposition has pervasive and subtle manifestations in a wide range of views, such as our manner of seeing existents or understanding the causal processes that inform how we attribute praise or blame. For this reason, Buddhist philosophy includes discussions on a range of philosophical problems, including metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology. All of these broad areas have bearing on the self-cherishing that is at the heart of the Buddhist problem of suffering.[8]

I articulate the central problem of the will to be that its focused orientation on self-assertion, -preservation, and -enhancement does not allow sufficient recognition of aspects of reality that do not serve this orientation. Misrecognition is in part spurred by the will's resistance against that which does not align with its agenda. For example, the will is able to impose a quality of identity or sameness over a variegated field for the sake of reducing that field to a single entity that somehow is effective for its projects. In Chapter Four, we will see that Buddhist philosophers consider this reduction of difference to sameness to be one of the problematic ways that we claim identity for ourselves and also how we attribute unified identities to other sentient beings.

Whether in relation to subjects or objects, the primary mechanism for the will to assert such rigid determinations is by imposing boundaries around entities. Boundaries

[8] In Chapter Four I connect the roots of the problem of suffering (attachment, craving, and aversion) to the problem of the will.

demarcate spheres of self-identical entities that are starkly different from one another. This means that whatever is included within a particular set of boundaries is reduced to the sameness of an identity, and whatever is on opposite sides of a given boundary is considered separate and uninvolved with the other side. Imposing boundaries is heavily entangled with our willful self-understanding as sovereign. Sovereignty creates a need for protection and even for enhancement. It distinguishes friend from foe. It is an existential modality that necessarily relies on division between self and other, whether on the level of the individual or that of an aggregate, such as a nation. This division is the attunement that places one in a specific mode of contact with the other over and over again, such that sentient and non-sentient beings are grouped as beneficial or harmful, relevant or disposable.

One of the key insights of both Heidegger and Indian Buddhist thought is that finite beings have limits that do *not* function as boundaries. The so-called identity of a finite thing requires conditions to traverse its limits in order for it to have the finite appearance it has. As we will see throughout this project, there are many implications for the lack of boundaries. To say that no individual being or thing has boundaries means that nothing exists independently without being touched, affected, and constituted by its so-called other. Throughout this project, we will see that this lack of independence brings the elevated status granted to subjects into question, affects relations of enmity, and animates parts of our world that we otherwise consider passive or inert.

A cursory look at the alignment between Indian Buddhism and Heidegger on a number of issues begins to demonstrate the range of understandings the will entrenches as well as those that are granted as we move toward nonwilling. For example, both

philosophies locate human existence within a broader field of beings and are not committed to a human-centered cosmology.[9] It is not the case that there is some other being (such as the figure of the Jewish or Christian God) that moves into the center; rather, these philosophies describe the phenomenon of an event without an orienting hegemon. In contrast, the will starts from the position of the subject as the orienting pole of empirical knowledge, value systems, and authority.

A related emphasis in both philosophies is that of interdependence (in Buddhist terms) or relationality (in Heideggerian terms). They emphasize the relations between seemingly discrete entities and consider relations to be heavily involved in the manner of finite beings and things appearing in our world. Finally, they are both interested in how it is that we move into a holistic manner of being that is different from the dispositions of willful self-cherishing and self-overcoming. These elements of their philosophies look considerably different, but there is a common interest in thinking in such a way that one is not beholden to the disclosures of the will.

I begin this project with two chapters on *unbounded finitude,* a paradoxical term that I use to characterize the ontological insights of relationality and interdependence in Heidegger's and Buddhist philosophy, respectively. While entities and beings are finite and have finite appearances, they nonetheless reach across their limits. This is not merely to say that limits are porous, but also that finite things are constituted by these relations. In these chapters, we will see that finitude occurs through dependence. For this reason, the

[9] While it is not controversial to recognize cosmology in Buddhist philosophy, it is also worth noting that there are elements of cosmological thinking in Heidegger's thought. See Daniela Vallega-Neu, "Heidegger's Reticence: From *Contributions* to *Das Ereignis* and toward *Gelassenheit*," in *Research in Phenomenology* 45 (2015): 30.

limits of a finite being never have the character of rigidly, closed and inhospitable boundaries. In this way, the metaphysical expositions in these chapters prepare us for seeing the will as a problem insofar as it does not attend to this dynamic ontology. I make this preparation a priority because we ourselves are likely attuned by the will, which means that it can be difficult to see how an unbounded schema could even be possible. These initial chapters frontload insights that will then contrast with the mechanisms of the will in Chapters Three and Four. These philosophies attest to the fact that unbounded finitude is not readily evident to us in our common involvement in the world and regular way of seeing. Heidegger describes it as an insight that one gains in particular moments (whether through the thinging of the thing, death, or a flash of insight); and Buddhists teach it through rigorous and sustained analysis of various phenomena. Nonetheless, it is not the case that the insight of unbounded finitude is to be upheld as reality against mere appearances in our more conventional lives. The finite appearances of the world *are* in fact real and are the sites through which unboundedness is disclosed. This is to say that even if we understand unbounded finitude to be an elevated insight, it is not the case that the absence of such an insight situates us among flimsy and delusional appearances. Indeed, this is why *finitude* is emphasized as a key part of the insight.

Chapters Three and Four are expositions of what the will is and what ethical problems emerge from it. Chapter Three develops the historical features of the will that Heidegger accounts for in his reading of the history of philosophy. One of the main fruits of thinking of the will as historical is that it helps us consider the ways in which the will does not belong to us or arise purely from us. This itself is a meditation on interdependence, and in that respect, it is conducive to preparing us for nonwilling. However, the historicality

of the will also exposes its wide spatial and temporal span, making it difficult for us to imagine twisting free of the will. Chapter Four is an exposition on the will in Buddhist philosophy. While there are philosophical treatments of volition (*cetanā*) and desire (*tṛṣṇā*, *kāma*) in Buddhist thought, I largely construct an argument in Buddhist sources to accommodate the particular sense in which the *will* is operative in this project. The philosophical arguments exist in more dispersed forms, but there is nonetheless a rigorous and multifaceted critique of self-assertion, -preservation, and -enhancement. To conclude, I provide a brief discussion of an ethics of nonwilling—a decisive move out of the binary of activity and passivity. I suggest that this movement requires a new categorical topography and argue that unbounded finitude is fitting for this.

III. My Cross-Cultural Methodology

To share my culturally pluralist or cross-cultural methodology, I discuss both my reasons for bringing these two philosophies together on the topic of nonwilling and how I do so in the structure and execution of this project.[10]

[10] I focus these comments on cross-cultural methods in this project specifically. I will not spend time justifying cross-cultural philosophy more generally. In recent decades scholars have put forth eloquent and varied arguments to convince broader audiences of the legitimacy, merits, and possibility of cross-cultural philosophy. For example, see: Bret W. Davis, "Step Back and Encounter: From Continental to Comparative Philosophy," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 1.1 (Spring 2009): 9–22; Bryan Van Norden, *Taking Back Philosophy, A Multicultural Manifesto* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Jonardon Ganeri, "Manifesto for a Re-Emergent Philosophy," *Confluence: An Online Journal of World Philosophies* 4 (June 2016): 134–41; Jin Y. Park, "Introduction: Rethinking Philosophy in a Time of Globalization," in *Comparative Political Theory and Cross-Cultural Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Hwa Yol Jung*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009): 1-16.

A. Reasons

The primary reason that I bring together Heidegger's philosophy and Indian Buddhist philosophy is that they have complementary discussions with respect to the topic of the will. While Heidegger continually emphasizes the will as a structural, horizonal, or world historical feature of modernity, Buddhist philosophy focuses on the views, understanding, and practices of individuals. One way to formulate their complementary nature is that Heidegger develops a rigorous philosophy of the will while Buddhist philosophy develops willing, or manifestations of the will. These differing emphases allow them to address complementary sets of questions to provide a more holistic picture of the will. Once we begin thinking about the will, whether we start at the level of world-historical horizon or personal afflictions, we are continually thrown back and forth between these levels as centers of the will's manifestation.

For instance, Buddhist philosophy roots a great deal of willful comportment in ignorance about the interdependent and impermanent nature of all things. This ignorance is not often portrayed as though it is a collective ignorance, yet as soon as we move into a serious confrontation with interdependence, it becomes difficult to understand ignorance as the possession solely of an individual. In thematizations in Buddhist texts, however, the concept of interdependence as it is applied to ignorance does not automatically lead us to thinking in terms of the world or to understand ignorance as having a structural, social scope.[11] Such a thematization is largely left to be desired, even while there are some

[11] In the Madhyamaka tradition, the closest we come to the notion of world is "conventional truth," (*saṃvṛti-satya*) which is seen as somewhat deceptive insofar as it covers over or conceals the emptiness of all things (I discuss this more fully in Chapter Two). Another way this is rendered is *lokavyavahāra-satya*, or "the truth of worldly convention." This has the word "world" (*loka*) in it, but the referent for this term does not have the type of structural inventory that occurs in twentieth century phenomenology and to which I refer above.

remarks here and there. We find accounts of ignorance being related to other features of life, to understandings of karma, and to psychological factors, but these all are generally operative at the level of the individual. Thus, Heidegger's explicit thematizing of the world expands the available implications of interdependence as they relate to ignorance.

This complementary function works in both directions. Heidegger had an admirable commitment to desubjectivizing the will in his writing, but this also meant that his priority was to avoid reinforcing the subject rather than addressing his audience members' relation to their own subjectivity. This is to say that Heidegger encouraged us to move away from thinking in terms of a subject-object binary, but his writing did not explicitly facilitate this movement. Nonetheless, if we consider Heidegger's emphasis on the will as a historical horizon, it is a historical horizon that disposes us toward being individual subjects. This means that Heidegger's own writings attest to the fact that we are encountering his critiques of the will from the attunement of a subject. While Heidegger purposely avoids addressing us as subjects, Buddhist philosophy can move between levels of analysis to address a subject disposition at the same time that there is considerable contemplation on the emptiness of such a position. When we reflect on the will in both of these formulations, we are forced to move between them in a way that ultimately deepens each of them with respect to their own emphases.

Another central reason I bring these two philosophies together is the simple fact that both of these philosophies have quality and relevant philosophical resources for my question. To choose one or the other would change my project from an inquiry that is centrally on a question to one that explores a particular set of ideas in one figure or philosophical tradition. With respect to Heidegger, this work has been done. Bret Davis's

book, *Heidegger and the Will, On the Way to Gelassenheit,* is a thorough exposition and analysis of the way Heidegger's thinking of the will developed throughout the span of his works and includes a chapter on twisting free of the will. With respect to Buddhist philosophy, I will pursue a more thorough project on an ethics of nonwilling that incorporates a wider set of sources in a future project. While the present project includes a great deal of nuanced exegesis on both Heidegger's works and Indian Buddhist works, it is not centrally about these philosophical bodies. Its orientation is toward motivating and imagining an ethics of nonwilling, which is a project to which both philosophical bodies of work make significant contributions.

Perhaps the most methodologically enriching reason for joining Indian Buddhist philosophy with Heidegger is that a philosophical reflection on the will demands we release the boundaries that surround our conceptual and ontological categories. This demand is heeded, if not met, by a cross-cultural process. To think nonwilling requires we move away from all of the associated categories that coincide with the will, including those of activity and passivity, subject and object, or self and other. The process of recalibrating categories – of finding the appropriate sort of existents and descriptors for their manner of existence – is incredibly difficult given the way that the common use of language is inscribed by the same categories that need to be renegotiated (namely, the categories of the will).

This demand from our philosophical reflection on nonwilling is also a demand that is operative in rigorous philosophy that facilitates a dialogue between different philosophical traditions around the world. Whether we call it "comparative," "global," or

"cross-cultural,"[12] a pluralistic approach requires that different terms and manners of thought address each other. To do pluralistic philosophy well, one has to first give a great deal of patient care toward understanding what underwrites particular manners of categorizing ideas or experiences (such as broader worldviews, textual practices, the presence or absence of historical events with intellectual influence). In other words, in one's hermeneutic practice, one has to attune oneself to the determinations that are creating the topographical landscape. This process must be balanced with also recognizing the limits of what a given philosophical tradition can account for within its broader commitments and methods.

The former process is one of opening oneself to the thought of a different worldview and perhaps leaving behind one's own strictest commitments (even if only temporarily for the sake of philosophical experiment). For example, encountering a different manner of evaluating epistemic justifiability may require that one reinterpret precisely what is operative in knowing altogether. However, opening one's thinking in this way is not mutually exclusive with engaging and evaluating ideas in the way that philosophers do. For example, opening oneself up to a new epistemic criterion does not prohibit determining whether that criterion is relevant for certain sorts of problems. However, in addition to contributing to philosophical projects that we already find

[12] There has been a great deal of discussion about the name we use to characterize philosophy that works with multiple traditions. It is a good sign that scholars have evolved in their understanding of various names and that methodologies have grown more complex, nuanced, and decolonial with more pluralistic approaches. With this unfolding, it becomes difficult to know how these names differ in their meaning and how they circulate among philosophers. I do not have a strong position in the debate about what we call it. I understand what I do to be pluralist. The philosophical themes of this project are anti-boundary, and in that spirit, I like how calling it philosophy "without borders" serves as an anthem to pluralize philosophical inquiry in a number of ways. See: Arindam Charkrabarti and Ralph Weber, eds., *Comparative Philosophy without Borders* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

worthwhile, the new criterion (in this example) must also be permitted to bring new epistemic questions to the fore. In this way, cross-cultural philosophy should never be a fetishization of other philosophical traditions. There is a dynamic unfolding in which schemas, commitments, and methods have to answer and respond to each other. This sort of response is key to an ethics of nonwilling. In this respect, the cross-cultural element is an attempt to at least begin performing this ethics.

B. Methods

While enthusiastic about bringing these philosophies together, one of my priorities is to do so with sufficient care to allow them to speak to each other without collapsing their respective differences. To do this, I start by opening myself to the manner of thinking that each philosophy invites me into. This involves particular methods of reading and learning, including reading them in their respective languages and with attention toward the philosophical concerns situating their innovations, polemics, and emphases.

The next stage involves facilitating a dialogue about the will and nonwilling. Given the history of philosophy as a discipline and its participation in a variety of colonialist practices, the performance of a dialogue is a delicate matter. Jonardon Ganeri writes the following as a brief description of colonialist distortions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that were claimed to have been motivated by a loyalty to the integrity of philosophy:

> Colonisers took what was in fact itself a local way of using reason (one contextually entangled with the history of the colonial project), falsely promoted it as a uniquely acontextual methodology, and denied that

> outsiders had so much as a concept of the general application of reason on the grounds that they did not share its parochial epistemic practices.[13]

Because of the way that intellectual encounters have been inflected by hierarchies that favor the geopolitical north as superior, there are considerable dangers that one can easily fall into without intent or any realization of doing so.

For this reason, I pursue this project without attempting to stabilize either philosophy in relation to the other. Fred Dallmayr characterizes this as part of a dialogical exchange. He writes:

> Dialogical exchange means an effort at bridge building across a vast abyss, an effort which does not erase the abyss nor domesticate the 'other shore'… [Dialogue] signals an alternative both to imperialist absorption or domination and to pliant self-annihilation…[14]

My way of balancing between both building a bridge and allowing spacing between the two "shores" is to discuss their contributions in turn. I allow each of them space to carry the reader into these philosophical expositions with the nuance of their language, idioms, frames, and textual genres. For this reason, the first four chapters are divided into two parts, each with a chapter from each philosophical body.

One aspect of "building bridges" is to address a plurality of audiences, especially those interested either in the thought of Heidegger or Indian Buddhism. Both Heidegger and Buddhist texts are skillful in disclosing a manner of thought through linguistic nuance

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[13] Ganeri, "Manifesto for a Re-Emergent Philosophy," 135-36.
[14] Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) xviii.

and playful language games. However, it is these same elements of genius that sometimes make them difficult and uninviting for new readers. After all, it takes a considerable amount of time to gain fluency in reading either "Heideggerian" or "Nāgārjunian." As mentioned above, I allow both Heidegger and Indian Buddhism to show their thought in their own idioms and styles, but I limit this to those features that I consider essential to their thought. It is for this reason that I use much of their technical language, include passages for which I provide close readings, and also incorporate expositions on points that are only visible in German and Sanskrit. However, I also do my best to elucidate the idioms, rather than merely echo them. My experience is that this does not in fact simplify the philosophy but requires a sort of conceptual excavation in which I bring out many layers of thought underwriting the more idiomatic or playful language. Nonetheless, even if I build the bridge, the reader still has to traverse it. Reading this project necessarily requires conceptual and rhetorical traveling.

A second structural feature of the bridge is allowing these philosophies to meet. At the end of Chapters Two and Four (or at the end of each part), I provide a synthesis to discuss what emerges on the "bridge" between them. These syntheses include conclusions that I draw from the prior chapters about the nature of either unbounded finitude or the will (for parts one and two respectively). In addition to articulating some of the ways I understand these philosophical ideas, I also engage material implications on matters such as political sovereignty or the function of borders, as well as philosophical implications for topics such as human exceptionalism and the nature of history.

IV. Textual Corpus and Conventions

A. Martin Heidegger

Within Heidegger's oeuvre, I focus primarily on his writings in the 1940s and 50s. I follow Bret Davis in understanding this era as the one in which Heidegger brings forth his "mature critique of the will."[15] Prior to these decades, Heidegger occupied different positions in relation to the will, ranging from lacking a thematization, to a voluntaristic trumpeting, to the beginning of him turning away from the will.

At times I lean on some of his earlier writings from the 1920s and 30s because of their topical coverage. For example, Chapter One has a section on *the nothing*, which Heidegger wrote about in 1929 in his essay titled, "What is Metaphysics?" However, these expositions generally involve more heavy discussion of texts in the 1940s and 50s. For example, the section on the nothing is most centrally about particular passages from the 1949 *Bremen Lectures* and the 1944-45 *Country Path Conversations.*

While quoting Heidegger, I include quotations from published translations. When I modify translations, I note this in the footnotes. In my initial citation of a piece, I include a full citation of the German *Gesamtausgabe* edition and the translation that I prefer among those available. After this initial citation, I write "GA" followed by the volume number, a colon, the German pagination, a slash, and then the English pagination. For example, "GA 79: 16/15" means that I am citing *Gesamtausgabe* Volume 79, page 16 in the German and page 15 in the English translation. To facilitate accessibility for all audiences, I provide an

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[15] Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 146-184.

appendix with a list of the *Gesamtausgabe* volumes I cite and the corresponding English translations that I have chosen.

B. Indian Buddhist Philosophy

The main tradition I work with in Indian Buddhist philosophy is the Madhyamaka (or "middle way") tradition, beginning with Nāgārjuna in the second century. I focus primarily on writings by Nāgārjuna, his student Āryadeva (third century), one of his principle commentators Candrakīrti (seventh century), and Śāntideva (seventh-eighth century). These texts were written in Sanskrit and many of them survive in Sanskrit. In the cases where the Sanskrit is available, I provide my own translations. Many of the available translations employ particular technical language either because of the way certain terms circulate in contemporary analytic philosophy or because of their technical sense in relation to specific polemical contexts or modes of classical Indian debate. I aim to translate in a way that addresses a plurality of audiences, including those that are interested in continental philosophy and those that are not fluent in the technical Sanskrit terms of philosophical debate. Moreover, I aim to bring attention to the morphology of particular words through my translations and in the analyses that further my arguments. For all of the passages I translate myself, I include the corresponding transliterated Sanskrit in the footnotes. In cases where the Sanskrit is not available and the text is translated from Tibetan and/or Chinese, I rely on published translations into English or French. In the latter case, I translate from French into English and include the French in the footnotes.

In addition to Madhyamaka texts, I engage ideas and passages from the *sutta* canon, which survives in the language of Pāli and is largely translated into English. This canon

contains dialogical narratives presenting the discourses taught by the Buddha and is a central textual body for Theravāda Buddhist traditions. They provide expositions to a number of foundational Buddhist ideas, such as the Four Noble Truths, the three types of suffering, and the five aggregates of the self. While the majority of Buddhist ideas in this dissertation come from Mahāyāna texts, many of my references to the Pāli canon are of foundational ideas that are operative in the majority of Buddhist traditions. I also incorporate reference to imagery and passages that are illustrative through their connotative or rhetorical style. Beyond its accessible and concise delivery of particular Buddhist ideas, the Pāli *sutta* canon also represents a historical body that was important for the Mādhyamikas (or the adherents of Madhyamaka philosophy). The terms that Nāgārjuna uses to orient his chapters in the *Root Verses of the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* hereafter *Root Verses*) all come from the *sutta* canon and engage particular understandings that are developed in that literature.

Beyond these canonical philosophical texts, I engage a number of Indian Buddhist narrative sources. There are several reasons for doing this. Foremost, narrative sources serve as effective illustrations of philosophical points. This is especially important when engaging philosophical arguments that proceed by negation (such as those of the *Prasāṅgika* subschool of Madhyamaka). The operation of this negative philosophy is largely to undermine a number of categories. As categories fall away, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to discuss or write about what understandings remain. However, narratives are effective illustrations for central philosophical points and proceed with more positive descriptions, even while disrupting a number of conventional categories in the process. This is because they are able to persuade an audience into a manner of seeing or

understanding without the limitations of rational argumentation. A second reason is that they animate a number of Buddhist ideas that are largely foreign to audiences trained in western philosophy and otherwise unfamiliar with South Asian cosmology and beliefs. For instance, narratives effectively convey Buddhist notions of rebirth and karma beyond a particular propositional description. This function of narratives is especially helpful in this project that addresses a pluralistic set of audiences.

Another major reason for incorporating narratives is that Buddhist thought allows narrative and philosophical argumentation to complement one another. We see this in the fact that Candrakīrti retells Jātaka tales (tales of the Buddha's previous births) in his commentary to Nāgārjuna's or Āryadeva's densely short verses. Other texts, such as Śāntideva's *Introduction to the Way of Awakening* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*), incorporate ritual elements, meditation techniques, and philosophical arguments into a single text. These are not necessarily "genre bending" works; rather their forms evince the fact that within Buddhist textual practices, different genres are not held fully apart. While there is a distinct set of texts that are categorically philosophy (*darśana*), one needs a broader orientation in order to access a number of arguments and references within these texts. Similar to how our knowledge of ancient Greek philosophy is situated within studies of Greek literature, histories, and plays, studying a range of Buddhist texts allows hermeneutical rigor that is not available of one limits their studies to arguments in philosophical texts. I share some of this textual interplay with my readers to impart a deeper level of understanding.

I use English translations of all Sanskrit and Pāli terms. The first time I mention these words, I include the Sanskrit or Pāli in parenthesis. I use Sanskrit terms without marking them as Sanskrit and qualify terms to be in Pāli when that is the case. Even though

I translate these words, it is still the case that they have a technical philosophical sense, which may significantly differ from how they circulate in contemporary philosophical discussions. For example, *nature* or *essence* (*svabhāva*) in the Buddhist context is necessarily a quality that is unchanging. I encourage readers to refer back to my initial introduction of several terms to help them recall the operative valence of the English translation. This will greatly facilitate their back-and-forth traversing of the bridge between these philosophies.

CHAPTER 1: Unbounded Finitude in Heidegger's Thought

I. Introduction

These first two chapters unfold an ontological paradox that both Heidegger and Indian Buddhist philosophers are able to respect: entities in our world appear in discrete, finite forms such that their occurrence is within evident limits, but also pass beyond or exceed these very limits to maintain constitutive relations to their world and each other. Moreover, it is by virtue of these limits' dynamic character that finite things have meaning, causal relations, and vibrancy. To link this shared insight in two culturally and historically different philosophies, I use the paradoxical trope of *unbounded finitude.*

Being finite implies having ends or limits such that no being is absolute. Finitude also connotes the absence of monism to retain differentiation and texture among beings, allowing for a world in which there are particular, discernable things. If we understand these finite entities that are proximate to each other to be fully separate, we can quickly slip into an understanding of each entity as a delimited sphere that upholds a particular identity. The limits would then function as solid boundaries whose primary function is security. In this way, finitude can be conducive to vulnerability. Krzysztof Ziarek describes this relation:

> Before one can speak of vulnerability, there needs to be a "something," an "it"—a being or an entity—that is or can become vulnerable, with its boundaries compromised, violated, even destroyed. Vulnerability is concerned precisely with the permeability of such *boundaries*, their susceptibility to danger and violation... [T]he notion of vulnerability is

> subtended by the idea of integrity: the condition of being whole, entire, or undiminished, taken as the proper state of existence of what, in principle, should be and remain within its assumed boundaries, proper or integral to itself, and thus invulnerable.[16]

Unbounded finitude, as an ontological insight, sheds this condition of vulnerability by dissociating the limits surrounding any finite thing from being a protective shell around something with a pure character or integrity. This ontological trope highlights the way that limits do not contain or constrain any particular being within a specific and determinate locus, nor do they serve as protective barriers that prohibit the external world from affecting the "content" within limits. Limits have particular functions, such as granting an appearance, rendering intelligible a collocation of conditions, and serving as the site of relations. However, we need not understand limits as metaphysical boundaries that prohibit movement or preserve the purity or integrity of what they contain. Ontologically speaking, they are not borders of a sovereign sphere that warrant the corresponding accoutrements of defenses, walls, and fortification. In later chapters we will see how a central feature of the will is that it mistakes finitude for the sort of situation that warrants such fearful protection through the construction of inhospitable boundaries.

Interested in limits throughout the span of his career, Heidegger continually interweaves the character of finitude and openness. Andrew Mitchell describes this insight: "every boundary that encloses, at the same time is an interface that exposes. Nothing is ever so closed for us; there is always (only) relation; and this is a staple of Heidegger's

[16] Krzysztof Ziarek, "A Vulnerable World: Heidegger on Humans and Finitude." *SubStance #132* 42, no. 3 (2013): 169.

thinking, perhaps even his only thought."[17] Mitchell argues that a core idea in Heidegger's philosophy is that limits offer both enclosure and exposure. While he uses the language of a boundary, this project's deployment of unbounded-ness is, in part, a rhetorical emphasis on exposure since enclosure is our most immediate understanding of a limit. Unbounded finitude directs us to recognize Mitchell's point in this passage, that limits are the site of an "interface."

To see Heidegger's nuanced thought about finitude, I turn to a passage from his 1959 lecture "Hölderlin's Earth and Sky":

> In-finite (*Un-endlich*) means that the ends and sides, the regions of relation do not stand by themselves cut-off and one-sidedly; rather, freed of one-sidedness and finitude (*Endlichkeit*), they belong in-finitely (*un-endlich*) to one another in the relation which "thoroughly" holds them together from its center. The center, so called because it centers, that is, mediates, is neither earth nor heaven, God nor human (*Mensch*). The in-finity (*Un-endliche*) that is to be thought here is cryptically (*abgrundig*) different from that which is merely without end (*Endlosen*), which, because of its uniformity, allows no growth. On the other hand, the "more tender relation" of earth and heaven, God and man, can become more in-finite (*un-endlicher*). For what is not one-sided can come more purely to light from the intimacy in which the named four are held (*gehalten warden*) to each other.[18]

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[17] "The Exposure of Grace: Dimensionality in Late Heidegger" in *Research in* Phenomenology 40 (2010): 315.

[18] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 4: Erlaüterungen Zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1996) 163; "Hölderlin's Earth and Sky" in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. by Keith Hoeller (Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 2000) 188. Translation modified. Joan Stambaugh dedicates a

In this passage, Heidegger discusses Hölderlin's capturing of the "more tender infinite relation" of earth, sky, mortals, and gods.[19] These four are held together. They do not have particular ends demarcating where one of these elements stop and another begins. Indeed, even in our most ordinary understanding of earth, sky, man, and gods, such a divergent spatial configuration that relegates each of the four to its own cell leaves an incomplete picture of their bearing upon each other and of their individual characters. What any of them are on their own is only accessible in the context of their belonging to each other.

The fourfold constitutes one of Heidegger's most rigorous and compelling presentations for shifting how we understand what it means for something to be finite. In this particular passage, he targets how we grasp an "end" because that word appears within the German words for both finitude (*die Endlichkeit*) and infinity (*das Endlosigkeit*). In our common understanding, an "end" marks a final point beyond which a thing no longer exists (e.g., "The End" of a story). Something's beginning and end are two bounds that hold it within specific dimensions. What is infinite, then, is understood to be continuous or endless. Heidegger's shift in naming what is infinite from *das Endlosen* to *das Un-endlich* encourages us to stretch our understanding of what is at stake in limits. If we were to do a literal, albeit coarse, translation of *Un-endlich*, it would be *not-end-like*. The *infinite* or *un-endlich* relation among the elements of the fourfold occurs at their limits, but not at any end in the sense of their dimensional finality. The implication is that they continue past these not-end-like limits.

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chapter to this passage and the idea of the in-finite in her book *The Finitude of Being* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992) 99-103.

[19] I discuss the fourfold and each of the four elements at greater length later in this chapter. For audiences who are less familiar with this idea in Heidegger's thought, what is most relevant to the present discussion is that each of the four occur finitely but in relation to each other and so without boundaries holding them apart.

The basis for this analysis is that a limit is not a sovereign determination, such that the form of a thing is decided only in accordance with the qualities and essence of that thing. A limit is better understood as a point of relation. The points that mark a limit granting finite form are moving and unfixed, unlike those on either end of a line in a geometric plane. This movement stems from the function of limits as a space of connection and intimacy among multiple finite entities. A limit is the point at which beings reach beyond themselves and become involved with or intimate to one another. Limits hold the earth, sky, gods, and mortals together in an intimacy (*die Innigkeit*) such that they go past their limits, even through the limits of each other, becoming internal to one another and offering each other the particular abode they have in the larger worldly configuration. What any one of these things are has to be understood while holding the other parts as what they are, too.

Another point worth noting here is that Heidegger is not interested in upholding a notion of infinity that is completely without any sort of break or differentiation. He clarifies that his emphasis on the infinite is not what is continually ongoing, completely without end (*Endlosen*). The structure of uniform infinity would not permit any sort of relation or holding together among different, finite things. Everything would wash into the same ocean without discernable currents or streams. A related problem would be a situation in which something is "cut off" at its ends such that its limits are in fact their conclusive end. In this situation, entities would exist independently without any hospitable invitation or possibility for others to engage. Heidegger says that this would generate a "one-sidedness," such that a thing's existence would not have any bearing on anything else since it would not be able to reach through its own limits. In this sort of situation, nothing would semantically or

functionally shine or become illuminated by virtue of their dependent relations with anything else. An *unendlich* character for limits avoids both the monotony of an infinity that has no limits whatsoever and a collection of discrete elements that exist merely in proximity to each other but without any ontological bearing upon each other. The former offers the variance of finitude and the latter qualifies this finitude as unbounded.

To account for unbounded finitude in Heidegger's thinking, I turn to three main topics: the thing, technology, and the nothing, which I treat in three sections. In each section, I highlight a different feature of unbounded finitude. We see that things are at once finite and a constellation of relations that require openness in their limits rather than the closure of boundaries. Things are able to reach or touch one another, providing a tenor for relation that is bright and sometimes even beautiful. The relational ontology of things makes alienation seem utterly impossible. However, as we move to the following discussion about technology, we see that such openness can also allow relational webs of unwieldy proportions, perhaps reaching the point of utter dispossession. Technology is not simply the machinery of our world, but a network of demands placed upon humans, resources, the earth, projects, and so forth. There is a threat of being over-determined by these relations, especially in our most intense efforts to assert mastery. In this regard, boundlessness poses a threat to finitude, making everything undifferentiated and boringly meaningless. In the final section, I turn to the nothing—a rather unlikely topic for alleviating concerns about how what is unbounded may lead us to an understanding akin to monism and its connotations of nihilism. The nothing allows what is unbounded and finite to return to a fruitful balance, exposing the finitude of meaning, while also celebrating the relations that bring forth a meaning-laden world. Each of these topics offers

a rich way to think of finitude on its own. Progressing through them in this sequence offers a subtle narrative that I will layout more explicitly in the conclusion of this chapter.

II. The Thing

Heidegger begins the lecture "Das Ding" by forcing objectivity to abdicate its claims to unqualified or indisputable truth. With the colloquial sense of the term "object" (*der Gegenstand*) we want to designate what is "self-standing" (*Selbststand*),[20] true without

[20] "As a vessel, the jug is something that stands on its own. This standing-on-its-own characterizes the jug as something independent. As the self-standing [*Selbststand*] of something independent, the jug is distinguished from an object [*Gegenstand*]. Something independent can become an object when we represent it to ourselves…" Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtasugabe Band 79: Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*, ed. by Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1994) 5. *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking by Martin Heidegger*, trans. by Andrew J. Mitchell (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012) 5. Shortly afterward, Heidegger emphasizes that the self-standing of the jug is not what qualifies it to be a thing: "Does the standing-on-its-own of the vessel already define the jug as a thing?... "Indeed, from the objectivity of the object and objectivity of what is self-standing, no road leads to the thinghood of the thing" (6/6). These passages make it difficult to accept the decision to characterize things as independent in recent scholarship by Theodore George and Günter Figal. George uses "Das Ding" to say that things are independent, but the pages he cites do not provide such argumentation from Heidegger. Additionally, George seems to be suggesting a dualistic opposition between comportment toward things and technological objects. As we will see in the following section, I suggest a more complicated relation between these modalities and do not find that reading them as foils of one another is fully defensible. It also seems to me that Figal undermines his own notion of independence. At one point, he shows that while Heidegger takes away the reliance of an object on a subject in his conception, he does not arrive at something independent, but the fourfold, the gathering event of the world (363). However, Figal also uses the language of "independence" because he wants to argue that some things can remain unclaimed by technology (366). I agree with his point but disagree with how he reads Heidegger's discussion of what is self-standing and his claim that things can have "definite dimensions" or can be "closed up" (366). Once again, I am confused by this valence of independence since at the end of the same page he suggests something paradoxical that is similar to what I am trying to articulate with the term unbounded finitude. He says, "[The thing] takes up space and provides space in such a way that it is closed and, at the same time, open" (366). While these writers are doing important work, this piece of their thought—which rests on a value for freedom and independence—is not faithful to Heidegger's writings in the 1940s. See Ted George, "Thing, Object, Life" in *Research in Phenomenology* 42, no. 1 (2012): 23; and Günter Figal, "The Universality of Technology and the Independence of Things," trans. by Margot Wieglus in *Research in Phenomenology* 45 (2015): 363. See also Günter Figal, *Objectivity: The Hermeneutical and Philosophy*, trans. by Theodore George (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

condition as though the objective is absolute. Objects ought to be what they are independently of any particular subject's perspective or imputation. He later refers to Kant's effort to think of an object in itself (*Der Gegenstand an sich*) as the being that is what it is independently of a relation to human subjectivity.[21] We think of an object as the sort of being whose essence is intrinsic to it. It has rigid boundaries such that what is outside of it does not affect it. This allows an object to move from place to place and still be the same object. Additionally, the objective is often granted a sort of sacredness in terms of its veracity. This rests on an understanding of the objective as having a purity or integrity such that it is independent of any contingency on this or that subjective perspective. What is objective is not touched when it is intuited, even though it has the possibility and capacity of impressing upon a subject. This ontological unflappability also makes the object fairly inert, meaning that it does not have a dynamic and responsive existence.

However, the structure of objecthood necessitates a representing subject to stand opposite (*gegen*) from the object. The dependence of an object on a subject then compromises its rigidity. It can no longer be thought of as self-standing, independent, or "in itself." Heidegger says, "Thought in a rigorously Kantian manner, "thing in itself" (*Ding an sich*) means an object (*der Gegenstand*) that is not an object, because it is supposed to stand without a possible 'against' (*Gegen*) for the human representing that comes across it."[22] Presumably, he brings up this internal inconsistency within the parameters of objecthood twice (once at the beginning and once half way through) in a single lecture to loosen the audience's attachment to a conception of the objective as a fully

[21] GA 79: 16/15.
[22] GA 79: 16/15.

independent domain. However, he is not interested in merely uncovering this possible incoherency for the sake of invoking a subtler or more nuanced sense of the relation between subjects and objects. Nor is he trying to recover self-standing objects (*Selbststand*) or objects standing opposite subjects (*Gegenstand*).

Instead, Heidegger provokes a thinking of the thing (*Das Ding*) that things (*dingen*), rendering everything (and everyone) conditioned (*be-dingten*). To help us access what he means with this nuanced and playful language, Heidegger picks a concrete example: a jug. He guides us through the process of finding the thinghood (*Dinghaften*) of the jug. He begins by thinking about the jug as produced, as having a history and an efficient cause that brought it forth, to see if that brings us to its thingliness. We imagine the potter and the earthen clay, but when the jug takes form, it stands on its own.[23] Since this general sense of causality is true for all beings, this reflection does not bring us to the jug's specific and singular character as a thing.[24] Moreover, we cannot get to the thingliness of the jug by turning to its function as a container that holds liquid. This description reduces it to a generic receptacle, a set of impermeable sides holding air that is displaced when a liquid is poured into it. These methods of looking at its causal production or functionality are predicated on a metaphysics that upholds objectivity. They presume that objects exist as independent beings whose past and futures are readily evident or predictable (despite not being temporally present). Objects have dimensions within which they are contained, and because they are reduced to this digestible form, perceiving subjects can easily intuit objects to discover their properties. They stand opposite from the subjects intuiting them,

[23] GA 79: 6/6.
[24] GA 79: 6/6.

allowing subjects to find their way around the predictable terrain of any particular object. However, this is a generic description that enables measurement as well as calculation while the features of the jug that qualify it as a thing have wholly disappeared.[25]

However, what makes the jug a singular thing rather than a generic object is the way that it *things* (*dingt*). This short phrasing is densely packed with implications about the numerous qualities of thinging. First, to say "the thing things" requires that we recognize agentive qualities in the thing. The grammar of this writing puts "the thing" in the nominative, meaning it is the agent of the verb *dingen*. There is at the very least a grammatical activity to things that is quite different from the inert stability of the object. By giving the jug this grammatical form, Heidegger is attempting to undo what vital materialists like Jane Bennett (quoting Rancière) calls the "partition of the sensible," the habit of metaphysically parsing the world into dull, inert matter and vibrant life.[26] He says, "From the thinging of the thing there takes place and is first determined the presencing of what presences [*das Anwesen des Anwesenden*] after the manner of the jug."[27] The jug is not merely produced or brought forth, but there is an occurrence of something coming to presence from the jug.

Thus, a second important piece of thinging is that the jug's appearance points not only to a material jug, but to the world that mediates the jug. This is markedly different from the way an object is fully present such that its being is final and decided. In contrast, the jug is open such that it shows itself and the world, not once and for all, but in a continual

[25] GA 79: 9/8.
[26] Jane Bennett, *Virbant Matter, A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010) vii.
[27] GA 79: 16/15-16.

way: "The jughood of the jug essences (*west*) in the gift of the pour."[28] As translator William Lovitt explains, essencing (*wesen*) is the, "manner in which anything, as what it is, takes its course and 'holds sway' in its ongoing presence, i.e., the manner in which it endures in its presencing."[29] Rather than existing amid ontologically uniform objects, we (qua mortals) are granted a world in which things hold sway, or take some form amidst enacting and enduring an ongoing process. Tied to the way the jug directs us toward the world is the way the thing allows its own concealment to presence. This is a third quality. Insofar as the thing's showing of itself is ongoing and not fully present, there is concealment or a withdrawal. We can understand this through the variance that is offered by having relational conditions. As the material form of the jug engages with particular conditions in one context, it shows itself in a certain way that also conditions its surrounding beings; in another context, different aspects of the 'same' jug could come to the fore while others fall back. However, the jug is not multiplicitous in a deceitful way because it also reveals its own concealment.[30] We will notice a difference with positionality and the way that what appears in that configuration forgets the sending of being that gives it presence.

If "the jughood of the jug essences in the gift of the pour," this pouring gives in two ways: the straightforward sense in which the jug pours, and thereby gives, some liquid that it was holding; and more originally, by showing what gathers in the essencing (*Wesen*) of

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[28] GA 79: 11/10.

[29] Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes (1938)" in *Gesamtausgabe Band 5: Holzwege*, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klosterman, 2003); "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1977) 115, See Lovitt's footnote 1. In addition to the discussion that follows, I will return to this notion of "holding sway" in the Conclusion.

[30] Mitchell, *The Fourfold*, 38-39.

the jug.[31] As a thing, the jug grants the world, or the context in which anything at all can have meaning. A thing is a movement that both brings itself to presence and also allows the world to come to presence. The jug only holds sway as a jug in the world, and the world is one in which jughood abides (*weilen*). The phrasing of "the jug essences," is thus more complicated than a basic subject-verb relation, insofar as the jug and the essencing are not separable. Theodore George says this dynamic way of being that evades the categories of both agent and patient is captured by the middle voice in ancient Greek,[32] a grammatical form that Benjamin Crowe says describes as capturing "the envelopment of a sometime agent by a larger process… There is neither a clearly demarcated agent, nor a receptive object."[33] In this particular case, I would also argue that the grammatically agentive *jug*, and the verbal, *essence*, collide in such a way that the middle voice is not only a lack of demarcation between agent and patient, but also agent and action, namely the jug and its essencing.

It is through the hold of the thing that we are given a world that can touch and move us. Heidegger looks to the Old High German of the word to point out that *Ding* connotes an affair, not one that is settled and closed, but one that is still under discussion. Thus the "thing" names "what concernfully approaches (*angehen*) the human in some way."[34] Andrew Mitchell translates *angehen* as "concernfully approach" because the verb can mean both to approach and to concern. He combines both senses of the word to preserve Heidegger's way of capturing the relation that is in play within concern: things come to us

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[31] GA 79: 11/10.
[32] George, "Thing, Object, Life," 22.
[33] Benjamin D. Crowe, "Resoluteness in the Middle Voice: On the Ethical Dimensions of Heidegger's Being and Time," *Philosophy Today* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 228.
[34] GA 79: 12/13.

when we care about them. This is not conditional in merely one direction, such that if we care then they approach us. The relation between the two is closer to identity: to be concerned is to be approached, and also to be approached is to be concerned. In our use and handling, things are not idly passive, but reach out to us. "Approach" gives us a spatial understanding of concern that is helpful here because it helps us see that the limit of a thing is not a withholding boundary. The thing extends in our direction, demonstrating its lack of boundary while having finite limits. With concernful approach, the thing brings us our world and holds meaning in this particular place.

What the jug holds together is the four that belong together: "The thing things. By thinging it lets the earth and sky, divinities and mortals abide. By letting abide, the thing brings the four in their remoteness near to each other."[35] This nearness is unique to the relation granted by a thing. While an object remains at a distance from a subject, a thing brings the four elements near to each other and holds them in their belonging. In brief, these elements are the fructifying material elements (earth); the passing of time and the forces of weather (sky); the "hinting messengers" who withdraw from presence (gods); and the ones who are able to die (mortals).[36] Heidegger says that sky and earth are brought together in what is poured, whether water for an oblation or wine for a libation. The jug gathers the spring or the vine, respectively, along "the nourishment of the earth and the sun of the sky…betrothed to each other." Moreover, the pouring of the jug enlivens mortals, or better yet, gives to the divinities a consecrating gift in an oblation. The jug is not a mere

[35] GA 79: 17/16.
[36] GA 79: 17-18/16-17. For an extended and thorough analysis of the Heidegger's notion of the fourfold in this lecture series and beyond, see Andrew J. Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*.

receptacle, such as a bucket, but a sacred vessel; the mortals and the gods are in a relation where the former gives to the latter through a pouring.[37]

The thing brings these near to each other in the simplicity of a single fold (*die Einfalt*), while each remains distinct and is brought to itself by the others. Heidegger describes this unity with a dazzling image of mirrors and illumination:

> Each of the four in its way mirrors the essence of the remaining others again. Each is thus reflected in its way back into what is its own within the single fold of the four… Lighting up each of the four, this mirroring appropriates the essence of each to the others in a simple bringing into ownership [*einfältige Vereignung*]. In this appropriating-lighting way, each of the four reflectively plays with each of the remaining others. The appropriative mirroring releases each of the four into what is its own (*gibt jedes der Vier in sein Eigenes frei*), while binding (*bindet*) the ones so released to the single fold (*Einfalt*) of their essential reciprocality.[38]

The four are dependent on each other to be what any of them are individually, meaning that what comes into its own is "given or delivered" by another, and so "owned by another."[39] Notice the contrast from an object we deem to be self-standing or in-itself. In the case of a thing, each of the four comes into its own through the ownership of another. They also illuminate one another and reflect each other, meaning they give each other their sense of own-ness. Each of the four are neither fully dispossessed nor fully sovereign – the

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[37] GA 79: 10-11/11.
[38] GA 79: 18/17.
[39] Andrew J. Mitchell, "Translator's Foreword," in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking by Martin Heidegger* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012) xiv.

own-ness of any one of them is contingent on what is designated as other, which also is only appropriated by what is claimed as the original own-ness.

This passage from "The Thing" upholds an important piece of unboundededness by directing us to think of a being as not bound *within itself*, but *to another* that is conventionally thought to be outside or other. This is one instance in which we see Heidegger showing the binary of interior/exterior to lose its footing. Heidegger says that the four are freed or released (*freigeben*) to their own, but only because they are tied (bound) to each other.

However, this relation to another should not be understood as bound in the sense of a restriction. Heidegger uses many forms of playful language to show that things, while tied to one another, are open for these relations. This openness is an integral part of what it means to be unbounded – one's limits are not a means of enclosing or folding up oneself, but the site of contact with another. Limits show or essence as an "appropriating mirror-play" (*das ereignende Spiegel-Spiel*) that is a "round dance of appropriation (*Reigen des Ereignens*)."[40] This round dance is not a tightly constraining hoop, but one that connects the circle by releasing each of the four "into their own pliancy, the nimbleness of their essence [*das Ringe ihres Wesens*]."[41] Dancing, lively softness, and gleaming mirrors certainly provoke a striking image through which we are to see that things have the character of being open:

> Through these terminological maneuvers, Heidegger seeks to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of construing the thing as either something substantial

[40] GA 79: 19/18.
[41] GA 79: 19-20/18-19.

> and solid or as something utterly diffuse or negligible. The thinging of the thing does not take place in a second order of reality apart from that of our own. These things are liminally situated. Their nimbleness consists in their opening onto relations with the world around them via the mirror-play of the fourfold. Neither present nor absent, things are "slightly" of the world, we might say, and that is all they can ever be.[42]

The constitution of the thing has implications for the beings we conventionally consider to be subjects or agents. Heidegger is offering an interpretation in which the will of a subject is not doing all the work of deciding what value, use, or meaning another being has. Instead, the supposed subject arrives into a clearing in which it participates in the appropriation of beings. This participation means that the "subject" also is appropriated. Heidegger says that there is an arrogance (*Anmaßung*) involved in believing that one is unaffected by a thing, or unconditioned (*unbedingten*), and that a critical step to recognizing the thing as thing, rather than as an inert object, is to leave behind such arrogance.[43] This requires that one leave behind representational thinking, or the metaphysical model that distinguishes subjects from objects with the corresponding attributes of agent and patient. These binaries require boundaries that sequester each of its components into separating compartments. To commemorate the thing also means to commemorate oneself as being part of the mirror play, rather than an alienated third-party master who coordinates or conducts the production of what a thing might be. This requires a commemoration of one's constitutive openness to the world and the fact that one's identity comes from the gathering of an event

[42] Andrew J. Mitchell, "Translator's Foreword," x.
[43] GA 79: 20/19.

with myriad parties. In this way, Heidegger shifts the focal point from humans to things, showing us that we cannot think about our identity as contained and controlled within our boundaries; we have to bring things into the foreground as things, thereby removing the presupposed priority of both the human and the subject.[44]

Heidegger's discussion of the thing encourages us to consider the possibility that matter has some of the qualities we attribute to agents: they produce effects, evade the metrics of calculability, and even come toward us. Attending to this character of things is the sort of thought required if we are to leave behind the representative thought that heightens our ontological arrogance as we understand ourselves to be subjects standing over a field of objects that we willingly (and uniquely) are able to control.

The scholarship put forth by Jane Bennett and other so-called "new materialists" is helpful for thinking through an ontology that decenters the (human) subject by virtue of elevating all matter to participate in the production of our world.[45] Indeed, Bennett introduces her book with a chapter on "The Force of Things," in which she describes a striking encounter with a glove, a rat, pollen, a bottle cap, and a stick composed into a "contingent tableau" on Chesapeake Bay for her to encounter on her morning walk. She reflects on their ability to produce an effect. In particular, they gave her a sudden disclosure of the "*anti*materiality" inherent to a consumptive culture that conceals the vitality of things

[44] Ziarek, "A Vulnerable World," 176.
[45] Bennet, *Vibrant Matter*, 13. Of course, there are many aspects of new materialism that clashes against or goes far beyond Heidegger's thought. I have no desire to conflate these philosophies, but there is interesting crossover that helps animate Heidegger's concept of *the thing* beyond his illustration of the jug.

by rendering them useless junk.[46] This interpretive folly about the metaphysics of things and the way we are conditioned by them is what her book tries to correct.

Using the language of Bruno Latour, Bennett describes an ontology with "distributive agency," capturing "multiple modes and degrees of effectivity."[47] This schema presents multiple *actants* that do not necessarily contribute to the same degree or in the same way to the configuration of a given event, but that nonetheless are operative as forces in an assemblage.[48] Moreover, this sort of paradigm does not allow for a particular hegemon (such as a human subject) to steer the agential potential on a given scene because there is no space for the hierarchical distinction between an agent and patient.[49] When we are only willing to attribute agency to subjects who are persons, we fail to recognize this dynamic quality of our material world. I see many of these same insights, albeit in subtler form, in Heidegger's description of the fourfold. Mortals are but a piece of a broader event, and while they have a specific role in the gathering event that assembles each of the four together, they are not so unique that they stand as masters directing earth, sky, or the divinities to a mortal will.

Many of us might object to such an account and note that there are significant ways in which humans steer their courses and dominate other beings. Indeed, many accounts of human nature provide such an understanding for the sort of being that a human is. For example, in Genesis or the origin story of Biblical religions, God establishes that the earth

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[46] Reading Bennett's account reminded me of David Wood's presentation on a panel about Andrew Mitchell's *The Fourfold* at the 2016 Heidegger Circle in Chicago. In the course of his presentation, he pulled from his pocket a series of things that struck him on his walk from his hotel to DePaul University's campus that very morning. Most memorable among these things was the corpse of a bird.

[47] Bennett, *Virbant Matter*, viii.

[48] Bennett, *Virbant Matter*, 21. "Assemblage" is a concept she takes from Gilles Deleuze.

[49] Bennett, *Virbant Matter*, 24.

is under the dominion of man.[50] By the seventeenth century John Locke appealed to this narrative to position humans as masters at the center of the natural world. He argued that because we improve land with our labor we are to claim it or appropriate it. Without human "improvement," the land is otherwise left to waste or idleness.[51] In the modern epoch of technology we can see ourselves taking control for ends of our own making. We extract resources from the earth and deploy them in various endeavors of production. We have managed to shrink the vast distances of the world with technology for communication and travel and have also continued to assert control over the microscopic kingdoms of bacterial and viral disease. Rather than a dynamic mirror-play, it seems as though everything simply mirrors us, the dominating subjects who make these things instruments for our ends.

III. Ge-Stell and Technology

Heidegger tells us that the apparatus of technology gives us an illusion of human machination and exploitation.[52] In our commonplace understandings of technology, humans are independently in control of resources and machines. Technology is made possible by the strict distinction between ourselves as master and the physical matter we deploy to our ends. However, Heidegger's insights on this topic provide a different account, one that undermines a sense of human dominance. While the last section discussed unbounded finitude in terms of openness and relationality, here we will see the way that

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[50] Michael D. Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, and Carol Newsom, eds. "Genesis," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 13.

[51] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. by C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company 1980).

[52] GA 79: 29/28: "This appearance, that requisitioning would be in its essence only a human machination with the character of exploitation, is even an unavoidable one. Nevertheless, it remains a mere illusion [*Schein*]."

such an account exposes a boundless situation without the balancing complement of finitude.

The common and prevailing conception of technology is that it is a means to an end – a network by which one sends email, the medicine one takes to treat a sickness, the weapons one uses to intimidate an enemy, or the vehicle that one uses to travel through space. This conception has the structure of utility: we have X-technological-apparatus in order to accomplish Y-goal, and we presume that it is the goal that is truly bringing us to a particular orientation. Some functions are worthwhile and valuable, while one might conceive of others as frivolous or even evil. The assumption then is that technology itself needs to be seized and mastered so that it can be used only for the completion of the correct ends.[53] However, Heidegger's insight into the essence of technology is that it is not the case that we place technological machines into their proper use or function. Technology does not exist apart from or arrive posterior to the goals that we think bring us to produce machines. It appears on the scene early enough to shape, inflect, and dominate in any deliberation about which particular uses or functions we ought to direct our technological capacities toward.[54] This is to say that technology is not merely the material capacities enabled by machinery, but a set of relations that dispose humans toward mastery.

Through the notion of *Ge-stell* or positionality, Heidegger discusses the way beings place one another in the technological apparatus. He inserts the hyphen to emphasize the *Ge-* prefix that connotes a gathering together. *Stellen* means to put or to place, and so through his use of *Ge-stell* we are to understand a gathering together of placing or

[53] GA 79: 59/56.
[54] GA 79: 60/57: "[Technology] is held to be some being among many other beings, while indeed being itself essences in and as technology."

positions.[55] Heidegger's own word choice demonstrates such a collection or gathering of placing, and it is worthwhile to see how his -*stellen* terms work together. We can begin with Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's concept of the intellectual virtue, *technē*,[56] which means to bring about or produce, *Herstellen*.[57] This production begins with that of representations, which are appearances in the form of objects placed before subjects. The placing-before of a representation is aptly captured by the German *Vorstellen*. This basic production of objects is a metaphysical apparatus that delivers a set of mathematical beings to make up a field of research. "Mathematical" here means that the beings are already known in advance of the inquiry. For example, in physics, all events are accounted for in terms of measurable "spatiotemporal magnitudes of motion."[58] The object-character of a representation compels us to comport ourselves as though what is placed before us is static and substantial, qualities that are generative of epistemic certainty, which means that what is appropriated to truth is exclusively exactitude.[59]

While the object maintains its distance from the subject, technological positioning obliterates such distancing for the sake of forcing everything into availability. For something to be available it has to be not just nearby or just across, but here and at the ready. This sort of presence is not in the same manner as that through which things are

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[55] In this lecture, Heidegger notes two other examples the prefix *Ge-* indicates a collection or a gathering: *das Gebirge* (mountain range) and *das Gemut* (disposition, or a collection of inclinations). *Das Ge-Stell* is the collection of positions in which everything is standing reserve. GA 79: 32/30-1.

[56] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation, Volume 2*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, trans. by W. D. Ross and J. O. Urmson, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[57] GA 5: 47; For the English, see "Origin of the Work of Art," in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. by Julian Young (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 35.

[58] GA 5: 75-80/116-119.

[59] GA 5: 87/127. These epistemic implications will be developed more in Chapters Three and Four as well as the Conclusion.

brought near, such that we can enter into a relationship with things while they preserve some spacing. Rather, through technology "everything washes together into the uniformly distanceless."[60] Additionally, in technology the placing or positioning is not only of objects to be known, but of all sorts of beings who fit into a series of relations comprising ends and means. This happens with inanimate objects surely, but it also happens to the sorts of beings that generally do not conjure the character of technological objects, such as humans, places, and nature:

> Men and women must place (*müssen stellen*) themselves in a work service. They are ordered (*werden bestellt*). They are met by a position (*Stellen*) that places (*stellt*) them, i.e., commandeers (*anfordert*) them. One places (*stellt*) the other. He retains them. He positions (*stellt*) him. He requires information and an accounting from him. He challenges him forth.[61]

By the very meaning of ordering, *Bestellen*, the position of everything points to the position of everything else. I understand this ordering to have two senses in English. First, there is the simple understanding of ordinal numbers – each of these numbers retains its meaning by virtue of all of the other numbers being what they are. An ordering requires coherence among what is ordered. Such is the operation of technological ordering, in which the order is a series of ends and means that create a circuitry. Secondly, beings are also ordered in the sense of being commanded. They do not freely enter these relations but are challenged to enter the circuitry of technology. The ordering or requisitioning is an inherently rigid

[60] GA 79: 4/4.
[61] GA 79: 26-27/26.

system of determinations that beings and projects bestow upon each other in the technological nexus.

The example of nature and natural resources is illustrative. The earth has become the "standing-reserve," *der Bestand*. It stands available in continual reserve for our use. The standing reserve implies each thing is over-determined as useful in some way or another, disallowing an appearing (*das Anwesen*) of what is outside of the technological order. In the standing reserve we do not see the earth as nature, but as an open tract of land or a deposit of minerals that is currently in reserve.[62] In the future this land could be used as space for production or as a source to be mined. In the structure of circuitry, the questions necessarily arise, "production for what end?" or "minerals for what project?" It is not only the minerals that are the standing-reserve, but also the activity of mining. Mining produces jobs, enables industry, and promotes research. Additionally, in positionality, mining does not essence as anything else but its contribution to a chain of ends. The circuitry of the standing reserve means that any end always points to another end, not such that we could reach anything final, but only so that we never leave the circular chain of technology. In this way "the standing reserve persists (*Der Bestand besteht*)."[63] In Heidegger's use of the verb *anfordern*, we learn more about the continual persistence of the standing reserve. *Anfordern* can mean requisition as well as to make a circular loop. Beings are requisitioned into the circular mechanism of technology.

In this circuitry, we see once again that there are no strict boundaries around beings that allow them to separate from all others. In this regard, the technological instrument or

[62] GA 79: 27/26.
[63] GA 79: 28/28.

product is not wholly differentiable from a thing. Both are a manifestation of prevailing relations. However, in the boundlessness of technology we no longer have the image of gleaming mirrors and playful dances that allow things to free themselves or to be released into their finite ownness. Technological entities have constraint and rigidity, but this is not because they have boundaries that hold them in. Rather, technological entities are so tightly bound to each other that these entanglements do not allow them to break free of technology's circuitry. Technology limits freedom because of its inherent marshalling or commandeering:

> The revealing that rules throughout modern technology has the character of a setting-upon [*Stellens*], in the sense of a challenging-forth…. Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering.[64]

In contrast to a thing, particular technological entities cannot concernfully approach (*angehen*) us and open us up in new ways. They are ordered to stand still for the sake of performing further ordering. An approach requires degrees of distance, but in technology, there is a uniformity in the spacing that comes with the circuitry of ordering. Everything is equally present, only waiting to be deployed when needed. This monotonicity in positionality means that we have only an indifferent relation to what appears or presences (*wesen*) since concern and approach are not given a window.[65] Moreover, the limits of

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[64] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 7: Vorträge Und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000) 17; *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977) 321-22.

[65] GA 79: 25/24: "The dominance of what is oppositionally objective does not secure distance. Rather, there already lurks in it the insistence of the distanceless. If distance lies in concerned approached, then where the distanceless reigns we are really no longer approached concernfully by anything at all. Everything slides into the basic trait of the indifferent…"

technological beings have more or less dissolved to allow for such a degree of ordering. This monotonicity results from prevailing boundlessness without the balance of finitude that marks difference among beings.

Humans are not exempt from the positioning of technology. Heidegger uses the example of a person listening to the radio to illustrate the role of the human. [66] On the one hand, we can argue that a listener is free to simply turn off the radio when she chooses, and further that listeners are isolated from one another as they listen, making us think they have independence. However, the choice to turn the radio on or off, while free in terms of one's literal ability to hit on or off, is situated in a context where the human is a piece of the public – a perspective to influence, a consumer of a program, a discursive agent in the public sphere. The piece of the listener, the piece of the programming or advertisements, and the piece of the machinery of radio networks position one another. They are not independently free but have an entangled fate. The listener relies on the equipment to connect it to entertainment and relevant information related to world affairs. The programming or ads appeal to the listener and maintain the equipment. And the equipment itself is set up and maintained to provide the services of connecting listeners and retailers through a communication medium. The choice to turn off the radio then is only the choice to free oneself "from the coercive insistence of the public sphere that nevertheless ineluctably persists."[67]

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[66] This example takes even more unwieldy dimensions today with the internet and its many means of connecting individuals to the marketplace, the polis, and the public sphere in general. We see ever more ways in which the pieces of voters, consumers, clicks, big data, campaigns, and so forth all exist as they make each other useful.

[67] GA 79: 38/36.

Our sense of freedom and choice retreats not only for particular acts, but also in terms of a larger worldview. Heidegger argues that it is not the case that we actively choose the technological order in which we are the supposed masters. The very notion of *Ge-stell* as a gathering of positioning shows that humans are not the authors or directors of technological positioning. There is no frame (*Die Gestelle*) emanating from humans and then imposed upon pieces of technology; rather, there is a process already in motion that incorporates everything into it such it that occupies a position.[68] We do not "have control over the unconcealment itself… Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature can this revealing that orders happen."[69] Heidegger anticipates the argument that our role in technology is unique since we are the designers, producers, and beneficiaries of positionality. However, he says that, "the human is a piece of the standing reserve in the strictest sense of the words "piece" and "standing reserve."[70] Our thought and intelligence is recognized and valued in terms of its function in technological production. This means that we also are positioned in a functional place within the broad sense of the technological machine. This is an assault on human destiny (*das Geschick des Menschen*)[71] since we are the beings who are to dwell in the world of things, to be affected and moved by what reaches us.

Thus, Heidegger reveals that the realm we associate most immediately with our mastery and agential ownership is another instantiation of our agential finitude:

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[68] Mitchell, "Translator's Foreward," xi: "The spread of positionality is thus not a framework that surrounds from without, but, in part, a process of conscription [*Gestellung*] that adopts and compels whatever it encounters into the order of standing reserve."
[69] GA 7: 18/323.
[70] GA 79: 36/35.
[71] GA 79: 31/29.

> It is only a matter of pointing out that in the standing reserve called the radio there reigns a requisitioning and positioning that has intervened in the essence of the human. Because this is so, and because the human does not decide about his essence on his own terms, and never by himself, for this reason the requisitioning of the standing reserve, for this reason positionality, the essence of technology, cannot be anything merely human.[72]

Accounting for what technology is, then, requires an account that goes across the boundaries of humans, natural resources, machinery, the atomic bomb, and so forth. Insofar as each of these positions one another, their limits merely provide sites of relation rather than points at which they fully separate.

These positions and their collective ordered positionality contribute to what Heidegger calls the unguarding of the thing. This unguarding means that the thing is not allowed to keep the distance needed for concernful approach but is forced into the distanceless. With a lack of distance there is pure presence – there is nothing hidden or concealed, nothing arriving or withdrawing.[73] Technology presents itself in this way, not because of an epistemic lapse on the part of the human, but because being has forgotten itself as a sending or a dispensation. This is to say that in the technological era, we do not encounter presencing or essencing—beings holding sway as an ongoing movement—but merely presence.[74] We are not turned toward being, or the way that beings are able to

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[72] GA 79: 39/37.
[73] Mitchell, *The Fourfold,* 39.
[74] Heidegger's idea that being withdraws in the modern epoch is connected to his understanding of history and the way that the will is a historical arising. I will discuss this notion in depth in Chapter Three.

appear in our world, because we are busied by particular beings who are not only appearing, but are here for our inquiring, handling, manipulation, and use. With such forgetting, being presences not as a bestowal or a granting, nor as a historical destining (*Seinsgeschichte*), but as actual, present fact. To further exacerbate the situation, being forgets this very forgetting, in the same way we all do if we forget to set an alarm or turn off the lights before leaving a room. If the forgetting itself were to make itself apparent in its very occurrence, not only when the consequences surface, then we would all have persistent reminders to ward off the clumsiness of forgetting. Not only is being obscuring itself with the guise of presence in technology, it narrows the possibility of catching such obscuration. Heidegger says this is what is most dangerous about the danger.[75]

However, it is not the case that there is a clear opposition between the product or instrument available and present in technology and the thing that grants a world. Both of these are ways of presencing that are granted by being. Because the thing is able to illuminate the world with itself, it allows being to presence. Positionality, in contrast, obscures the relational composition of the world and the sending of being, and for this reason, Heidegger says that positionality is the self-endangering of being. While there is this differentiation, it also is the case that both the thing and positionality are nonetheless being:

> That which is, is in no way this or that being. What authentically is—and this means properly dwelling and essencing in the is—is solely beyng. Only

[75] GA 79: 68/64.

> beyng "is," only in beyng and as beyng does there take place what the "is" names; that which is, is beyng from out of its essence.[76]

This point is not to portray a picture of unrelenting sameness among all disclosures of being. Rather, I mention it here because through it we see that the thing and technology are not simply the correlates of truth and appearance in Heidegger's work. Positionality and technological beings commandeered into the standing reserve are real, and quite simply are. Additionally, in the human's involvement with the standing reserve, her perception of these technological pieces is not illusory or epistemically unsound. Positionality is being, even while it obscures its own essence as a gathering event.

Another reason we cannot formulate an antithetical relationship between the thing and positionality is that the possibility of transformation is in the danger itself: "In the essence of danger there is the concealed possibility of a turn in which the forgetting of the essence of being so turns that through this turn the truth of the essence of beyng properly enters into beings."[77] In other words, the turn, which is within the danger of being's forgetful dispensation of positionality, allows the world to take place and allows the thing to thing. The thing is intimate to positionality. It shows up as a sudden flash that illuminates the essence of being, that lights up a glimmer of world, and grants humans insight about their essence as the mortals who are looking toward the divinities.[78]

The positionality of technology is the historical disclosure of our contemporary, modern era, which means that the flash within technology that turns it would also be

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[76] GA 79: 74/70. The use of "beyng" (*das Seyn*) rather than "being" (*das Sein*) is rhetorically purposeful in Heidegger's thought. One of Heidegger's intentions is to remind the reading that being is a dynamic sending, rather than anything statically present.
[77] GA 79: 71/67.
[78] GA 79: 73-76/69-71.

configured by the historical sending of being. We now turn to a more personal "flash of insight" that illuminates the meaning-laden world in which beings appear: the Nothing.

IV. The Nothing

Positionality and technology move us in opposite directions at once. On the one hand, beings of all sorts assure us of their availability at our beck and call. This is especially the case when willful mastery coordinates the constellations of our world, such that everything in our midst is ordered to allow vast networks of projects to move along unimpeded. We find the stuff that makes up our world to be mostly reliable and predictable, allowing us to be swept away in the relentless organization of means and ends. On the other hand, Heidegger's insights expose the liminal and tenuous character of these pieces such that they are not the same beings when removed from the circuitry of the standing reserve. While objecthood asserts too much presence, such that beings do not shape or affect one another, the picture of positionality, in which technology as a whole becomes vacuous, undermines the significance of any particular being, much more so the relational nexus that holds together an apparatus of mastery.

To alleviate concerns of nihilism and to further our discussion of unbounded finitude, this final section on Heidegger explores his discussions of the nothing (*das Nichts*).[79] The nothing is the imagined possibility of the absence of beings, of no things

[79] This may seem a bit ironic since after Heidegger's 1929 lecture "What is Metaphysics?" some philosophers, such as Bertrand Russell and Rudolph Carnap, understood his discussion of the nothing to be part of a nihilistic philosophical enterprise. Additionally, Heidegger critiqued the limits of positivistic scientific inquiry and logic, and this also contributed to his "banishment" from the Anglo-American philosophical arena for some time. Heidegger responded directly to these criticisms in 1943. See: Martin Heidegger, "Nachwort zu 'Was ist Metaphysik'" in *Gesamtausgabe Band 9: Wegmarken*, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann. 2nd ed. (Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1976) 303-312; "Postscript to "What is Metaphysics?" in *Pathmarks*, ed.

whatsoever. The nothing has no finite particulars, no beings that reach to each other to imbue one another with meaning, nor even beings isolated but proximate to each other. Heidegger discusses the nothing as a disclosive experience that comes to us through our mortality and through the fundamental attunement (*die Grundstimmung*) of anxiety. It is through these experiences and their path through the nothing that we can appreciate an ontology of delimited, finite beings and their unbounded reach as an awesome event. Additionally, "held out into the nothing,"[80] we encounter the limits of meaning and our role in the manifestation of finite beings.

In his 1949 Bremen Lectures, Heidegger says that death is not to be thought of as the empty nothing.[81] To decisively determine it as an empty or pure nothingness—the absence of anything at all—presumes unobscured knowledge of death that we, as living beings, can never have. Removing the mystery inherent to death perhaps provides relief to our mortal anxiety. People ostensibly attribute such determinations to death because there is comfort in doing so: we can prepare ourselves for our own death and also grieve in such a way that we do not worry about our loved ones who have passed. Interestingly, this understanding of death as nothingness is popularly considered undogmatic and stoically rational since it does not presume the orientations of a specific religious tradition. Still, we will see that there are many presumptions of this secular order that Heidegger considers injurious to our relation to being. In making the positive assertion that death is an empty nothing, we presume that death, even as nothingness, can be completely present, as though

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and trans. by William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 231-38. For some discussion about the conversation between Heidegger and the logical postivists, see Richard Polt, "Later Heidegger" in *Heidegger, An Introduction* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999) 121-24.

[80] GA 9: 115/91.

[81] GA 79: 56/53.

this nothing is a graspable and unhidden object. This formulation undermines itself since what is supposedly not anything at all is decisively understood as something in particular.[82] While death has some quality of emptiness and nothingness, an end after which one no longer endures, such a rigid determination is far too conclusive and determinate for the sort of event that death is. What is at stake is not a mere epistemic overreach that unfoundedly asserts the determinacy and purity of a void in death. The issue is that such dogmatism forces a missed (existential) opportunity by overlooking how death is something akin to a bridge that grants a relation. This is to say that death can carry us to a different sphere of thought than that of objective knowledge or technological dependability. It does so by creating a relation to the nothing at the same time that the nothing is not made absolutely present. Heidegger says that death "is the shrine of the nothing (*das Nichts*)."[83]

The concept of a shrine deserves reflection on its own before we can understand death as a particular shrine. In religious practice, a shrine is where we place material things that allow us to continually honor, worship, and remember beings that are not tangibly or fully present. We may make shrines for people, deities, or elements of nature that we wish to invoke or bring forth. In the Hindu prayer shrine in my parents' home we have statues and illustrations of deities that we adorn and worship. These pieces of our shrine are not mere objects; they have the lively character of things that enable a relation to the divinities we offer salutations and to whom we devote a practice. In addition to having a specific sort of material agency or animation, shrines serve as a special place that is consecrated or

[82] To posit the nothing as a being "is exactly what [the nothing] is distinguished from. Interrogating the nothing—asking what and how it, the nothing, is—turns what is interrogated into its opposite. The question deprives itself of its own object" (GA 9: 107/85).
[83] GA 79: 18/17.

purified in order for it to properly create such a relation. The relations it facilitates are not only sustained in explicit and volitional activity, since the shrine standing in our home reminds us of our devotion outside of these times as well. It is an installation in the mundane space of our home that helps us maintain a steady practice, which in turn grants us a connection with other beings. The elements of the shrine are not fully present objects, insofar as they become what they are through relations with us in our practice. The elements of the shrine have an unfolding, one that is affected by us and that also affects us. In these ways, shrines bring forth beings and facilitate enduring relations.

It is a common practice to make shrines of various sorts for those who have died. One could even deem the language we use to talk about those who have departed as a shrine to them. If we consider the colloquial manner of characterizing people who have passed, we might say, "She was incredibly helpful." The past tense verb ("was") is one way that death enshrines insofar as it marks neither pure presence nor pure absence of her qualities, but something in between. We remember her through such locutions and are thereby able to bring her forth in this commemorating. It is not accurate to say, "She is incredibly helpful," nor do we swing to a fully opposite claim and say, "She is not incredibly helpful." Using "was" gives us neither a purely affirmative claim of being nor a negation that indicates strict absence. Neither present nor absent, something is preserved through our shrines. Another common type of shrine to those who have died are graves that mark the cite of burial for a person who has passed, allowing us to bring them near when we visit the grave. A specific grave is a place where we are able to remember and visit a person, and a graveyard is treated with the solemn respect that allows people to come into relation

with a person who is not there in the narrowest of senses, but is brought near through the practices of remembrance by their loved ones at their grave.

Tied to the practice of graves are caskets. As Andrew Mitchell and John Sallis have each noted, the German *der Schrein* is a case or a casket that allows for the deceased to be physically hidden from view while also still present.[84] Heidegger also discusses a specific sort of shrine, namely the practice among German peasants to install a *Totenbaum* ("death-tree"), or a coffin, in their homes as a way to allow death to linger.[85] As a thing that conditions, the death tree grants an abiding. Rather than crediting the carpenter with the achievement of building and completing the death-tree, Heidegger focuses on the lively work of the death-tree that reaches what surrounds it through its enshrining: "The death of the deceased flourishes in it. This flourishing determines (*bestimmt*) the house and farmstead, the ones who dwell there, their kin, and the neighborhood."[86]

It is worth noting Heidegger's use of the verb *bestimmen* (which I also discussed in the Introduction). While "to determine" offers an appropriate and fluid English translation, looking at the German we find additional connotations if we think of *bestimmen* alongside a related word featured in Heidegger's thought, *die Stimmung*, a mood or attunement. The prefix *be-* means that an action is applied to an object by the agential subject. In this case, we can ascertain that the death-tree "determines" what surrounds it by supplying a mood for them. The "determination" of the people and the neighborhood near the death-tree is thus not to be understood in a straight-forward sense of being-understood-in-such-and-

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[84] Mitchell, *The Fourfold,* 232. This volume also has a discussion of the *totenbaum*, the death tree, which Heidegger discusses in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking." John Sallis, "The Proper Name of Man," in *Echoes: After Heidegger*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990) 136.
[85] GA 79: 26/25.
[86] GA 79: 26/25.

such-way; rather, the death-tree sets a tune to which they also are attuned in the affective disclosures of a mood. The presence of the death-tree not only affects people's relation to it or the departed person it holds, but relations among beings more broadly. Describing attunements, Richard Polt says they "disclose the world more fundamentally than any propositions, affirmative or negative, that we may express. Our sense of beings as a whole is what allows us to take up particular relationships to entities."[87] This disclosure is such that the significance of every particular thing is inflected by the tune of death, ringing as either harmoniously aligned or strikingly out of tune. In the latter case, what once was familiar, sensible, and understood no longer gives itself to thought so easily. This introduces a profound uncanniness in which meaning as such slips away. While Heidegger does not explicitly use the language of a *Stimmung* in relation to death in this text, we will soon see an association among death, the nothing, and the *Grundstimmung* of anxiety.

While the shrines above are used for people who are deceased, Heidegger precisely characterizes death as a shrine not to this or that person, but to the nothing. To say that death enshrines the nothing is to say that death brings forth the nothing in the way that shrines do—the nothing is not made present, but through the mediation of death it is still granted, commemorated, or brought into relief. In this regard, death discloses the nothing—the possibility of the lack of finite beings. Like the death-tree for peasants, the nothing then determines what surrounds it. This is the case of particular deaths as well as the fact or condition of mortality more generally. The temporal endurance of how death enshrines is discussed in a 1944-45 text titled, "The Evening Conversation: In a Prisoner of War Camp in Russia, between a Younger and an Older Man." One passage reads:

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[87] Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, 126.

> Older Man: Death is itself like something that waits in us.
>
> Younger Man: As though it waits upon our waiting.
>
> Older Man: And upon what do we wait?
>
> Younger Man: May we even ask this, if we are properly waiting?
>
> Older Man: Insofar as we wait for something [*auf etwas warten*], we attach ourselves to something awaited. Our waiting [*Warten*] is then only an awaiting [*Erwarten*]. Pure waiting is disturbed—because in pure waiting, it seems to me, we wait upon nothing (*auf nichts warten*).
>
> Younger Man: If we specifically wait upon Nothing (*auf Nichts warten*), then we have already fallen back again into awaiting, which in this case clings to there never in fact being anything awaited. So long as we wait upon nothing in this manner, we do not purely wait.
>
> Older Man: How strange this is, to wait neither upon something nor upon nothing, and yet nevertheless to wait.
>
> Younger Man: That is, to wait on that [*dessen zu warten*] which corresponds to pure waiting. More fittingly let us say: to wait upon that which answers pure waiting.[88]

Death does not show up all at once. It stays with us throughout our lives, waiting within us. This contributes to its shrine-like quality insofar as we have a sustained relation to the nothing through death. Our own death is always a haunting possibility, one we encounter

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[88] Martin Heidegger, "Abdendspräch in einem Kriegsgefangenenlager in Rußland zwischen einem Jüngeren und einem Älteren," in *Gesamtaustgabe Band 77: Feldweg-Gesprache*, ed. by Ingrid Schüßler, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 2007) 217; "Evening Conversation: In a Prisoner of War Camp in Russia, between a Younger and Older Man," in *Country Path Conversations*, trans. by Bret W. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 140.

too often in the most mundane of activities, such as crossing the street or witnessing a slide in our health. Additionally, as we will see in the following chapter, the observance of others' death is something akin to receiving a message or a reminder about the precarity inherent to the human condition. Thus, the shrine to the nothing is erected as a feature of living.

The Younger and Older Man also iterate that death is not the empty nothing. They say that clinging (*hängen*) to a rigid understanding of death as the nothing makes us anticipate something specific, while death calls for a more open waiting. The translator of this conversation, Bret Davis, includes a footnote to elaborate on Heidegger's subtle distinction between the two in his locution. Generally, and initially in this passage, the verb *wartern* (to wait) is transitive and uses the preposition *auf* to link "wait" to an object that the grammatical subject is waiting for or upon. In the final lines of this passage, however, Heidegger switches to a genitive pronoun, *dessen*, and omits the preposition altogether, since the verb has lost its object and turned intransitive. Davis writes, "The genitive rather than the prepositional construction evidently suggests a less objectifying and more openly attentive relationship."[89] With the omission of the preposition, Heidegger distinguishes awaiting something in particular (*erwarten*) and waiting in a more open sense (*warten*). The latter type of waiting is suitable for death since it is not an "empty nothing," or anything else we can calculatively anticipate as being something of a certain sort. This is why the Older Man says that death requires waiting neither for something nor for nothing. We cannot give death the character of something specific, not even as a pure lack of being. For Heidegger, death waits upon, or attends to, our waiting—our general comportment as we

[89] Bret Davis, *Country Path Conversations*, 140-41.

anticipate nothing in particular, and yet are openly waiting nonetheless. Such waiting cannot be characterized by wanting to know what death is but requires that we wait in our thinking by staying open for the claim of being.[90] Determining what death is disallows death to bring us into the nothing. In this way death is a shrine to the nothing by giving nothing a way to appear or essence (*wesen*), even though we cannot simply say, "the nothing is," or "there is nothing." Not waiting upon any one thing nor upon nothing at all, we hover (s*chweben*).[91]

A fuller version of the passage in the *Bremen Lectures* about death as a shrine reads:

> Death is the shrine of the nothing, namely of that which in all respects is never some mere being, but nonetheless essences (*west*), namely as being itself. Death, as the shrine of nothing, harbors in itself what essences (*Wesende*) of being. As the shrine of the nothing, death is the refuge of being. The mortals we now name the mortals—not because their earthly life ends, but rather because they are capable of death as death. The mortals are who they are as mortals by essencing in the refuge of being. They are the essencing relationship to being as being.[92]

The nothing is no particular being at all, but that which essences (or appears) despite this. What meets such a characterization is being itself (*das Sein selbst*). How we are to understand Heidegger's swift equivocation above of being and nothing? To help us, I take us through a set of texts in which he writes in a similar manner, namely, his 1929 essay

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[90] GA 79: 71/67. In this context, Heidegger is talking about the waiting required for the turn of being from the self-forgetting danger of positionality. He says that no one knows the timing or nature of the dispensation of the turn, but also that such knowing would not be proper for the human whose essence is waiting.
[91] GA 9: 112/88-9.
[92] GA 79: 18/17.

"What is Metaphysics?" as well as his 1943 "Postscript to "What is Metaphysics?" In these texts Heidegger gives an exposition of anxiety, a fundamental attunement that grants a tranquil calmness in which the nothing is made manifest as prior to and more originary than the presence of particular beings. In anxiety the nothing becomes known as it nihilates (*nichten*) beings, causing them to slip away or recede from their own essencing (or appearing). This receding means that each particular being loses its mediation from the world, and in their immediacy, they are left meaningless.[93] This nihilation does not occur piecemeal such that this being here or that being there is nihilated. The totality of beings—their nexus of significance—is turned into nothing, a sheer lack of beings, an absurd arena with no things whatsoever. Here we see a stark contrast from the concernful approach of things; beings turn away, leaving us ontologically indifferent. Because our arena of familiarity is one of a meaning-laden world with beings that reach out to us in our concern, our indifference gives us an uncanny experience of abyssal horror. However, this experience is not reducible to a mere feeling or sentiment of being anxious, worried or scared; it is an ontologically disclosive mood or attunement. In anxiety the nothing shows us the limits of meaning in our world of beings and further shows us that we are required for them to manifest.[94] Anxiety calls on us to be attentive "to the voice of being" which claims us, "so that in the nothing we may learn to experience being."[95] Heidegger says that rather than sheer nihilistic horror, anxiety gives us courage to be the ones for whom there are beings and awe before the fact that there are beings and not nothing. With the essencing

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[93] Thomas Sheehan, "Facticity and *Ereignis*" in *Interpreting Heidegger, Critical Essays*, ed. by Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 62.
[94] GA 9: 121/95.
[95] GA 9: 307/234.

of the nothing we are able to withstand the nothing and take the being of beings as an awesome bestowal because we are the favored ones.

Returning to the original passage from the *Bremen Lectures*, we have a better sense of what it means for mortals to be "the essencing relationship to being as being" – being needs mortals for the manifestation of particular, finite beings who have open limits that allow them to meaningfully appropriate one another. The nothing exposes our role as mortals who would not be able to exist without the unconcealedness or disclosure of meaning to our understanding. This relation is a reciprocal need between mortals and being. In this relation we are at once active and passive, submitting to our appropriation to the meaning-making-process at the same time that we actively sustain such a process. This constitutes a back-and-forth reciprocity between mortals and being.[96] Thomas Sheehan describes this essencing relationship as an "ever self-unifying togetherness of man and meaning whence unfolds the ontological difference between meaning-giving and the meaningful."[97] Thus, the nothing shows us our relation to meaning in the appropriation of finite beings. Moreover, we see the finitude of being (or meaning, á la Sheehan) itself before its possibility of nihilation in our death.

Death enshrines the nothing because it shows us the possibility (at our death) of when we no longer meaningfully appropriate beings and allow being to finitely manifest. When Heidegger says that only the mortals are capable of dying, this means that only we are capable of experiencing an end in this regard since only we are able to let being essence

[96] Thomas Sheehan, "Facticity and *Ereignis,*" 59.
[97] Thomas Sheehan, "Facticity and *Ereignis*," 56.

– that is, let being bestow essences to beings both through beings' finitude as well as their open unbounded-ness that allows them to constitute each other.

Anxiety, death, and the nothing disrupt the indifference pervasive in technological monotonicity. The lack of boundaries in the circuitry of the standing-reserve creates such indifference because all beings are equally distanced and are not able to reach to us or move us. This is parallel to monism because there is no differentiation. Boundlessness seems to have spun to hyperbole, dissolving the limits that constitute finite beings. The nothing has the same sort of anxiety, but it also grants courage to withstand being and shelter it. In doing so, we are the ones who essence beings – we allow beings to be what they are. The reason death brings this forward for us is that death is the threshold beyond which it is possible that there are no beings at all; as we come into relation with this possibility, we have awe since there are beings and not nothing. [98]

V. Conclusion

Where do we arrive in terms of an understanding of unbounded finitude after the three expositions above? Let us start by noting that even by its grammar, insofar as finitude is the nominalization, this term is primarily interested in what it means to be delimited in a world with beings differentiated from one another. The aspect of world brings us to the qualification of finitude as unbounded, pointing to the way that distinctions are not clean separations, but are part of mutual delimiting and so also mutual belonging. Indeed, unbounded finitude is the condition of a world that mediates finite beings. Finite beings are able to take a delimited and distinct form in a joint appropriation, where each is brought

[98] GA 9: 114/90.

to its own by the other. No particular being possesses its limits since its being is always the being of all beings, indeed of being itself. This lack of boundary, such that beings are not sequestered into themselves but tied to each other, inhibits any successful assertion of mastery or control, or even an ontology that supplies masterful agency to the category of subjects. In the modern epoch, boundlessness almost eliminates the texture and vivacity of finite beings in our world. Nonetheless, there are flashes in which we gain the insight that we—mortals—are the ones to withstand and shelter being by letting finite beings be.

The movement between the sections also highlights the fact that in Heidegger's thinking there is always already unbounded finitude. The difference between a world of things and a world of technology is phenomenal. In other words, this difference lies in matters such as whether we are able to catch sight of it and embrace it or whether its concealedness allows us to resist it as we assert mastery and sovereignty. Heidegger is careful, however, to not make this difference one that is simply incumbent on us, but one that involves an unbounded worldly constellation.

Another matter worth highlighting at the conclusion of this chapter is the affective register of each of the three sections, as well as the progression of their sequence. Heidegger's writing certainly has strong affective tones such that reading his works is not a neutral experience. Nonetheless, we must be careful about claiming that his writing delivers the experience or emotive register of normative valuations as something that is coming strictly from Heidegger. Part of the force of the writing is the injunction to at least entertain the possibility that our sentiments as an audience are born from the colliding of our own value systems and the exposition he provides. There is especially a tonal transition as we move from the section on the thing to that of positionality. The first section presents

things that mirror each other with a gleaming bestowal of own-ness, allowing the finite occurrence of each thing to be a radiant event. Technology, however, simultaneously presents both the lack of boundaries and a lack of distancing, leaving us with a picture of mechanistic monotony and a scene in which any remnant of sovereignty is continually retreating from our reach. We finished with a section on the nothing, which starts by inhabiting the anxious space in which boundlessness erases all things, but then recovers finitude in the mutual belonging of being and mortals in the appropriation of being.

In the process of both reading Heidegger's words and writing about it myself, I notice notes of anxiety interweaving with those of its alleviation. Anxiety corresponds with both a lack of power and with domains that are too vast and dispersed for power to be relevant. In our exposition of the thing, a finite entity is something of a glowing gift that emerges from a relational nexus. We see in Heidegger's account of *Ge-stell* that technology is similarly a relational nexus in which different placements position one another to produce a circuitry of mastery. The difference between a thing and a technological piece is not the fact of their exposure or relational existence, but that in technology, these relations are commands. The anxiety, then, arrives at least in part because technology does not understand itself in these terms. Indeed, the way that pieces appear in technology is as exact objects that enable measurement and calculation, and so exposing the apparatus as a whole in terms of a nexus that diffuses our power over particular objects understandably turns the power-valuing technological being (likely you and me) toward panic.

This is to say that the ominous character of Heidegger's presentation of technology is contingent on our existence within modernity and the way that our value for mastery is agitated by the way we are left without it in Heidegger's account. Another piece of the

concern here is that everything is leveled down to the distanceless, which means that the stuff of our world does not concern us in ways that are specific and singular. Without distance, everything is made to be immediate, in the sense that their mediation in the world is effaced. The technological object has a bare presence without worldly play.[99] They are reduced to their role in the circuitry of means and ends that reach toward ever more mastery, leaving our world devoid of the texture that things supply. We feel powerless at the same time that we swim through disenchanting monotony.

This monotony is met with a peculiar sort of anxiety, one that also grants courage. While we may be anxious about the way our world is spinning with the momentum of technological positionality, the anxiety that emerges in flashes of insight is not one that is equivocal to powerlessness. It is rather the sort of exhilarating anxiety that comes over us when we knowingly engage in something that exceeds our individual participation. We are at once in awe and also courageously continuing. Since Aristotle, we generally consider courage to be a virtue, the practice of the mean between cowardice and rashness that orients us toward Eudaimonia and requires a habitual practice for us to have it.[100] Whether it is the case that several flashes of insight can offer the sort of practical training required for the virtue of courage is a question that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Rather than thinking courage in this classical sense, let us think of courage as an affective disclosure in the vein of a mood. It is not simply a feeling one has in a subjective sense, but is disclosive of the world prior to the determinate form of linguistic propositions.

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[99] In "The Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger talks about the importance of earth as that which both shows itself and withdraws at the same time. This aspect of nature is why Dasein is held open to be there for the gathering event of world.

[100] Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics."

Indeed, it imbues such propositions with meaning. This mood in particular discloses the belonging of the mortal with being. Courage allows us to see what sort of being we ourselves are. We are the ones who are essential for a world of meaning and for the sheltering of being. We are the ones who can allow concealment and let beings be in their play of concealment with unconcealment. Indeed, it is the partial concealment of things that gives them movement, and so also, a lack of pure presence. There is a mutual belonging of world and mortal: the concealment of being (and of beings) is necessary for there to be the spacing that allows relations that create meaning; and secondly, without the meaningful spacing and the differentiation of beings, being would simply be nothing. Inhabiting this essential role requires that this anxiety also grants courage because we are met by the other parts of the fourfold, the other nodes of relation that make up the relational constellations required for meaning.

With this presentation of unbounded finitude in Heidegger's philosophy from the 1940s and 1950s, we are ready to turn to turn to another philosophical view in which boundaries are refuted even while monism is not accepted, namely that of early Mahāyāna Indian Buddhist philosophy. This conception will come from almost 2000 years prior to Heidegger's entrance onto the philosophical scene, and so the discourse will not engage with technology or modernity even as it illuminates similar points about relational things and worldly mediations. The two philosophical expositions also do not share a lineage or a tradition since they come from very different parts of the world. Despite these differences, we will still find concerns about the delimiting of a thing within itself and confrontations with any claim to a pure identity of any particular thing or concept.

CHAPTER 2: Unbounded Finitude in Indian Buddhist Philosophy

I. Introduction

The specific topic of limits is not generally the primary term orienting philosophical conversations about metaphysics in Indian Buddhist philosophy. However, what is at stake in limits is perhaps the lynch pin that connects central inquiries on matters such as essential natures, the details of causal efficacy, or the structures of identity or difference. We can readily recognize the stakes of understanding limits in key discussions within the works of Nāgārjuna and other Mādhyamikas. The most salient example is the dedicatory verse to *The Root Verses* in which Nāgārjuna praises the Buddha for his teaching of interdependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). At the very outset of this text, we are immediately invited to think about the nature of limits as we learn that, by virtue of the doctrine of interdependent origination, all beings are:

> Neither ceasing nor arising, neither perishing nor eternal,
>
> neither singular nor plural, neither coming nor going.[101]

These qualities make us think most immediately of temporal limits, but also call into question other mediums in which we understand that one thing ends and another begins, such as space or enumeration. Given the pairwise *negations* of opposites, we are left confounded as we try to parse out a metaphysical account of the parameters we grant to

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[101] *anirodham anutpādam, anucchedam aśāśvatam, anekārtham anānārtham, anāgāmam anirgamam.* P. L. Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna with the Commentary: Prasannapadā by Candrakīrti*, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts 10 (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960) 4, (verse 1.1).

any being whatsoever. The negations problematize a strict understanding of finitude as much as they do an infinite monism that includes the finite particulars of our perception.

Indeed, this dizzying feeling only deepens as we move further into *The Root Verses*. Near the end of his treatise, Nāgārjuna writes:

> When all things (*dharma)* are empty, what does it mean to be with or without ends (*anta*)?
>
> What does it mean to be both with and without ends?
>
> What does it mean to be neither with nor without ends?[102]

Here we see Nāgārjuna explicitly refer to the fact that the paradigms of ends and emptiness are incoherent with one another.[103] If we understand limits to be the boundaries surrounding some distinct identity, then limits of this sort do not allow for the interdependent relations that exist among beings. Dependence requires some traversal across such limits such that they cannot be understood as an "end" that marks a point of finality. Thus, the insight of interdependent origination requires that we think of all beings as lacking a precise point of beginning and end.

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[102] *śūnyeṣu sarvadharmeṣu kim anantaṃ kim antavat | kim anantam antavacca nānantaṃ nāntvacca kim,* Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 235 (verse 25.22). Jay Garfield translates this verse from the Tibetan with a different set of words for *ananta* (literally, without ends) and *antavat* (literally, possessing ends). This translation is also illustrative:

> Since all existents are empty,
> What is finite or infinite?
> What is finite and infinite?
> What is neither finite nor infinite?

Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way, Nāgārjuna's Mūladmadhyamakakārika* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 333.

[103] Emptiness will be explicitly developed throughout this chapter. To offer an initial definition for certain audiences, *emptiness* is a manner of describing the lack of an independent nature or essence. Nāgārjuna equivocates being empty and being dependently originated.

However, the broader ontological picture in Madhyamaka philosophy still includes distinction and difference among finite entities. One of the main reasons is that there is no reasonable way to deny that we experience such distinctions. Further, deflating our intuitions of finite particulars deprives us of the primary data set that we can work with to make any transformations in our views or behaviors. Preserving an account of finitude comes hand in hand with preserving an account of our experience and conduct in our conventional world. In other words, preserving finitude is a necessary part of the Madhyamaka program avoiding a metaphysics that diminishes reality to the point of nihilism.

This is an integral part of the Madhyamaka philosophical project, so much that it bears upon the way they understand themselves as a philosophical school. "Madhyamaka" means "the middle way" between absolutism (*astitva)* and nihilism (*nāstitva*). Finite entities are neither granted a status of being (*bhāva*) nor nonbeing (*abhāva*), meaning they are neither to be regarded as existing in a stable state in which their foundations are secure, nor should they be reduced to a negligible appearance that is unworthy of our regard. In second century India, when Nāgārjuna inaugurated this tradition, he had polemical opponents that sided with one or the other of these extremes and addressed specific audiences in many of his arguments. Thus, as we read his arguments, we can also discern why his emphasis lands in particular places in some moments and in other places at other moments.

In this project, the primary concern is the set of ontological positions that align with the promulgators of a rigid and fixed existence for finite beings. If the will is a mechanism of self-assertion, -preservation, and -enhancement, then the main ontological category to

address is the sphere we appropriate to a self. However, shedding our own boundaries also requires that we see that all beings are unbounded. Our understanding of large metaphysical mechanisms, such as causality, are as much in play in our outward view as our inward understanding. For these reasons, the first section in this chapter puts forth a general argument for unboundedness. Entities necessarily move past their own limits and through each other in order to produce a world with the relations that give them intelligible and radiant existence. Recognizing this aspect of reality in one's immediate intuition requires a steady practice that involves both studying argumentative analysis and contemplative practice. C. W. Huntington explains the vision of a *bodhisattva*, an awakening being who has phenomenologically realized interdependence:

> …the phenomena of the world are seen to be devoid of any enduring 'self' or 'sovereign.' Like magical illusions, beams of light, fairy cities, dreams, or reflected images, from the perspective of this soteriological truth they are all without intrinsic being. As seen through the eye of perfect wisdom, the relations between things exert much greater claims to meaning and existence than do the things themselves.[104]

Huntington emphasizes that meaning inherently is a relational structure, such that any unit of value or significance is contingent on other such units. This contingency can help us see how the entities—whether people, objects, or ideas—we intuit are not to be upheld as absolutely one thing or another. They do not exist within strict boundaries that allow us to move them from context to context while they maintain the same significance or

[104] C. W. Huntington and Geshe Namgyal Wangchen, *Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Madhyamka* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995) 91.

appearance. In order for entities to take any meaning at all, their limits have to allow relation.

This passage also evinces a danger, namely that everything takes the illusory character of "magical illusions, beams of light, fairy cities, dreams, or reflected images."[105] When this happens, nothing we encounter seems real. Thus, unboundedness drifts toward one of the extreme views that the Mādhyamikas seek to avoid, deflationary nihilism. Indeed, the primary teaching for releasing boundaries is emptiness (*śūnyatā*), a word that immediately connotes voidness, hollowness, and vacuity.

To address this nihilistic possibility, the Mādhyamikas also teach the *emptiness of emptiness*. They argue that emptiness, or the dependent contingency of all things, is itself dependent and contingent. It is a teaching that is skillfully delivered by the Buddha(s) for the sake of removing certain habits conducive to suffering. However, it should not carry any status beyond the situations in which it bears efficacious meaning. Moreover, it is only through our reflective meditation on finite things that their emptiness can reveal a relational radiance. Thus, emptiness is the shedding of boundaries that arrives through finite disclosures.

However, interdependence is not merely relevant for how we apprehend the metaphysics of particular, finite things. It conceptually undergirds a number of "big picture" Buddhist ideas, such as Buddhist cosmology which incorporates multiple realms (*loka*), the theory of rebirth, and the complexity of karmic histories. For this reason, I argue

[105] It is worth emphasizing here that Huntington explicitly says that phenomena are seen *like* these sorts of appearances. This does not mean that they have the same illusory character, but rather that they have capacities for deception if one is not in relation to their dependent existence. This feature of *likeness* will appear again in Chapter Four.

that unbounded finitude is at the heart of a Buddhist understandings and pervades how we recognize causal structures, especially those involved in our accounts of agency. This becomes particularly evident when we shift from explicitly philosophical texts to the genre of Buddhist narratives. In Aśvaghoṣa's *Life of the Buddha* (*Buddhacarita,* a 2nd century semi-canonical poem), we see the Buddha's life story from a panoramic vantage point in terms of time and space. Even the paragon of attainment—the Buddha himself—has a story that involves a large cast of conditions and agents. Aśvaghoṣa weaves together these conditions in such a way that finite occurrences that exist in separate spheres are nonetheless inseparable from one another. The Buddha's story is one that only makes sense if conditioning factors are able to travel across what we might otherwise recognize as insuperable boundaries between realms and births. However, even with this degree of entanglement, the story has a plot that consists of particular moments, events, and characters. There are decisive turning points that demarcate phases of the Buddha's life, discrete points of reference that become symbols in the broader Buddhist tradition, and specific persons who perform specific deeds. This narrative demonstration of unbounded finitude exhibits interdependent origination as an ontology that enables a Buddhist mode of giving accounts.

The first two sections of this chapter present first emptiness as a way of removing boundaries and then the emptiness of emptiness as a way of upholding finite limits. The Mādhyamikas present these ontological arguments in very precise logical form, following the standard rules and semantics operative in Indian philosophical exchanges. For this reason, they are incredibly precise and also fairly cryptic for many audiences. My presentation makes some synthetic leaps to lift the discussion of limits out of these

arguments while nonetheless remaining loyal to the arguments put forth by Nāgārjuna and one of his most famous commentators, Candrakīrti (7th century). My goal is to demonstrate not only that unboundedness and finitude coexist, but that in the span of Madhyamaka metaphysics, they necessitate one another: discrete, finite things are only intelligible by virtue of the co-arising of conditions across the limits of many beings; and any recognition of this unbounded co-arising appears to us through the mediation of finite entities.

In the third section, I return to Nāgārjuna's dedicatory verse to the *Root Verses* (discussed at the beginning of this chapter) in order to demonstrate how an understanding of interdependent origination complicates any account of substances – whether discrete and plural substances with limits or a monistic substrate that is all encompassing and void of limits. While this verse leaves us wondering how we can report on the events of our world without being misleading, Buddhist narratives model a way of talking about events without foregoing a profound sense of conditionality. In the final section, I use Aśvaghoṣa's *Life of the Buddha* to transpose the philosophically argumentative accounts of the Mādhyamikas into a way of giving narrative accounts.

II. Releasing Boundaries with Emptiness

In English, the word "empty" draws our attention to the content of something, more specifically to the *absence* of content within a specific space. For example, if we imagine an empty glass, we see the glass itself – its bottom and sides – and also notice that it holds nothing within these parameters, despite having the sturdiness and otherwise necessary structural possibility for doing so. Thus, "emptiness" makes us think in terms of a lack or deficiency, that something is not yet full or fulfilled. When we have an empty thing, we

essentially have a set of limits holding a set of possibilities rather than any assuredly existent and integral content. In fact, one could argue that a large part of the teaching of emptiness is to emphasize a value for this undecided element that allows for possibility over any value belonging to the metaphysical fixity of substance.

In the teaching of emptiness, Madhyamaka philosophy targets any presuppositions of there being an essential character or integrity belonging to an entity. All entities are void of a character that distinguishes a pure sphere belonging exclusively to it. In the first chapter, we saw how the notion of a particular "it," an integrity with "the condition of being whole, entire, or undiminished" warrants the construction of protective boundaries.[106] As a phenomenological teaching, emptiness targets the need for such boundaries by targeting the coherency of an "it" with a specific integrity to its identity.

The Sanskrit correlate for the "integrity" or "identity" of a delimited "it" is *svabhāva*. This technical philosophical term within the Indian philosophical arena literally translates as "own-being," since *sva* means self or own, and *bhāva* means being or existence. Scholars and translators render *svabhāva* many different ways in English, including: substance, essence, intrinsic identity, independence, nature, self-being, own-being.[107] When it is shown through analysis that something in particular does not have *svabhāva*, it is said to be empty, *śūnya*. The general lack of *svabhāva* is abstracted into the term emptiness, *śūnyatā.* In terms of the nature, essence, or what is intrinsic to some particular thing, *svabhāva* is the core that remains regardless of context or intervening

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[106] See footnote 16 referencing Ziarek.

[107] For more on the senses of *svabhāva* as a philosophical term, see: William T. Ames, "The Notion of Svabhāva in the Thought of Candrakīrti," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 10 (1982): 161–77; Jay Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 61; Jan Westerhoff, "Interpretations of *Svabhāva,*" in *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 19-52.

variables. Without that essence or defining characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*, *svarūpa*), a particular thing would not be what it is.

Another sense of *svabhāva* asserts that something is fully responsible for its own being. This sense of *svabhāva* is similar to the substantiality or independence that we grant to something that is its own ontological foundation. It is self-originated and not contingent upon external conditions. As was the case in Western philosophy at this time, there was a prevailing association between reality and permanence among many of the Mādhyamikas' interlocutors. Some of these were even Buddhists. For example, Nāgārjuna presents the Abhidhārmikas as holding the view that all of the gross entities we perceive are composed of indivisible and permanent particles (*dharmas*) and that these particles were the only true existents among the phenomena of our world. Thus, for the Abhidhārmikas, the larger entities that we intuit have a lesser ontological status relative to the particles that compose them.[108] This differential in status as more or less real is determined in relation to permanence and divisibility. In effect, reality is attributed to what is less open for being affected by conditions, whether those that unfold in time or those germane to being a composite entity with interlocking aspects.

The Mādhyamikas held this sort of analysis to be deflationary and conducive to nihilist tendencies that disregard the reality of our world. If composite entities are the majority of our experiences, then understanding them as unreal relative to their atomistic elements deflates the reality of the way that we access the world. Moreover, the Mādhyamikas argue that anyone who is truly an adherent of the Buddhist doctrine of interdependent origination cannot defend any claim to this sense of *svabhāva* for anything

[108] Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* 62.

whatsoever. This is established as early as the first verse of the first chapter of the *Root Verses*, when Nāgārjuna says that nothing has arisen without a cause (*ahetutaḥ*).[109] Later in this text, he connects the ubiquity of having causes and conditions to the ubiquity of emptiness:

> Since there is no existent (*dharma*) whatsoever that has arisen without dependence,
>
> There is no existent whatsoever that is not empty.[110]

For most of us, the fact that everything arises from causes and conditions is hardly a controversial claim. We have accepted this concept as a maxim of truth, whether in the form of Leibniz's articulation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason or scientific laws of preservation.[111]

Both of these senses of *svabhāva* necessitate boundaries in different ways. If we imagine something with an essential character—a purity or integrity whose very compromising would cause the cessation of that thing—then the locale occupied by such an essence has sturdy boundaries around it to differentiate it from anything else. Its existence is contained within these boundaries. There is a sharp degree of difference between what occurs within and outside of the boundaries. On the other hand, if something is said to have *svabhāva* in that it arose from itself and continues to sustain its own existence, then it also exists on its own without the sort of continual becoming that occurs for all impermanent entities. To be caused or conditioned is to become what one is, in part,

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[109] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 4 (verse 1.3).
[110] *aprtītya samutpanno dharmaḥ kaścinna vidyate | yasmāttasmād aśūnyo hi dharmaḥ kaścinna vidyate* || Vaidya, *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 220 (verse 24.19).
[111] I will treat Leibniz's Principle of Reason in Chapter Three while presenting Heidegger's account of the will.

through another. A claim of independence is a claim that one is sequestered from this sort of dynamic genesis among various conditions bearing upon one another.

Nāgārjuna especially drives home the point that everything is empty of such an independent character when he argues that even the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha are empty of absolute and unconditioned veracity. Not only are they themselves empty, but they also attest to emptiness and interdependent origination as an important presupposition of the Buddhist project to relieve suffering.[112] The Four Noble Truths teach us that suffering exists and also that it has a cause. Further, they teach us the Eightfold Path as a way out of suffering. These truths are premised on a certain understanding of causality, especially that there are causes of suffering and also reliable causes for relieving suffering. Moreover, the fact that suffering can arise and cease attests to its impermanence. If suffering were unconditioned and permanent, then the Buddha would not have had any impetus to teach us anything at all.[113] However, the truth of pervasive suffering is not immutable since suffering can also be removed.[114] Thus, it is not only suffering that is empty of an independent and static existence, but so is the truth that suffering exists, namely the truth taught by the Buddha at his first sermon. In this way, the Four Noble Truths are not to be upheld intrinsically even though they are the truths that generate the whole of the Buddhist dharma. The Buddha taught *these* truths in particular because they are an appropriate response to the travails we face. Thus, the emptiness of the Four Noble Truths is not only the condition of possibility for their responsiveness to us, but also a necessary aspect of their ability to have efficacy in removing suffering.

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[112] Vaidya, ed., *Madhayamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna*, 225 (verse 24.40).
[113] Vaidya, ed., *Madhayamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna*, 220 (verse 24.21).
[114] Vaidya, ed., *Madhayamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna*, 222 (verse 24.26).

When Nāgārjuna teaches the emptiness of this central Buddhist teaching, he does not thereby deflate the value or meaning of these truths. The term "emptiness" in Madhyamaka philosophy emphasizes the fact that whatever content may be within a particular (ontological) locale—such as a truth delivered in propositional form—is not stable and decisive. For example, the self is said to be empty not because there is nothing there within the space or function that we call a "self," but because the content that comprises a self is constantly changing and negotiated in relation to what might be on the other side of its limits and in relation to its own impermanence. It is empty of an enduring, decisive, inherent nature that serves as its own ontological foundation, independent of any other conditioning. It is only because the self is empty in this way that it is able to participate in causal chains, respond to changing conditions in the world, and live a dynamic existence such that it moves across limits and touches the being of others.

The emptiness of the self and the Four Noble Truths demonstrate how the center of an entity, the so-called *svabhāva*, is only able to congeal into a finite form because of conditions constantly traversing its own limits, so much so that the limits themselves are constantly renegotiated. These limits are necessarily open and porous, never closed and rigid boundaries. When we understand that what is missing in an empty existent is merely an existence constituted by boundaries that are inhospitable and inflexible, emptiness is no longer felt as a diminishing or deflationary quality. Emptiness characterizes openness that engenders relation and involvement. These implications of emptiness offer a different set of connotations for the "lack" of self-sufficiency that emptiness diagnoses. It is by virtue of being empty that the Four Noble Truths are able to address Buddhist practitioners. Moreover, their emptiness is the reason that they offer hermeneutical support as we move

between them or even into other Buddhist teachings that lean on the framework put forth by these truths.

Nāgārjuna demonstrates that emptiness is not deflationary in the *Dispeller of Disputes* (*Vigrahavyāvartanī*) in response to an opponent's misapprehension of what it means for something to be empty. His interlocutor (presumably a Naiyāyika) argues that because Nāgārjuna's own teachings are empty, they are causally inefficacious in an argument.[115] The opponent understands "empty" to mean something along the lines of unreal, and therefore, impotent. In this case, the operative sense of *svabhāva* for Nāgārjuna's opponent is "substance": if something is empty, it is void of substance, and therefore, does not exist; further, if it does not exist, then it cannot possibly cause any real effects upon other entities.[116] Nāgārjuna corrects this misunderstanding by pointing out that it is only because his propositions are empty that they are able to have any efficacy at all.[117]

He likens his proposition about emptiness to a chariot, pot, and a cloth (all of which are material things commonly employed as examples in Madhyamaka texts). None of these exist fully independently insofar as they are not self-causing and are composed of parts.[118]

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[115] Yoshiyasu Yonezawa, "Vigrahavyāvartanī: Sanskrit Transliteration and Tibetan Translation," *Journal of Naritasan Insitute for Buddhist Studies* 31 (2008): 216 (verse 1).

[116] The Sanskrit verb here is *vidyate*. The verb's technical sense in its philosophical usage means to "exist" substantially and unconditionally, meaning with *svabhāva*. The verbal root *vid* literally means to find, and *vidyate* is a passive construction ("is found"). To say that something is found is to say that its existence is defensible under analysis, which is essentially only the case for a substance.

[117] Jan Westerhoff, trans., *The Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Vigrahavyāvartanī* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 47-8.

[118] The part-whole, or mereological argument, is another way that we can describe dependence. It is especially relevant in polemical engagements with the Yogācāra Buddhist traditions. One famous engagement with the relation between parts and wholes occurs in a dialogue between a Buddhist monk and a Greek King. See T. W. Rhys Davids, trans. *The Questions of King Milinda: The Milinda Panha* (Classic Reprint Series. Forgotten Books, 2012). I will further discuss this argument's emphasis on "neither one nor many" in Chapter Four.

Therefore, they are empty. Nonetheless, these objects "perform in their respective ways by removing wood, grass, earth, by containing honey, water or milk, and by bringing forth protection against cold, wind, or heat."[119] This moment in the text demonstrates that dependence—the fact of being insufficient on one's own—is not to be understood automatically as an ontological weakness. We still understand the chariot, pot, and cloth to participate in the same projects with the same degree of functionality even after we recognize them to be empty. Here we see that the connotations of emptiness as a deficiency are not only present in English. They were also a challenging point even for other philosophers within the Sanskrit context.

Logical argumentation further demonstrates that functionality actually depends on the emptiness of propositional claims. When we think about the way that an argument works, we can recognize that propositions have to fit together in a coherent logical structure in order for them to collectively lead us to a conclusion. If the propositions did not have this ability to operate upon one another, then all arguments would merely be isolated propositions rather than a series of interlocking claims that work together to make a point. Similarly, propositions would not have implications, nor could there be an argumentative structure involving multiple propositions (e.g. *modus ponens*). This would mean that all propositions functioning as arguments would be akin to tautologies, such that their truth value would be determinate independently of any real conditions or contingencies. Propositions would not be revised in light of other relevant information or new empirical data. Truth would be determinate indefinitely, preserved within propositional boundaries

[119] Yonezawa, ed., "*Vigrahavyāvartanī*," 254, auto-commentary to verse 22; Westerhoff, trans., *The Dispeller of Disputes*, 27.

and unresponsive to the language of other truths or the conditions circulating in our world.[120]

The fact that boundaries do not exist around true propositional claims—even the claim that convey a teaching about the emptiness of entities—means that these claims can bear upon one another, that they can render each other true or false, qualify one another, and push each other to their logical implications. Nāgārjuna does not exempt his insight of emptiness or the proposition conveying his insight from participating in the relational gymnastics endemic to discourse. It, too, is empty.

In fact, Buddhist teachings need to be empty in order to address varying soteriological needs. These teachings do not aspire to have a truth value that is objective or absolute. The emptiness of all teachings enables skillful Buddhist teachers to address specific audiences according to their soteriological needs. Nāgārjuna reminds us of this fact in the Examination of the Self (*ātma*) within the *Root Verses*. He says:

> By the Buddhas, the existence of the self is taught,
>
> the nonexistence of the self is taught,
>
> and neither the existence nor nonexistence of the self is even taught.[121]

The Buddhas would not teach using a falsehood, so the contradictory nature of these teachings makes us reflect not only on the nature of the self, but also upon the truth of these teachings and the pedagogical skill involved in deploying them. Candrakīrti's commentary clarifies that the Buddhas teach all of these to different people depending on their

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[120] That truth is liminal, contingent, and unbounded is a significant claim that has significant implications if one is interested in securely possessing truth with certainty. This ethical and epistemological issue will be taken up in Chapter Four.

[121] *atmety api prajñapitam anātmety api deśitam | buddhair nātmā na cānātmā kaścid ityapi deśitam* || Vaidya, *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 152 (verse 18.6).

soteriological needs. The existence of an enduring self is directed to those who need a sense of responsibility for their actions and the lack of self is directed to those in need of less self-cherishing. Contrary to those who think "no-self" is the ultimate truth, the final teaching Nāgārjuna lists strikes a middle way between the existence and nonexistence of a self.[122] This verse demonstrates unbounded finitude as part of Madhyamaka methodology: each claim is granted finite linguistic form, yet their significance emerges as they traverse limits to mingle and entangle with other beliefs and dispositions held by the addressees of the Buddhas. Skillful teachers are able to anticipate this encounter. They target an understanding that comes from the joining of the new teaching with prior understandings. In terms of pedagogical practice and in terms of metaphysical argument, it is a philosophy that highlights how the suitability of ideas only emerges in relation to everything else.

We can imagine how this relational structure that distances itself from objectivity might collapse into a relativity that also resembles a nihilistic realization that nothing is real. It is not completely unreasonable for the Naiyāyikas to worry about whether emptiness entails nonexistence. After all, when the boundaries of a particular entity become defunct, it seems as though everything would drift into an inchoate expanse. Illustrations and examples throughout the Madhyamaka corpus further encourage this impression. In the *Four Hundred* (*Catuḥśataka*), Nāgārjuna's student, Āryadeva quotes from the *Samādhirājasūtra*:

> A large lump of foam is carried away by the current
>
> And, after investigating it, one sees no solid substance,

[122] Vaidya, *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 152-154.

You should know all things in this way.[123]

Moreover, there are moments in his writing where any strict adherence to form, limits, or distinctions is altogether ridiculed. In the *Sixty Verses on Reason*, (*Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*), Nāgārjuna says:

When subjected to analysis,
There is no apprehension of it is "this" or "that,"
What intelligent person would argue
and debate "this" or "that" is true?[124]

In the same way that a seemingly discrete lump of foam dissolves into the ocean, so too do all demarcations of "this or that" slip into an unstructured assemblage of moving, changing, interdependent conditions. These descriptions seem to deprive any particular thing—whether an agential subject, a pot, or a propositional claim—their determinate locus. Impermanence and interdependence both highlight that being is shifting in dynamic ways with conditions continually responding to and bearing upon one another. Perhaps boundaries are drawn arbitrarily to collapse a plurality of minor conditions into a single entity. Jane Bennett is compelled by this sort of understanding of the process inherent to things when she says that matter is "always in various states of congealment and

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[123] Karen C. Lang, trans., *Four Illusions: Candrakīrti's Advice for Travelers on the Bodhisattva Path* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 162 (paragraph 240).

[124] Cristina Anna Scherrer-Schaub, ed., *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti, Commentaire à la soixantaine sur le raisonnement uu Du vrai enseignement de la causalité par le Maître indien Candrakīrti* (Brussels, Belgium: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1991) 274-75; Robert A. F. Thurman, Thomas F. Yarnall, and Paul G. Hackett, eds., *Nāgārjuna's Reason Sixty: Yuktiṣaṣṭikā, With Candrakīrti's Commentary (Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti)*, trans. by Joseph John Loizzo and The AIBS Translation Team (New York, NY: American Institute of Buddhist Studies and Columbia University Press, 2007) 124, 192 (verse 42). I go between these two translations and editions of the text. The full Sanskrit of the text is not available, but for the instances in which it is, Scherrer-Schaub includes it in her notes. See also Lang, trans., *Four Illusions,* 157 (verse 228).

diffusion."[125] On her account, this tendency to attribute a single identity is in part a survival mechanism:

> the stones, tables, technologies, words, and edibles that confront us as fixed are mobile, internally heterogenous materials whose rate of speed and pace of change are *slow* compared to the duration and velocity of the human bodies participating in and perceiving them. 'Objects' appear as such because their becoming proceeds at a speed or a level below the threshold of human discernment... [T]o live, humans need to interpret the world reductively as a series of fixed objects, a need reflected in the rhetorical role assigned to the word *material*.[126]

Indeed, emptiness is in part calling into question the way that our perceptions carry us into the sphere of claiming existing in such-and-such-a-way, namely with a particular *svabhāva*. However, these examples seem to be encouraging us to not only shed boundaries but lose any understanding of limits whatsoever. In effect, delimited entities also lose their ontological status. However, as we go further into Madhyamaka thought, and understand emptiness to itself be empty, we will see that it is not the case that removing boundaries is equivocal with discarding any sense of determination among things in our world. In this respect, emptiness shifts how we grasp our world, but it does not diminish the world altogether.

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[125] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 93.
[126] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 57-8.

III. Emptiness of Emptiness as a Way of Upholding Finitude

What does it mean to say that Nāgārjuna's teaching of emptiness is itself empty? In part, the teaching of the "emptiness of emptiness" directs us to remember that despite the linguistic form of empty-*ness* as an abstraction (and with the abstract suffix *–tā* in Sanskrit), emptiness is not an absolute that we can access independently of particular, finite things which are empty. Emptiness, as an idea that is meaningful and applicable, is conditioned by and contingent upon entities which are in fact empty. This contingency of emptiness upon finite things implies dependence, which necessarily implies emptiness itself. When we search for the intrinsic being of some entity and are unable to defend any precise articulation of it, then we can say that the entity is empty, that its being is neither decided on its own nor in a final and permanent sense. It is only through finite entities that we can begin to think of the way that their limits are porous and their being is unbounded. Meditating on emptiness facilitates a phenomenological realization by which emptiness is apparent in our ordinary, pre-reflective apprehension of entities even before analysis. With this phenomenological realization, we do not grant any particular thing the status of being independent or unconditioned even upon our immediate intuitions of it. Instead, our apprehension includes the dependent relations supporting that thing. In this way, emptiness can be disclosed repeatedly through finite entities.[127] It does not exist in an all-pervasive and boundless ideal. Understanding emptiness in relation to its own conditionality prevents

[127] Nāgārjuna conveys this point when he argues that the ultimate truth (emptiness) can only be taught through conventional truths (which are necessarily determinate and finite). Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 216 (verse 24.10).

us from becoming overly attached to it such that we grant it an absolute status and dogmatically grasp it.

Nāgārjuna teaches the emptiness of emptiness to warn his audience about the perils of installing emptiness into the status of unconditional Truth. In the *Root Verses,* he says,

> The Victors proclaim emptiness to be the cure for all views,
>
> But those for whom emptiness itself is a view, they are said to be incurable.[128]

The first line uses the common practice for Buddhist teachings to be likened to medicine insofar as the teachings remove the pathogenic views that are conducive to suffering.[129] Emptiness treats the harmful views of absolute existence and nihilism. The previous section addressed the aspect of emptiness that deals with the former: emptiness emphasizes contingency and dependence to dismantle views about a rigid and enduring existence for any so-called substance. Throughout this section we will see how emptiness deals with nothingness. In brief, the emptiness of emptiness continually retrieves us from a sense of boundless nothingness by returning us to the immanent field of finite things.

In his commentary to this verse, Candrakīrti quotes a conversation between the Buddha and his disciple, Kāśyapa, from the *Āryaratnakūṭasūtra* (*The Sūtra on the Noble Heap of Jewels)*. The Buddha says that if a medicine is ingested, removes the sickness it was intended to treat, and then simply stays in the body, then the medicine itself will lead to sickness.[130] Nāgārjuna's initial verse points out that dogmatism about emptiness is even

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[128] *śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭīnāṃ proktā niḥsaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ | yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatā dṛṣṭistānasādhyān babhāṣīre.* Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 108 (verse 13.8).
[129] For more on this trope, see Jonardon Ganeri. *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of the Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 98-103.
[130] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 108-109.

more pernicious because it is incurable (*asādhya*). The danger in conceiving emptiness as absolutely true is that doing so causes one to fall into one of the extremes—nihilism—that the "middle way" of the Mādhyamikas strives to avoid. In this context, nihilism is the belief that nothing is real. If emptiness becomes a transcendental truth, its elevated status as "what is really true" renders the meaningful distinctions circulating in our immanent world to be void of any reality.

The emptiness of emptiness rescues us from deflating the world in which we live by including emptiness itself within the set of things that are removed from an unconditional status. If even the ultimate level of truth is conditional and contingent, then its ontological status is not markedly different from the conditional and contingent entities we deal with in our mundane lives. In this way, the emptiness of emptiness elevates the status of contingency in our immanent plane.

This discussion incorporates a nuanced understanding of the Buddhist doctrine of the two truths: conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) and ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*). It should be noted from the outset that the Mādhyamikas do not use this distinction to create a duality between appearance and reality or between the immanent and transcendent. "Conventional truth" is precisely what it sounds like – a way of understanding that coheres with the conceptions and paradigms that already circulate around us in common convention. Notice that this is a type of *truth*, so even as we move up, so to speak, to an ultimate analysis, it is not the case that the truth of convention becomes a falsehood.

In Sanskrit, one term used to designate "conventional truth" is "*saṃvṛtisatya,*" which also carries the sense of a reality which is concealed, deceptive, or false.[131] In some systems, it might be the case that worldly or conventional realities (also *lokavyavahārasatya)* were dismissed as merely deceptive. However, the Mādhyamikas, as a piece of their efforts to avoid the extreme of nihilism, are not so willing to neglect the force of our experience or the reality of the sensibilities that circulate in our world. As Dan Arnold explains, "there can be no explanation that does not itself exemplify the same conditions that characterize our conventions."[132]

What is concealed or deceptive, then, is not *what* exists, but *how* those same entities exist. "Ultimate truth" requires seeing conventions *as* conventions that are embedded within and conditioned by a semantic field. However, this understanding of their truth value as conditioned does not negate their truth value. Essentially, Mādhyamikas will say that existents appear as though they are independent objects with *svabhāva*, when they are actually empty of such a static and independent existence. Insight into the emptiness of conventional entities is insight into the ultimate truth. When something is held to be ultimately true that means that it is defensible under philosophical analysis. The emptiness of an entity seems to meet this criterion at a particular point in analysis, but a more thorough analysis will uncover emptiness itself to be empty, which means that what is initially

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[131] There are at least three senses of *saṃvṛtisatya*. The first is conventional in terms of the conventions of our agreements to use particular words to refer to some particular or particular set. The relation between the words and their referents is not intrinsic, but a de facto agreement among the members of some community. *Saṃvṛti* can also refer to a concealing truth that generates ignorance. In these cases, *saṃvṛtisatya* means "'true-for-the-ignorant,' 'true-for-the obscured,' or 'true-for-the-benighted.'" Finally, the third sense of *saṃvṛti* means mutual dependence. Guy Newland, and Tom J. F. Tillemans, "An Introduction to Conventional Truth," in *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 13.

[132] Dan Arnold, *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief: Epistemology in South Asian Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 120.

discernable as true on the ultimate level is itself empty of any stable, rigid form. In the end, there is nothing that is ultimately true. With training and insight, we are even further aware that all we have are conditioned contingencies. In effect, the ultimate truth returns us to our immanent world of interdependent, finite entities that mutually condition one another.

In *The Dispeller of Disputes* Nāgārjuna illustrates this matter of *how* we apprehend the existence of an entity with the example of a mirage appearing on the horizon of a traveler's path.[133] A mirage is the deceiving appearance (*saṃvṛti)* of water at a distance, when in reality, there is only heat rising off the ground and no water. There is a blatant discrepancy here between what we understand from our experience and what actually exists in the reality beyond our experience. This is because the mirage is real while the water is deceptively unreal.[134] However, to simply see a mirage does not mean that one is deceived by a false appearance. The issue arises if one sees a mirage and, rather than recognizing that one is looking at a mirage, one understands there to be water at a distance. To see a mirage is in accordance with our optical anatomy and the reality of our experience. The prudent skill for a traveler, however, would be to recognize a mirage as a mirage. Similarly, seeing finite things that exist within certain limits is not a problem in itself. The skill of a learned person is to see finite, conventional things *in their conventionality*. With this example, it becomes clear that the distinction between conventional and ultimate is subtler than a dualistic dichotomy between appearance and reality. Just as it would be for a traveler who sees a mirage and one who sees water, the difference is between the reality

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[133] Yonezawa, ed., *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, 246-250 and 320-324; Westerhoff, trans., *The Dispeller of Disputes*, 116-120 (verses 13-16 and 65-67). See also, Lang, *The Four Illusions*, 162 (paragraphs 240.3-4).

[134] Jay Garfield, "Taking Conventional Truth Seriously: Authority Regarding Deceptive Reality," in *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. by The Cowherds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 29.

apprehended by someone who is trained well and someone who is not, even though the strict appearance of the waves in the distance is the same.

Emptiness does not dissolve limits altogether such that the conventionally real entities of our world are no longer defensible as real. It is a teaching that encourages us to avoid apprehending limits in deleterious ways. In the *Sixty Verses on Reason* Nāgārjuna says:

> If [you] claim a beginning, then, definitely,
> You are embracing an [addictive] view.
> What beginning or end could there be
> To that which arises interdependently?[135]

Nāgārjuna is critiquing the claim that there are determinable beginnings and ends to particular entities. In his commentary to this verse, Candrakīrti takes this verse to be particularly about the beginning of saṃsāric existence. On the Buddhist view, saṃsāra has to be without beginning (*anādi*) because it otherwise would have a certain point at which it itself was uncaused. However, this metaphysical quality of beginninglessness is applicable for all entities. Grasping a claim to a distinct beginning prohibits us from recognizing the ways that seemingly discreet entities participate in the conditioning of one another. Interdependent origination implies that entities have been on their way to being what they are well before any beginning, birth or arising that is discernable from our point of view. The marking of a particular beginning obscures this extended arena that is largely opaque to us, and ultimately limits our way of accounting for things. Similar to how

[135] Verse 14: Thurman, et al. eds., *Nāgārjuna's Reason Sixty,*120-21, 163-64; Scherrer-Schaub, ed., *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, 180-183.

claiming a particular beginning imputes form over a continuum, so, too, does an end. Death is a common trope for demonstrating this point in Buddhist texts. Death is not a sudden break, but is written into life, meaning that death and life rely on each other to be what they are.[136] Rather than describing death as a decisive moment, one is continually dying throughout life. Furthermore, death itself cannot be understood as final annihilation, as with it one disperses into generative conditions for other ontological events. Thinking in terms of decisive beginnings and ends shrinks entities into a reduced form that does not incorporate relevant causes, conditions, and effects into a particular thing's or person's being.

While Mādhyamikas argue that limits are never impermeable boundaries that uphold a sphere with a permanent and independent integrity or identity, they do still recognize the reality of limits. Limits *occur* within a collocation of conditions, and as the conditions inevitably change, where these limits fall and what they distinguish is also continually renegotiated. Having distinguishable, finite entities is important, but these limits must also be tended to in such a way that they are not dogmatically grasped as though they are absolutely, necessarily, and independently real. As mentioned before, "Madhyamaka" philosophy aims for the "middle way" between an ontology in which things exist independently or absolutely, and another extreme ontology in which no particular thing can be said to exist in any real way whatsoever. *Unboundedness* avoids the former and *finitude* the latter.

[136] Lang, *The Four Illusions*, 114-115 (paragraphs 14-16).

IV. The Radicality of Limits in Madhyamaka Philosophy

Insofar as interdependent origination affirms finite entities and a lack of boundaries, it is a radically paradoxical metaphysics. I return to the dedicatory verse in the *Root Verses* that was briefly visited in the Introduction to this chapter. Translated in full, it reads:

> Neither ceasing nor arising, neither perishing nor eternal,
>
> neither singular nor plural, neither coming nor going –
>
> That is interdependent origination, the auspicious calming of all elaborations,
>
> Taught by the Buddha. I praise him, the best of speakers.[137]

This verse exhibits Nāgārjuna's paradigmatic employment of negations, in which he negates two binary opposites, and thereby demands that we leave the paradigm of the binary altogether. These four pairs show that interdependent origination especially questions the way we mark points of separation between existents that are constitutively entangled. That Nāgārjuna praises the Buddha for teaching interdependent origination and makes this the focal point of his dedicatory verse implies that interdependent origination is the orienting idea (*abhidheyārtha*) to the *Root Verses*.[138]

Three of these pairs are about the temporal boundaries we might attribute to a finite thing while demarcating its limits. A foundational Buddhist insight is that everything is impermanent, but there is a variety of ways to understand impermanence among different Buddhist traditions. In the first pair, neither ceasing nor arising, Nāgārjuna targets the view

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[137] *anirodham anutpādam, anucchedam aśāśvatam, anekārtham anānārtham, anāgāmam anirgamam, yaḥ pratītyasamutpādam prapaṅcopaśamaṃ śivam, deśayamāsa saṃbuddhas tam vande vadatām varam.* Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 4.
[138] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 2.

that things arise and cease moment by moment (*kṣaṇabhaṅga*). Candrakīrti glosses "arising" (*utpāda*) as "the coming forth of an existence that has a self" (*ātmabhāvonmajjana*). We see in this gloss that "arising" structurally implies the arising of some particular thing that has a distinct identity (self, *ātma*) from what was there prior to the event of arising.

Another way we can understand the impermanence of existents is that they come or arrive into a particular locus of existence and then also similarly leave that locus as they go out of existence. In the final pair, *neither coming nor going*, Nāgārjuna says that this view of impermanence is also untenable. In such an ontological account, it is still the case that a distinct thing goes through this cycle of arriving and departure. A third (and final) way we can understand impermanence is through the idea of continuums that endure until they are interrupted, meaning a particular thing exists until the stream that constitutes its existence is cut. In the second pair Nāgārjuna says a continuum is neither cut or interrupted (*uccheda*), nor are there any continuums that continue eternally (*śāśvata*) for all time.[139] The negation of eternalism is not controversial for Buddhists, but the idea that nothing is ever cut or interrupted seems completely incoherent with any sense of impermanence whatsoever. How can we understand impermanence in any sense except that things are disrupted, cut, or destroyed (all of which are senses of *uccheda*)?

The third pair of negations, *anekārtha anānartha,* neither singular nor plural, is critical for resolving this puzzle. Here the middle way is invoked not only in terms of time, but in terms of distinctions and limits more generally. What I translate as "singular," *ekārtha,* literally means "a thing that is one," in the sense of a single, monistic thing.

[139] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 2.

Nāgārjuna negates this because a causal event necessarily disrupts a sense of unity insofar as there is a change from the beginning to the end. However, he also swings to the other extreme and says that there is equally not a multiplicity, *anānārtha*. If we are willing to fully separate the cause from the effect, allowing there to be a multiplicity of things, then we encounter other undesirable implications. Separation means that the being of any part of the causal event as that particular part is independent the other parts of the causal event. However, interdependence stresses that existents neither occur separate (*pṛthak*) nor not separate (*na pṛthak*).[140] There is a sense of finitude insofar as everything is not united into a single thing with only one identity, but we also should not think that the degree of difference implies a diffuse multiplicity. This is the ontological in-between state at the center of the famous "neither-one-nor-many" argument that Mādhyamikas deployed to challenge ontological foundations for Buddhist and non-Buddhists alike.[141]

The idea of "neither separate nor not separate" especially complicates our accounts of events that require relations among existents. If we observe the arising of something and want to say that the new arisen thing is separate from its causes, this point of separation betrays the ties that a thing has to its cause. Similarly, if we are not willing to mark separation between a set of causes and conditions and an effect that arises, then it becomes difficult to talk about any causal event whatsoever, despite our empirical experience of them. Thus, Nāgārjuna is trying to make it increasingly clear that we have to move out of

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[140] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 2.

[141] For example, see: James Blumenthal, trans., "Śāntarakṣita's 'Neither-One-Nor-Many' Argument from Madhyamakālaṃkāra (The Ornament of the Middle Way): A Classical Buddhist Argument on the Ontological Status of Phenomena," in *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, ed. by William Edelglass, and Jay L. Garfield (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 46–60. This topic will also appear again in Chapter Four.

the binary of identity and difference or separate and non-separate in order to think in terms of interdependent origination.

Two types of relations repeatedly featured throughout the *Root Verses* are the relations between causes and effect and the relations between a property and its bearer. At the outset of the *Root Verses*, Nāgārjuna says that causes and effects are not identical, nor are they distinct, nor are they both identical and distinct.[142] If they were identical, then there would be no significant event by which a cause gives rise to an effect.[143] If they are distinct, however, we have to account for the way that the cause produces the effect. In this first chapter, Nāgārjuna shows that no independently existent (i.e., possessing *svabhāva*) cause or effect would be able to participate in the relations inherent to being a cause or effect.[144] In other words, even if an entity is a cause, claiming independence would be incoherent. In the second chapter, we encounter the complications between a property and its bearer. In particular, we can neither disentangle nor collapse an act of moving and an agent who moves. These two are neither identical nor distinct.[145] If they were identical, then an agent and action would be identical.[146] If they were distinct, then we would be able to encounter either motion or a moving agent independently of one another.[147]

In Chapter Ten of the *Root Verses*, the Examination of Fire and Fuel, Nāgārjuna gives us a concrete example of the relation between cause and effect. More specifically, fuel and fire, respectively, stand in the place of a causal agent and an inert patient that is brought into being by the cause. The presupposition is that the subject is independent and

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[142] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 4, (verse 1.3).
[143] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 4 (verse 1.4).
[144] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 4-32.
[145] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 39 (verse 2.18).
[146] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 39 (verse 2.19).
[147] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 39 (verse 2.20).

the patient is dependent. Nāgārjuna's argument against this relies on this final pair from the dedicatory verse, though he shifts the language slightly. Instead of using the adjective *nāna* (multiple), he uses *anya*, which means different or other. This swift change highlights the fact that the structure of a multiplicity requires a relation of otherness or difference among entities. The chapter begins with the premise of the law of an excluded middle: either fire and fuel have a relation of sameness (*ekatva*) or of non-sameness, namely, difference (*anyatva*).[148] If fire and fuel were the same, then it would be superfluous to start a fire by igniting fuel. Fuel would already be fire and nothing would need to be done to it in order to start a fire, such as sparking fuel.[149] This, however, runs contrary to our experience. Further, assuming fire and fuel to be unified in substance does not offer any clarity to the broader metaphysical question at stake, namely about the relation between an agent and a patient.

The next option is to consider them separate. If fire and fuel were fully different, then they would be able to exist independently such that we would be able to encounter one while the other is absent. This would mean that items such as grass would be fuel even without any notion of "fire" or plan for it to become a part of fire, and that fire would blaze even in the absence of fuel.[150] However, neither of them are able to be what they are *qua* fire and fuel without each other. Fire is obviously contingent upon the lighting of fuel, and fuel does not conceptually exist without its possibility of feeding a fire in the future. For example, a pile of dry sticks collected by a bird for a bird nest is not fuel, but if a person were to have collected the same pile of sticks with the intent of starting a fire, then the

[148] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 86 (verse 10.1).
[149] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 86-7 (verse 10.3).
[150] Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 86-7 (verse 10.2).

sticks become fuel. In order to be fuel the sticks must be collected for the sake of starting a fire or be already presently burning as fuel for a fire. Nāgārjuna does not eliminate the limits between fire and fuel to fuse them together, nor can he understand these limits to be insular.

In these examples, we find that interdependent origination complicates the function and meaning of limits as the sort of form-granting, demarcating structures that they are. In the introduction, we glanced at this verse merely to recognize that limits are at stake. Now, we can read it and recognize the tone of absurdity and perhaps even exasperation while Nāgārjuna tries to square the metaphysics of emptiness with that of limits:

> When all things (*dharma)* are empty, what does it mean to be with or without ends (*anta*)?
>
> What does it mean to be both with and without ends?
>
> What does it mean to be neither with nor without ends?[151]

Nāgārjuna's way of asking theses question demonstrates the absurdity of thinking in terms of "ends" altogether. He uses a single word alongside the options he presents, namely the interrogative expression *kim?* When something is not completely self-sufficient and thereby empty, the very concept of an end is turned on its head. *Kim* indicates that we cannot really make sense of emptiness alongside an understanding of ends, either in the sense of having them or lacking them. There is still something in particular that is said to be empty, so insofar as I can point to this thing to say that it is empty, its ends exist and contain the thing to which I point. However, the fact that this thing is empty means that its

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[151] "*śūnyeṣu sarvadharmeṣu kim anantaṃ kim antavat | kim anantam antavacca nānantaṃ nāntvacca kim,*" Vaidya, ed., *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna,* 235 (verse 25.22).

ends could never be demarcations that disjoin it from other things. Since an empty existent is not self-sufficient, it necessarily has some link to other existents. Both having and not having ends is not tenable, since neither end of the conjunction makes sense on its own. While *kim* in the first two questions highlights the incoherency between emptiness and existents with ends, in the last question *kim* invites a puzzling consideration, namely to think outside of the terms of either having or not having ends.

V. Unbounded Finitude as a Worldview in Buddhist Narratives

It is incredibly difficult to provide meaningful accounts when we cannot have a conception of limits as either absent or present. In the absence of limits altogether, we would give an account of monism. Moreover, if limits were assuredly present, then we could account for multiple entities. In their most radical moments, however, the Mādhyamikas adhere to neither of these ontological accounts. Nonetheless, Buddhist narrative accounts of sequential events do exist and function in myriad and profound ways. These accounts largely uphold conventional limits, but also make several specific limits significantly more complicated than how we understand them prior to any reflection. In doing so, Buddhist narratives give us ways of incorporating unbounded finitude into certain aspects of our worldview and our practices of narrating events.[152]

In general, narrative form coheres by virtue of the way that any singular moment of a story receives its meaning from its contextual background, which itself is linguistically

[152] We could argue the same for the philosophical text – that it launches itself into the experience of the reader. Some scholars have made this argument by calling a study of Madhyamaka philosophy a "spiritual exercise." See, for example: C. W. Jr. Huntington, "The Nature of the Mādhyamika Trick." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 35 (2007): 103–31.

presented as a series of finite acts or descriptions. Thus, narrative form is predicated on unbounded finitude insofar as (1) particular moments, characters, and acts exceed their limits in order to have significance, and (2) this context or background is comprised of finite details. What is unique about Buddhist narratives is that they employ interdependence via broader Buddhist views, such as the theory of rebirth, Buddhist cosmology, and karmic histories. One such narrative is Aśvaghoṣa's *The Life of the Buddha* (*Buddhacarita*),[153] a semi-canonical narrative poem telling the story of Siddhārtha Gautama, or the Buddha.[154] In Aśvaghoṣa's rendering of his life story we see that the Buddha's ultimate achievement of *nirvāṇa* is one that required a myriad of conditions that reach across the thresholds of lifetimes and cosmological realms (*lokas*).

While *The Life of the Buddha* presents a comprehensive rendering of the Buddha's life, this tale has relevant pieces outside of the temporal bounds of the Buddha's birth and death. We see this at the beginning of the story when Aśvaghoṣa presents the particular birth of Siddārtha Gautama in a way that calls us to comprehend—or at least ponder—a sequence of lifetimes and an entire karmic history and future. In the initial canto we learn that the Buddha had previously cultivated the appropriate wisdom and burned up his karma, all of which prepared him for his Awakening in this lifetime. Just after being born, the infant Siddhārtha foretells his own future:

> For Awakening I am born,

[153] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha,* ed. and trans. by Patrick Olivelle, The Clay Sanskrit Library (New York: New York University Press & JJC Foundation, 2009). I am using this edition for both the Sanskrit edition and the English translation because I find Olivelle's translations better attuned to the poetic qualities of the Sanskrit than my own English renderings.

[154] Elements of this story do exist in more canonical sources, such as the *Jātakas* or the *Sutta Piṭaka.* Aśvaghoṣa retells a story in poetical form that many people already knew. It also should be said that this is not a historical biography; it is more similar to a hagiography (Silk 2003), and so my reading will interpret it accordingly.

for the welfare of the world;

This indeed is the last coming

into existence for me![155]

This birth is singular and unique because it will be his final birth and the one in which he awakens.

In the same verse that Aśvaghoṣa makes us think about this historical moment, he also gives us a glimpse of the prior conditions that grant this moment its distinctive call for celebration. This is further signaled by the poetical description that is characteristic of enchanting and auspicious scenes in classical Indian poetic literature. When the new prince emerges from his mother's womb,[156] there is already some awareness of who he is on the part of onlookers from different realms, including light from the sun and the moon, *yakṣas,*[157] heavenly beings, and gods who give their blessings for his Awakening. We also see all of the elements of the earth partake in eager celebration of his arrival, offering auspicious omens: the earth trembles, fire blazes brightly, water wells burst; while other parts of nature exude tranquility: the animals are pacified, the sky clear, and the rivers calm.[158] Additionally, the prince is born with the marks (*lakṣaṇa*) of a great person (*mahāpuruṣa*),[159] and upon finding these, Āsita, the great seer, predicts the prince will

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[155] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 8-9 (verse 1.15).

[156] In Aśvaghoṣa's telling, the Buddhist did not travel through the birth canal out of his mother's womb, but simply "emerged" (Aśvaghoṣa 7). In other stories it is said that he came out of the side of her torso. Jonathan A. Silk, "The Fruits of Paradox: On the Religious Architecture of the Buddha's Life Story," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 4 (December 2003): 867.

[157] *Yakṣa* is a word that is often left untranslated because it does not have an equivalent in English or Judeo-Christian cosmology. In Olivelle's glossary at the end of this volume, he says "*yakṣa*" is "generally a term for demons, but in Buddhist terminology refers to a class of divine beings" (475).

[158] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 26-29 (verses 1.69-1.72).

[159] Olivelle translates: "the soles of his feet with marks of a wheel, his hands and feet with webbed fingers and toes, a circle of hair between his eyebrows, genitals ensheathed like an elephant's" (25,

become the Awakened One, the Buddha who will "dispel the darkness of delusion," "proclaim the way to release," and indeed, "release the world from bondage."[160]

These inclusions are cues that direct us to interpret the tale with consideration of the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth in general, as well as the stories of the Buddha's previous lives as they are conveyed in the *Jātakas*. As Jonathan Silk argues, this interpretative frame does not require knowledge of the specific details of previous lives, only recognition of the sustained effort that led to the cultivation, merit, and attainments that allow for the Buddha to reach *nirvāṇa* in this lifetime.[161] Once he becomes a mendicant, his insight and wisdom are attributed to his cultivation in his previous births, and during his Awakening he recalls his previous births—particularly the various relations that ended with the passing of a life and the cyclic nature of death and birth.[162] This particular life had a supramundane birth and death only because they were set at the end of a long series of merit-producing lifespans. The distinctiveness of Siddhārtha Gautama's lifetime as a finite event can only be understood with reference to efforts in prior lifetimes to cultivate Buddhist virtues and burn through his karma. In order to recognize this finite event as something extraordinary, we also have to recognize that his birth and death are not closed boundaries, even as they delimit a lifespan. He is born from ongoing conditions and will also contribute to the conditioning of others.

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verse 1.60). He also supplies a note explaining that most of these marks, save the last one, are noted in *Mahāpadāna Suttanta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (437). In another rendering of his life in the *Mahāvastu*, we see that much of Siddhārtha's conduct was supramundane – his sleeping was meditation, his bathing was merely for conformity's sake since he never dirtied, and his death was also mere appearance since he remained to relieve the suffering of others. See Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 2nd Edition, The Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices (London; New York: Routledge, 2008) 20-21.

[160] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 5-10 (verses 1.11-1.26).

[161] Silk, "The Fruits of Paradox," 866.

[162] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 404-405 (verses 14.2-14.6).

Stretching a person's acts and achievements to conditioning prior to their birth has several ethical and soteriological implications. Because particular acts are linked to prior conditioning in Buddhist narratives, finite acts encourage us to search for a broader frame of reference. Hallisey and Hansen argue that the metaphysics of rebirth implies that the effects or consequences of an intention or act may not always be readily evident to us. Karmic chains are so large and complex that we inevitably have opacities in our accounts.[163] Using stories from the *Divyāvadāna,* Sara McClintock describes the way that reading stories whose arc spans multiple lifetimes presents causal chains to which the characters of the stories are not always privy. A certain way of reading such stories can provoke the audience to have an existential reckoning with the fact that we cannot always know or understand how we have arrived at our present circumstances. She argues that when confronted with these opacities, one inhabits an epistemic humility that can motivate ethical autopoiesis, a fashioning of one's ethical being.[164] Maria Heim argues that the expanded biographies of characters across multiple lifetimes in Buddhist narratives also can influence ethically laden practices that affect how we relate to others. Stories that offer larger interpretative frames through which we can view specific acts call us to reflect on how we assign judgment or admiration. The larger frames provide important information for moral evaluation by shifting the set of semantic references, changing the meaning of an act as different information is brought to the fore.[165] Additionally, Jonathan Silk argues

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[163] Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen, "Narrative, Sub-Ethics, and the Moral Life: Some Evidence from Theravāda Buddhism," *Journal of Religious Ethics, Inc.* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 319.
[164] Sara McClintock, "Ethical Reading and the Ethics of Forgetting and Remembering," in *A Mirror Is for Reflection, Understanding Buddhist Ethics*, ed. by Jake H. Davis (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) 198.
[165] Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 187-191. I will further develop the complexity of how we understand the cause of an action or responsibility in Chapter Four.

that the enlarged frame for the Buddha's story in particular allows readers to approach the Buddhist path with a greater sense of possibility since the work of removing the three poisons of ignorance, craving and aversion seems far too ambitious for a single lifetime. The broader frame's implication for a long and patient cultivation means one does not need to identify with the Buddha at the end of the path or during his most insightful moments along the way in order to consider Buddhist practice worthwhile.[166]

What is unique about using rebirth as a way of highlighting the conditions that contributed to that particular moment is that the conditioning is not contained within a person's lifespan. However, narrative structure will often use prior conditioning to highlight the importance of a particular moment without breaching the thresholds of birth and death. For example, we are forced to enter the conditions prevailing in the story in order to appreciate the gravity of Siddhārtha's realization of human suffering. When the prince was born, the Brahmins predicted that he would either become a powerful king taking his father's throne or that he would leave for the forest and become the Buddha. Not wishing for his royal line to be interrupted, the prince's father (King Śuddhodana) created several obstacles to impede his son from witnessing others' suffering and thereby finding reason to renounce his luxurious situation. The king deliberately removed "those lacking a limb or with defective organs, the wretched, the decrepit, the sick, and the like"[167] from the prince's line of sight.

[166] Silk, "The Fruits of Paradox," 870.
[167] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 62-63 (verse 3.5).

The gods who were looking down disrupted this effort by manifesting before the prince in four forms: an aging person, a sick person, a corpse, and a mendicant.[168] These forms are "messengers" who deliver a catalyst for the Buddha's renunciation of his kingly role. Upon seeing the impermanence and suffering of the body, the Buddha has profound reactions that escalate in his encounters with each messenger. Initially, he is horrified that he also will endure bodily suffering since aging cannot be defeated even by a king with all of the resources of this world. But when he sees the next messenger of sickness he has sympathy, which heightens to pity by the time he meets the messenger of death and also sees people grieving. The prince's degree of anguish, agony and shock before the fact of human finitude could not have occurred without King Śuddhodana's sustained efforts to keep these negative features of human existence out of his sight. Without his father's extreme measures, Prince Siddhārtha would not have been shocked by these sights, and therefore, he would not have been moved to embark on a path to find an exit from suffering.[169] Siddhārtha has a profound realization only because there was a correspondingly profound sheltering (or deprivation) before the realization took place. This is to say that while the messengers met Siddhārtha in specific and finite moments, these could not have constituted the same particularities with other conditions surrounding

[168] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 70-71, 74-75, 80-81 (verses 3.26-7, 3.40, and 3.54, respectively).

[169] In general, shock is an important lever that teachers will manipulate for their students. Chögyam Trungpa cited the occurrence of shock in tantric practitioners as one important reason that the tantric texts of his tradition were to be coveted and only shared with practitioners upon their initiation. *The Tantric Path of Indestructible Wakefulness*, ed. by Judith L. Lief (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2013) xvii-xix. The Buddha also is known to have presented people with sights they would find shocking for the sake of catalyzing a certain realization. For example, this happens to Dharmaruci upon seeing his skeleton from a previous life. See: Andy Rotman (trans.), *Divine Stories: Divyāvadāna Part 2*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2017) 3-44.

them.[170] Without consideration of how this experience differs from the entirety of the Prince's previous knowledge and understanding, this scene could easily be misunderstood or dismissed as over-embellished. This is a turning point in the story because it is the impetus for Siddhārtha's departure from his palace and entry onto a path of renunciation.

While the messengers have a precise role in this story, they also become symbols or tropes for teaching foundational Buddhist ideas. Sickness, aging, and death are messengers in our mundane lives who relentlessly deliver the teaching that all beings are impermanent and vulnerable.[171] As we endure and witness these experiences, we are not to simply bear physical pain or observe others' fortitude, but rather to incorporate an understanding of impermanence into the same quotidian practices where we encountered the messengers. In this way, our moment-by-moment confrontation with suffering has a different nature if the story of the messengers is in our own interpretative backgrounds.

So far, we have discussed the lack of boundary between a finite event and the temporal background against which it is set. Another way in which unbounded finitude appears in *The Life of the Buddha* is in terms of the locus of an agent or actor.[172] For several

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[170] Richard Robinson accounts for this reaction through the oscillation of *rāga* (passion, desire) and *tyāga* (renunciation, detachment). He argues that the dialectic between these opposite aesthetic tastes intensifies each of them as the story goes on. It is not only that the Prince was sheltered, but also that he was presented with great delights and pleasures. However, he was not able to enjoy them after seeing the harshness that the messengers brought before him. Richard H. Robinson, "Humanism Verses Asceticism in Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa," *Journal of South Asian Literature* 12, no. 3/4 (1977) 1-10.

[171] "The Three Messengers" in *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Aṅguttara Nikāya,* trans. and ed. by Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012) 51-3.

[172] What follows is a decisively different interpretation of this text than Robinson's humanist reading. In large part, the notion of unbounded finitude dislocates any center of power, such as the human. Robinson says, "Divinities are there; Aśvaghosa does not reject belief in celestial beings. But they are mere stage-hands, subordinate to the action of the human principals. To the extent that humanism is a concern with man, with his imperfect nature and its perfectability, Aśvaghosa is a humanist." "Humanism Verses Asceticism in Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa," 6. On my view, such

key events, we see many actors from different locales contributing to its arising, almost as though there is conspiratorial cosmic choreography. This is especially the case when Siddhārtha departs from his father's palace and enters his path for Awakening. When Prince Gautama told his father of his wish to renounce his life as a prince, the King ordered securities be put in place to keep him from leaving. Anticipating a righteous realization, the gods intervened in the middle of the night. They opened the locked doors for Siddhārtha[173] and possessed the mind of Chandaka[174], the horsekeeper, to have him follow Siddhārtha's directions to retrieve a horse.[175] Then, Siddhārtha, Chandaka, and his horse were able to silently leave the palace without waking anyone else in the middle of the night. This is because the beings from various realms who rejoiced at Siddhārtha's birth appeared again to help him. A group of *yakṣas* carried the hooves of the horse in their hands to avoid making any noise[176] and an unknown being[177] allowed the heavy gates of the palace[178] to burst open without the usual clamor of elephants and armies pulling them apart. After giving this aid, the deities rejoiced as they heard Siddhārtha vow that he would only return

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an interpretation imposes post-enlightenment humanism upon a text that gives us a very different sort of cosmological order.

[173] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 150-51 (verse 5.66).

[174] Later Chandaka tells how this happened in more detail as he explains everything that happened to Yaśodharā, Siddhārtha's wife. His account only makes sense if we include deities (226-229, verses 8.43-8.49).

[175] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 152-53 (verse 5.71).

[176] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 156-57 (verse 5.81).

[177] The text says that the gates opened on their own (*svayam*), but rather than interpreting this locution as Aśvaghoṣa appropriating agency to the gate themselves, I read this occurrence with the gates as another specific way that we see beings from different realms stirring conditions for the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*. On my reading, Aśvaghoṣa is telling us what happened without telling us why or how (156-57, verse 5.82).

[178] Jonathan Silk argues that the description of these massive gates and the impenetrable fort surrounding the palace remind the reader of the extent to which the Buddha was isolated or sheltered, which further emphasizes the way that the encounter with the messengers was able to have the effect that they did. This speaks to the argument above about unbounded finitude in terms of the particular event of the Buddha's shock and the surrounding conditions that made the messengers so shocking in the first place. See Jonathan Silk, "The Fruits of Paradox," 871.

to the palace after reaching "the farther shore of birth and death."[179] Aśvaghoṣa ends this canto with the image of Siddhārtha walking in the middle of the night on a path lit by beams shined by deities who know how difficult his vow will be to keep. This image foreshadows both the arduousness of what lies ahead for the Buddha, as well as the way divine beings will help bring about the conditions that allow him to keep his vow.

Indeed, there is an expansive cast of agents who contribute to the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*, demonstrating that an event occurs through agential forces beyond the bounds of a particular acting agent. We already met King Śudhodana who tried to save Siddhārtha's innocence, the messenger gods who catalyzed his renunciation, the *yakṣa*s who padded (and thereby quieted) the horse's gait, and the other beings who facilitated his departure from the palace. We continue to see the gods when the Buddha needs them throughout the remainder of the story, contributing to Siddhārtha's attainment and the flourishing of the Buddhist *dharma*. When he comes out of a period of severe austerities that cause him to be physically and mentally weak, a woman possessed by the gods offers him food to help him restore health so that he would be strong enough to attain his Awakening.[180] Once again, after his awakening, wondering how his wisdom could be received by others so immersed and invested in the delusions of *samsāra*, he is encouraged by gods to teach his doctrine,[181] and begins gathering disciples. The frame of this narrative, and Buddhist cosmology more generally, incorporates beings from various realms (*loka*) who act in ways that are not necessarily visible to observers in our world. Whether we take this to be symbolic or literal, this feature of this narrative provokes a regard for the opacity inherent to events insofar as

[179] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 158-59 (verses 5.84-85).
[180] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 366-67 (verse 12.111).
[181] Aśvaghoṣa, *The Life of the Buddha*, 418 (Canto 14).

they are goaded, enabled, and virtually enacted by beings other than the most direct actor. The finite acts of particular actors allow us to narrate and understand the events of our world, but Aśvaghoṣa's narration also draws our attention to the conditions that are not necessarily in the foreground and yet are nonetheless essential.

This interplay of larger conditions and finite particulars appears across an array of Buddhist narratives, and are arguably features of any narrative. Every story links multiple finite moments to each other because they inflect one another and touch one another. The examples above show that this is true for both temporally finite moments and finite actors who condition one another and provide avenues of mutual possibility. Particular finite forms for events and causal relations are only a partial disclosure of a grander event of colliding conditions. This narrative construction gives delimited events greater significance than if we observe them in isolation, and this is largely the reason we engage in telling stories at all. Each narrative adopts a frame in which certain moments or acts will have their meaning, deciding which conditions to disclose and which to conceal.

VI. Conclusion

These expositions on unbounded finitude in Buddhist philosophy are an effort to highlight the topical centrality of limits within discussions of emptiness. If emptiness targets a claim to distinct and independent identity, then the parameters of whatever entity claiming such an identity are necessarily at stake. Moreover, the sort of carefulness that emerges with not only the teaching of emptiness but also the emptiness of emptiness requires the sort of care called for by the metaphysical description of unbounded finitude.

We preserve the way that finite entities bring texture and variance to our reality, but we disallow any sense of closure for any entity who- or whatsoever.

It is worth continuing the discussion of affect that I opened at the end of the previous chapter. As I stressed in the first section, the teaching of emptiness need not provoke diminishment or dispossession. Rather, emptiness is the condition of possibility for a dynamic world where entities are conditioning forces that necessarily do bear upon one another. Thus, the primary affect emptiness tries to unseat is those that correlate with a valuation of substance: certainty, security, groundedness. As we saw in the dedicatory opening to *The Root Verses*, settling into these feelings betrays the attentiveness demanded from interdependent origination.

Our sense of security, however, is not displaced by a state of vulnerability. Rather, emptiness targets the coherency of identity that renders something either secure within boundaries or vulnerable to what is different from it. Emptiness brings our focus to limits so that we can see the many lanes of movement for conditions traveling in all directions. Finite things exist, but interdependent origination shows that they lack any degree of either self-possession or other-possession.

This understanding appears in certain moments of the *Life of the Buddha*, demonstrating how emptiness can explode particular boundaries while nonetheless preserving the finite particulars that render an account intelligible. I focused on this particular narrative because of the way that it releasees boundaries of time and place, showing both that conditions are incredibly formidable and that a finite particular is a disclosure of something incredibly complex. For this reason, power does not simply exist in some center, even if we center account around the person of the Buddha, but arrives

there from sources mundane and cosmological. At the same time that the Buddha's story shows an openness among entities that is beautiful, it also leaves us looking for support from the likes of our past lives and distant deities.

The Mādhyamikas recognize that unboundedness can give rise to a perilous nihilism by which limits dissolve altogether and everything is as unsubstantial as sea foam that gathers and dissipates with the break of the ocean. To avoid leaving people adrift, emptiness is itself shown to be empty – a teaching that can help us release our habits of grasping but should never displace what it is that we grasp. Again, the emptiness of emptiness also targets a sense of security and stability, only this time it is security that arises when we misapprehend a truth that is taught as one that prevails unconditionally.

I have shown that the way that unboundedness moves throughout the Madhyamaka program highlights its concern for deleterious habits for the sake of producing a sense of security. Having laid this out, the goal for the end of this project is to show that this does not lead to passive submission, but to a reconfiguration of events that avoids the categories of activity and passivity.

Part I Conclusion: Synthesizing Accounts of Unbounded Finitude

These first two chapters have at least two specific functions in this project. First, they establish a link between Heidegger and Madhyamaka philosophy. There is a common spirit in these philosophies to uphold finite entities while also bringing some dimension of focus to, acknowledgement of, and even gratitude for the relations that grant such finite existence. These ontological insights capture many of their reasons for criticizing the will's insistence on upholding and aggrandizing a determinate self, its striving for certainty about beings in order to claim increasing mastery, and its simple schema that strictly demarcates agents and patients. Thus, the other main function of these two chapters is to provide the backdrop against which the will is a problem. An understanding of unbounded finitude prepares us to see the character of the will as problematic. Without such preparation I fear that the prevalence of our own willing understandings would make it difficult to see the will as a significant barrier to inhabiting a responsive ethos.

In this brief synthesis, I begin by highlighting some benefits of this cross-cultural study for scholars and adherents of these philosophies. Secondly, I articulate some shared emphases between these philosophies. Finally, I connect our thinking of boundaries to hostility. We do not readily see a discussion of hostility in the ontological expositions described in these chapters. However, the fact that boundaries are hostile is the reason that they are studied at all in a project exploring an ethics of receptivity and response. The link between ontology and ethics introduced here will continue to be developed over the course of this project.

I. The Cross-Cultural Fruit

One way to appreciate a concurrent study of philosophies from different traditions is by recognizing how they illuminate implications that otherwise remain concealed in their common circulation. Philosophies take emphases and frames in relation to other philosophical discourses that they themselves seek to engage or challenge. In Madhyamaka philosophy it is especially easy to see how polemical encounters and common philosophical views brought Nāgārjuna and his followers to articulate themselves in the way that they did. However, the project of studying philosophy is in part something we take up because these philosophies, regardless of the status of any particular philosopher, can be responsive to the questions and matters that animate our own philosophical activity. Indeed, the philosophies are not stuck and stale within their boundaries but can reach out to each other in interesting ways. I argue that bringing together the Mādhyamikas and Heidegger allows us to similarly lift a set of implications out of their texts that is less than explicit but nonetheless undeniable.

For the Mādhyamikas, the primary benefit is that the topic of *limits* comes into focus in discussions of emptiness and *svabhāva*. While limits preserve the content of our world, they do not warrant the sort of ownership that belongs to something with *svabhāva*. Indeed, limits surround something empty. They bring intelligibility to an overwhelming degree of dependent relations that arrive from sources both apparent and opaque. The limits give these conditions a determinate space to congeal, a landing pad for them to collect. In their receptivity to conditions, limits are a gift that will not rigidify into boundaries. In the context of Indian philosophy, limits help emptiness ward off concerns about its nihilistic connotations as a deflationary philosophy. Shifting, porous limits help us recognize

existents while staying between the extremes of pure being and pure nothingness. In this regard, an exposition on limits is valuable for the middle way of Madhyamaka philosophy.

For Heidegger, the emphasis on dependence in Buddhist philosophy helps us relate the gathering, appropriative event involved in things to the philosophical themes of sovereignty and vulnerability. While Heidegger has a robust account of power when he talks about mastery and the sorts of philosophical tropes that are conducive to mastery (as we will see in Chapter 3), this account does not incorporate a discussion of the related issues of claiming sovereignty or overcoming vulnerability for a self-identical sphere. However, these themes are helpful for explicating the phenomenon of a will that is interested in enhancing a sphere claimed for oneself or for the group with which one identifies.

In the case of both Heidegger and the Mādhyamikas, revealing these implications does not necessarily shift how all audiences read either of these philosophies or the pieces that are studied in these chapters. Rather, it presents how one *can* read them to bear on issues that go in the direction of limits and sovereignty, respectively.

II. Shared Emphases

In addition to highlighting subtle features of each other's writing, the study of unbounded finitude leaves us with specific points emphasized by both Heidegger and the Mādhyamikas that are worth underscoring as we proceed into this project on the will and nonwilling.

One especially salient claim is that finite particulars buoy us from drowning in an undifferentiated, inchoate expanse of nothingness. Heidegger and the Mādhyamikas were

both concerned about the possibility of taking their ontological illuminations to the extent of nihilism. Buddhist writers caution against such an extreme grasping of emptiness over and over again, warning audiences of the way that this teaching must be at once respected and also qualified. Indeed, it is only by virtue of finite particulars that emptiness can come into focus. Similarly, for Heidegger, confronting the possibility of there being no differentiation among things moves us initially into a state of horror. We recover from it by our awe before a world of delimited things, recognizing our place to appropriate. Going forward, we will continue to see their philosophies preserve the reality of our world. Rather than aspire for a transcendence into another permanent sphere existing more perfectly above our immanent world, they encourage us to shift our views and conduct in light of a more attentive dwelling as and among finite beings.

While our world of finite particulars is preserved, even celebrated, both of these philosophies are critical of granting finite things the character of an object preserved within its boundaries. An object is settled to such a degree that it appears to us as though it is independently sustained. Both Heidegger and the Mādhyamikas consider this to be a gross simplification that covers over an object's ties to its various supporting conditions and its own impermanence. For Mādhyamikas, one of the concerns is that we elevate conditioned, dependent things to the status of objects and thereby form attachments. Objects become rigid in desire and deprive us of prudent orientations. For Heidegger, objects do not show us the relational vibrancy of our world. When we understand a material thing to be an object, we are not sufficiently prepared for the other disclosures that may come through a thing. For Mādhyamikas this is not merely the case for material objects but also for objective truths. Truths that are held in boundaries are not sufficiently responsive to

shifting contingencies. For this reason, they can go as far as obscuring our recognition of such contingency.

In addition to addressing the character of objects that we intuit and manipulate, both of these philosophies also demote the human subject from its position as the willful center. In Buddhist philosophy, the same metaphysical conundrums that suspend claims of identity and difference from objects or moments in a continuum also apply to humans and the locus of the self that we claim. Moreover, a broader cosmological tableau qualifies the function of humans as distinct and unique agents of action. This assemblage of different sorts of beings is partly what is involved in Heidegger's fourfold gathering, in which the mortal is indeed one of four. In both accounts, mortals or humans are not dispensable, but they also are not independent operators. Heidegger similarly puts pressure on the view that actors are a unique sort of causal force through his emphasis on the conditioning effects of things. In these ways, unbounded finitude exposes an event-based ontology that includes a wider recognition of causal forces than those that fall neatly into the categories of either being mechanical or agential.

III. Hostile Boundaries

The discussion of unbounded finitude continually lends itself to spatial illustrations. A recurring trope in my rhetoric is that of fortresses, walls, or secured borders – any line in space that disallows certain parties access to the other side of the line. Every finite form necessarily has certain limits, but once they are embellished with protection, they adopt the hostile character of boundaries. These limits no longer exist as a marker that illuminates transient and contingent form. Some (imaginary) version of that finite form is being

secured from any impingement by changing conditions, including changes in the very conditions it recognizes to be its own. At that particular site, security is effectively an effort to prevent the finite form from participating in an appropriative event in which it itself is repeatedly appropriated into its own.

While much of the discussion in this chapter occurs on an abstract, metaphysical register, there is no shortage of examples for popular misapprehension of the dynamic character of limits. A readily available analogue to this abstract idea is the U.S.-Mexico border and the many travails faced by myriad parties while the United States treats it like a boundary that is not to be crossed. This practice of security both feeds and exaggerates a mythical *svabhāva* of the United States. This mythos involves a strict line of difference between who is on one side and who is on the other. Moreover, it falsely reduces everything within the boundaries to be homogenous instantiations of US-essence (*svabhāva*).

Such a hardline understanding of the border requires forgetting its shifting geography over time. It forgets that this border came into place several decades after the birth of our nation and that its previous reliance on the location of a shifting river has required that the border itself move. The border has existed with many natures: "This is the border's history. The line that was nonexistent, imaginary, disputed, negotiated, drawn and unfindable. Then it was bloody, peaceful, useful, hard." In recent history, it has become the site of different individuals' adaptations to shifting trade policy and security measures that are designed as responses to matters that exceed the realities located on the southern US border. Treating this limit like a boundary is an effort to lock in place not only the spatial dimensions of the US in our imaginations, but also the communities existing on

either side of it.[182] Thus, the boundary becomes a function of *part* of the US identity at the expense of others.

The border and the effort to make it an unsurpassable boundary exemplifies the way that a particular identity formation engenders a sense of vulnerability. The insistence that the border exist as a boundary is an instance of how some group (Americans, or at least a subset of Americans) desiring preservation and enhancement produces boundaries through various hostile practices resistant to change. While we imagine boundaries to ward off possible intruders coming in from the outside, Sara Ahmed describes this phenomenon as it occurs *within* boundaries. Even when the change is as minimal as bringing to light an aberrant strain that already existed within the limits of a supposedly self-identical sphere, we can encounter a limit that presents a significant obstacle. Ahmed describes how institutions assert a rigid understanding of the public will, creating a boundary to separate identities or conduct that are permissible from those that are not. The institution becomes a boundary itself that one continually comes up against. Ahmed explains, "To think the wall as will in concrete form is to suggest that what has been willed can become hard or condensed, becoming part of the materiality of an institution."[183]

The next part of this dissertation project will explore the complex process of constructing such boundaries for the sake of preserving a particular integrity, whether in cases where something from the outside may be bearing upon it in integral ways, or in

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[182] For an accessible, interactive, multimedia and Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage on the geographic, environmental, and humanistic concerns at the border, see "The Wall." *USA Today Network*, 2018. https://www.usatoday.com/border-wall/&xid=17259,15700022,15700186,15700191,15700248. More specifically, to see an article on the geographic movement of the border, Ron Dungan, "A Moveable Border, and the History of a Difficult Boundary." *USA Today Network*, 2018. https://www.usatoday.com/border-wall/story/us-mexico-border-history/510833001/.

[183] Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014) 146.

cases where something from within is not granted being within particular constraints. As we will see, such construction is a comprehensive apparatus.

CHAPTER 3: Heidegger and the Problem of the Will

I. Introduction

The first two chapters of this dissertation argue that boundaries are not in fact operative in the existence of finite beings that are distinguishable from each other. The limits that constitute finitude are a relational emergence that is not hegemonically managed by any single party. Nonetheless, we are disposed to see finite things as having boundaries. Using Heidegger's philosophy, I argue that the construction of boundaries emanates from the phenomenon of the will. In this dissertation, the will is not a faculty belonging to an individual subject that constitutes one's volitional directions and appetites. Nor are we dealing with philosophical questions related to the strength or freedom of the will.

In accordance with Heidegger's unbounded ontology, the will is something that permeates the space and being of our world. It touches our value systems, conception of truth, self-understanding, and, most importantly, our ethical character. While we commonly attribute these elements of one's existence to the particularity of one's personhood, Heidegger argues that the will is a historical sending of being, the same sending of being that forgets itself as a sending in the positionality of technology.[184] The will is the historical sending that determines according to utmost value for the assertion, preservation, and enhancement of a self—whether of an individual or a group.

The topic of the will arguably permeates Heidegger's entire philosophical oeuvre. The will is necessarily entangled with the subject, an ontological category that Heidegger is continually dismantling as a feature of being as early as *Being and Time* and as late as

[184] See page 49.

The Zollikon Seminars. My goal is not to present a comprehensive account of the will in Heidegger's thought or in a particular era of Heidegger's thought. The main question I seek to answer in this chapter is: How does the will's construction of boundaries—whether between finite beings, or between being and beings—impede our ethical character?

To prepare us for this question, I first give an exposition of what the will is through a sketch of the will that helps us enter into thinking the will as an ontological event. The second section presents Heidegger's understanding of the will as a historical sending, a complex feature of Heidegger's presentation that necessarily complicates our ethical reflection. Finally, the third section directly addresses the relation between the will's construction of boundaries and its impact on our ethical character. I present an ethical problem that accords with Heidegger's thought and also present ethical concerns that accord with the spirit of this dissertation more generally.

II. A Preliminary Sketch of the Will

My goal in this first section is to provide some orientation to Heidegger's thinking of the will. Most of what I say in this section will be elaborated upon later in this chapter with more specific textual support and reference to the history of Western philosophy. However, the will is somewhat elliptical as an idea in Heidegger's thinking. It is difficult to have a point of entry without having some idea of what the broader picture entails. Thus, this preliminary sketch is meant to provide a broad understanding before the more detailed discussion that follows.

The nature and metaphysical structure of truth is a central feature of the will and its development through the history of philosophy. Heidegger's discussions of truth and its

changes throughout the history of philosophy expose the role of the will in occurrences that are not readily recognizable as will to the reader. For many of us, truth is objective and occurs indifferently to us. Heidegger's manner of tracing changes to conceptualizations of what truth is and how we access it demonstrates that the will is a panoramic phenomenon rather than the agenda of a single person. The second half of this section distinguishes the sort of power that the will propels from something merely biological. In this section, we see that the will is not equivocal with the sort of striving that is inevitable and natural to the animal dimensions of human existence.

A. From Truth to Power

In the attunement of the will, it is understood that there is a metaphysical partition between us and the truth, an interpretation that stems from a more general understanding of a boundary demarcating the interiority of subject and the exteriority of the world. In terms of epistemological concerns, this boundary causes us to doubt whether we are correctly reaching across this boundary to have correct access to the truth. For this reason, the epistemic project becomes aimed toward having a correct correspondence with what is outside. To alleviate any skepticism about our intuitions—namely, our means of accessing the world outside us—we seek justification for our knowledge such that we can claim for certain that we have correct correspondence. Given the difficulty of surmounting the boundary around our subjective consciousness, we begin this process by claiming certainty in our own existence. This claim is justified by the way our consciousness is able to bear witness to itself. Certainty about our intuition stems from the indubitable experience of an "I."

Certainty, in general, commands that we give reasons or grounds for any claim we make about the nature or existence of an entity. This command is seldom recognized as such, but one that becomes operative in our way of accounting for what is true. Thus, existence is entangled with grounds and reason to the point that we have less ability to grant being to that for which we cannot account in terms of grounds and reason. This sets up a certain domain of existents about which we can claim truth, namely the domain of objects that have measurable, calculable dimensions within strict boundaries. Thus, the will encourages us to the grasp entities as boundaried through its paradigm of knowledge.

Alongside the possibility of attaining certain knowledge, there is a disclosure of utility. This disclosure grants us power to manipulate our world. Objects are digestible units about which we can claim true, measurable knowledge. In our very intuition of objects, before we measure them, we are providing causal accounts pre-reflectively, enabling knowledge about processes that can produce specific results. All of knowledge is posited in terms of measurable substances that are fully present and whose causal stories are discoverable. We attribute forms to these substances such that they fit into a set of regular categories that serve our practical needs.

These themes—the relation between so-called subjects and objects, our understanding of knowledge and truth, and the ontology operative in seeking and seizing power—are necessarily connected to each other in Heidegger's thinking. In this regard, the will requires consideration of epistemic modalities and ontological reflection. The will is always about power, but we cannot understand power apart from the disclosures that enable power to occur in the first place. I argue that this disclosure is centrally about boundaries between subject and object, between a knower and what is known, and between a master

and the mastered. Already, we see a harsh separation between the grammatical agent (subject, knower, master) and the patient (object, known, mastered). Heidegger argues that the will motivates this grammar and also that this grammar covers over the way that finite beings appropriate each other in their mutual belonging.[185]

B. Distinguishing the Will from Mere Striving

Given that the will is rooted in a historical sending of being for Heidegger (as we will see below), we cannot reduce the will to a biological drive that is universal to all people in all contexts. In this respect, the will is not a necessary part of the biological nature of our species. Nonetheless, we should not be so quick to understand the biological and historical as mutually exclusive such that characterizing the will with respect to one of these frames displaces any possibility of validity for the other. Heidegger addresses the mistake of considering historical and scientific understanding to be divergent in the first of his *Country Path Conversations*, which is between a scientist, a scholar (presumably a historian), and a Guide. In the "Triadic Conversation," the scientist and the scholar discuss the relative scope of these disciplinary approaches, and through the voice of the Scientist we hear a familiar account that elevates the sciences above the humanities in terms of its apprehension of truth and certainty. He says that a scientist is "entirely dedicated to the object," such that "[e]verything that is temporally conditioned and personal drops away from the investigating [scientist]." The scientist further argues that in the humanities, "everything depends on the personal experiential capacity of the researcher being brought into play," which means that the humanities can never reach "universally valid

[185] GA 9: 349/240.

knowledge."[186] The claim that the sciences reach a superior truth that is less contingent has spurred many worldviews to seek some semblance of scientific method or attitude for the sake of gaining a higher level of validity.[187]

Heidegger dissolves the frequently claimed duality between science and history (or the social sciences and humanities in general) by showing that the two modes of inquiry are in fact the selfsame. Through the course of these conversational exchanges, Heidegger argues that a scientific determination is a historical determination, even though we often understand science to be immune from the sways of historical contingency. It is only through a particular historical disclosure of beings that objects are granted the sort of presence that underlies a quest for objective knowledge. The presencing of beings granted by the will makes beings appear unmediated, such that we can grasp something as it occurs within evident limits and feel no sense of obligation to the relations that suspend it as a mediated thing. In other words, the disclosure of the will gives us boundaried objects, disposing us toward the position of subjects for whom scientific knowledge of the objects is available to seize and utilize.

Beholden to the apparent veracity and indubitability of positivistic findings, this subjectivity responds to the question of what human nature is by understanding it as a species of animal nature. Insofar as animals are necessarily striving beings, humans also have this quality. On this interpretation, the will is nothing more than a biological fact of our existence, one that we can perhaps tame or suppress, but doing so would have to be a continual project for all subjects. Heidegger's insight is that science does not have access

[186] GA 77: 42/27.
[187] GA 77: 49/32.

to a timeless fact since it cannot manipulate the way that being opens up to it. Within the opening that we have, scientific methods have soundness and validity that are certainly accurate. However, science fails to recognize its own dependence upon the historical opening of being insofar as the way that being shows itself to us is prior to scientific inquiries, methods, and findings. Thus, the determination of our biology and nature is a historical determination by category even if it is a scientific determination by method. Furthermore, it is a determination that is available because of a historical disclosure that is temporally contingent, and so *not* necessarily universally agreeable. This means that some of what we understand to be a *fact* of nature is perhaps rooted in something else that is not only contingent but hidden from us.[188]

So far, I have argued that in order to categorize the will as biological striving, one would have to underappreciate the meaning of the will as a historical event. Another reason we should avoid conflating the will with striving is that the will is more than a mere mechanism of survival. The will goes beyond the goal of preservation and instead aims for enhancement. The former entails the survival of distinct lives or of a genetic identity, and the latter requires self-transcendence. This transcendence is not with aspiration toward anything in particular, but is rather an ontological injunction to propel oneself toward perpetual enhancement:

> Will is command... In commanding, 'the innermost conviction of superiority' is what is decisive. Accordingly, Nietzsche understands commanding as the fundamental attunement (*Grundstimmung*) of one's

[188] Ewald Richter, "Heidegger's Theses Concerning the Question of the Foundations of the Sciences," in *Heidegger on Science*, ed. by Trish Glazebrook, trans. by Glazebrook and Behme (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2012) 67-90.

> being superior; indeed, not only superior with regard to others, those who obey, but also and always beforehand superior with regard to oneself. The latter means excelling, taking one's own essence higher in such a way that one's very essence consists in such excelling (*Überhöhung*).[189]

In the attunement of the will, one's very essence becomes excelling. By describing this essential determination as the outgrowth of an attunement, Heidegger is calling on us to think of the will in terms of the dimensions of world and history rather than those of an individual willing subject. As an attunement, the will to power only values power. This singular track means that all of being is thought in relation to or with an orientation toward "incessant self-overpowering," which necessarily requires continual becoming. Such a becoming is not a transformation to something else entirely. It recurs again and again as an increase in power.[190]

We catch sight of the attunement that essentializes the human as excelling through concrete behavioral practices. Bret Davis describes the behavior engendered by the will's dimension of enhancement as *ecstatic incorporation*, a term that requires us to recall Heidegger's descriptions of *Dasein* as ek-static, as standing outside itself. Ecstatic incorporation describes the regular behavior on the part of any locus of self by which one goes *out* beyond the self and then returns inward while swiftly incorporating the so-called other back into oneself. The result for the part of the one ecstatically incorporating is that

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[189] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 6.1: Nietzsche (1936-1939)*, ed. by Brigitte Schillbach (Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1996) 587; *Nietzsche, Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, ed. by David Farrell Krell, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (San Francisco: Harper One, 1991) 152.

[190] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 6.2: Nietzsche Volume II*, ed. by Brigitte Schillbach (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997) 28-29; *Nietzsche, Volume IV: Nihilism*, ed.by David Farrell Krell and trans. by Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper One, 1991) 7.

it is continually augmenting its sphere of control and power. For those being incorporated, this process of incorporating is forceful because the will does not encounter its other on the terms of the other, or in a mutually compromising set of terms. Davis uses Levinas's philosophy to suggest that the will reduces any mark of difference to identity.[191]

In Davis's swift characterization of the will we can begin to see the connection between the will as *history* and willing as the human execution of this historical horizon. If the will is a determination of the human in a certain respect, then it will determine its very ways of being. The determination of the human is an ontological determination in terms of what sorts of beings we are constitutively and what relations compose our being. The fact that the will bears upon our ontological disposition highlights that it is an issue that hits us at our foundation, which means that our manners of existing—such as our values, choices, and understanding—stem from the will. This is the reason that the will is at once an ontological issue and an ethical issue.

III. The Will as a Historical Sending of Being

Heidegger grounds the will in the history (*Geschichte*) of being, which he characterizes as a sending (*Geschick*) of being. We must be careful not to slip into the theological connotations of *Geschick* such that we understand it to mean *destiny*, whether "a sorrowful, an evil, [or] a fortunate *Geschick.*"[192] In his Introduction for *The Principle of Reason,* Reginald Lilly (who translated the volume) cautions against such translations

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[191] Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 9-10.

[192] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 10: Der Satz Vom Grund*, ed. by Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997) 90; *The Principle of Reason*, trans. by Reginald Lilly (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996) 61.

because they draw a separation between being and mortals such that the former is hypostatized into a hegemony that exercises control over the latter. Nonetheless, a "sending of being" requires some interpretative gymnastics to avoid the misunderstanding that being is actively dispensing while another party—namely, the human—is passively receiving it. This structure would also fall into the pitfall of a dualistic boundary between being and the human.

Lilly clarifies that the sending of being includes the act of bestowing (*Beschickung*), the bestowed ones (*die Beschickten*), and the suitability (*das Shickliche*) among the bestowing and the bestowed. This suitability is not coherent with the structure inherent to a fate that is actively dispensed by a party possessing superior power and forced upon another who receives it involuntarily. While fate requires agential power solely on one side of a transitive act, namely on the side of the grammatical subject, Heidegger formulates the sending of being in such a way that those who are bestowed are as integral to the bestowing as the one who bestows. Given this structure of history for Heidegger, locating the will within the history of being does not render it a fate (*Shicksal*) that we are dealt (*beshickt*).[193]

The ontology of unbounded finitude is helpful for configuring the relation between the bestowing of being and those who are the bestowed beings, namely, mortals. While these parts of a bestowing event maintain their finite positions, their mutual appropriation means that they are not separate things occurring within stable boundaries that coincidentally come into contact with one another while maintaining their essential respective characters of bestowing or receiving. Rather, they bring one another to their finite positions, and it is this mutual bringing that constitutes the occurrence of bestowing-

[193] Reginald Lilly, "Translator's Introduction," in *The Principle of Reason,* xiv-xv.

receiving. When we think about history in this way, neither being as bestowing nor mortals as the bestowed become a dominant power imposing its agenda or essence upon the other.

To account for the will as a historical sending, I turn to Heidegger's writings that show us how to recognize the slow and steady rise of the will in different writings of thinkers throughout the history of Western philosophy. Through his readings of these thinkers, we see the presencing of the will develop historically until we reach its escalated incarnation in modernity and post-moderntechnology. Heidegger often focuses on shifts in fundamental structures—such as those of truth, the essence of the human, or the criterion for knowledge—that are relevant to the rise of the will. These expositions show us that it is not always the case that the will presences explicitly as *will* in the sense of power, mastery, or self-transcendence. The historical narrative is helpful for seeing how more general appropriations of values and orientations contribute to what becomes the recognizable and totalizing structure of the will by the twentieth century. I present the historical rise of the will through Heidegger's reading of four great thinkers: Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, and Nietzsche. This is by no means an exhaustive account of relevant thinkers,[194] but it allows us to ascertain many of the central features of being that Heidegger captures under the signifier *will.*

Before discussing these specific thinkers, however, it is worthwhile to consider Heidegger's way of understanding the relationship between thinkers, being, and history. He reads thinkers as a historical window into how being showed the being of beings in different historical moments Thus, the thought that a thinker reveals is not merely their

[194] Some of the other thinkers that receive thorough treatments from Heidegger and that are linked to the will are the Presocratics (Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides), Aristotle, Kant, and Schelling.

personal insight that flourishes within their mind and then comes to expression in the language of their writing. Rather than understanding thought in such subject-centered terms, Heidegger says that the thinker is able to receive being in the form of language because of their inherent openness to being.[195] Heidegger formulates this reception in terms of a remarkable hearing (*das Gehör*) on the part of thinkers. The historical determinations (*die Bestimmungen*) that thinkers bring to language are attuned (*gestimmt*) by virtue of their essential belonging (*Zugehörigkeit*) to being.[196] This understanding of thinkers' relation to being shapes Heidegger's reading practice. While he can show the limits of a particular thinker's thought, he is rarely argues that a thinker made a mistake or was wrong. The thinker brings being to language as being discloses itself. This means that the the thought of any thinker is not equally available or accessible to everyone. In the same way that Heidegger encourages us to avoid the leveling down of material objects such that they are reducible to the same metrics, he also considers thought, by virtue of its historicity, to be outside a universal measure.[197]

That a thinker's hearing occurs through hearing being means that the history of philosophy is not merely a narrative of philosophical discussion. It is the narration of the historical *disclosure* of being. Thinkers are certainly studying and reflecting on prior thinkers' writings, but we need not minimize any traceable connections by relegating such reflecting to erudite scholarly practices. What any thinker says continues to reverberate in being for thinkers to continually hear. Thus, in every thinker's thought path, there is both

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[195] For example, see GA 10: 36/23, GA 6.2: 28/7; GA 6.2: 34/12.
[196] GA 10: 75/50.
[197] Robert Bernasconi, *Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Prometheus Books, 1989) 4.

a receiving of being as a sending in itself and a sending of being out toward future thinkers. Heidegger's argument essentially is that what is continually received and sent out anew transforms in the process such that it turns into what he will call the will.

For this reason, we cannot use his expositions to argue that the will is already present in Plato's thinking, but we can say that predecessors of the will are recognizable from our (and Heidegger's) retrospective vantage point. The historical understanding that we gain in this reflection is not one of a causal chain such that we can say that a certain moment of history is responsible for what followed. Instead, this historical reflection grants us insight into the essential nature of the will as we see it now. We can think of it as a cross-sectional cutting such that reveals what is packed together and interwoven within our modern epoch.

A. Plato and Correctness

Heidegger repeatedly connects the will with a certain epistemological modality in which truth is something to attain by means of correct correspondence. As we saw in Chapter One, this orientation to truth requires a boundary between a perceiving subject and a perceived object. Heidegger argues that the turn toward truth as correctness occurs already in the ancient Greek philosopher Plato.

Heidegger argues that in Plato's allegory of the cave we see a shift toward understanding truth as correct correspondence with what is true. He understands this to be a marked shift away from understanding of truth as unconcealedness (*alētheia*).[198] Starting with Plato, "being present is no longer what it was in the beginning of Western thinking:

[198] GA 9: 231/177.

the emergence of the hidden into unhiddenness, where unhiddenness itself, as revealing, constitutes the fundamental trait of being present."[199] When truth is what is unconcealed, as Heidegger argues it was for the Presocratics, then truth is given in time such that there are contingent disclosures of being. It is not given over in full presence all at once, but continually unconcealed. The inherent correlate to unconcealment is concealment. Thus, prior to Plato there was an understanding that truth has a playful dynamic between hidden- and unhidden-ness.

Plato's conception of truth introduces truth as ideas, which are pure, permanent, and transcendent. The purity and permanence of ideas displaces the hidden or concealed elements of truth, inaugurating an era in which truth is understood in such a way that we can expect to access truth fully and without remainder. In the *Republic* the ideas existing outside of the cave are above our ephemeral lives. We see a desire for self-transcendence in Plato's aspirations to join the realm of reality where there are permanent and pure forms, a reality that presents a superior truth to those we access while among the immanent and transient contingencies in which we live. This sort of possibility for possessing a transcendent and superior truth coemerges with the authority of a knowing subject and will later coincide with a claim to authoritative mastery.

Still, in Plato's thinking, the accessibility of truth does not mean that it is simply before us automatically. Accessing truth requires "continuous effort at accustoming one's gaze to be fixed on the *firm* limits of things that stand fast in their visible form."[200] As present and shining ideas, truth has no hiddenness, and so being also is no longer

[199] GA 9: 233-34/179.
[200] GA 9: 222/170. Emphasis added.

understood as self-hiding that appears through unconcealment.[201] If only we can educate ourselves enough to ascend to its heights, we can reach true being as it is fully given. The project of knowledge thus becomes *correct* apprehension of what one encounters. The visibility of limits as firm is taken to be a guide toward reaching the forms. Truth is contingent on "human comportment toward beings."[202] On Heidegger's account of the history of philosophy, this turn toward correctness and away from *alētheia* became a standard-bearer for truth that increasingly diminished the role of situated and specific unconcealment. As John Caputo explains, truth as correctness "cut truth down to size for philosophy's purposes and introduced a formula which could be handed down in a decontextualized form across the centuries."[203]

Nonetheless, Heidegger is able to find features of an earlier conception of truth in Plato's writing. Heidegger says that we must not take unhiddenness as merely some way of revealing absolute ideas, such that the ideas are prior and unhiddenness is a means or window for accessing them. Instead, he argues that the prior structure is unhiddenness and we must understand the ideas to be a specific event of unhiddenness.[204] The operative structure in Plato's allegory for truth is a cave, a covering that hides. He argues that the "'allegory' can have the structure of a cave image at all only because it is antecedently co-determined by the fundamental experience of *alētheia*."[205] The cave is an enclosure that hides the pure shining of the ideas such that those inside see shadows without recognizing that the shadows are a mere unconcealment of something still left enigmatically covered

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[201] GA 9: 223/171.
[202] GA 9: 231/177.
[203] John Caputo, "Demythologizing Heidegger: 'Alētheia' and the History of Being," *The Review of Metaphysics* 41, no. 3 (March 1988), 523.
[204] GA 9: 234/179.
[205] GA 9: 224/172.

over.[206] There is an appearance of beings that is given, even while hiddenness remains. What transforms truth in Plato's allegory is that the eye has to adjust to the brightness of the ideas so that it can see correctly.[207] This sets off an understanding that carries into the thinking of the medieval and modern thinkers, such that Aquinas and Descartes, who understand truth to be a judgment of the intellect.[208]

B. Descartes and Certainty

Descartes's writings initiate the modern period by introducing subjectivism and a value for certainty.[209] In the term "subjectivism," Heidegger is pointing to the priority given to subject consciousness, such that the experience of an "I" is granted certainty in existence even while any external objects indicated by the experience remain skeptical.[210] In Descartes's thought we find a chasm between the interiority of the subject and the exteriority of an object, and with this spacing, the subject-position is the side that assumes dominance. This dominance on the part of the subject comes from the demand for "an unshakable ground of truth, in the sense of certainty, which rests in itself."[211] Such certainty is only achievable for a subject who can attest to her own fact of existence as a perceiving consciousness.

Heidegger argues that this moment in history stems from religious currents that were shaking a cosmological system in which revelation was esteemed as certainly true.

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[206] GA 9: 224/172.
[207] GA 9: 230/ 177.
[208] GA 9: 233/178-179.
[209] GA 5: 87/66.
[210] GA 5: 99/75.
[211] GA 5: 106-107/81.

He says that human certainty carried such value because the certainty of salvation had diminished:

> [T]his liberation *from* the certainty of salvation disclosed by revelation has to be, in itself, a liberation *to* a certainty in which man secures for himself the true as that which is known through his own knowing... Descartes' metaphysical task becomes the following: to create the metaphysical ground for the freeing of man to freedom considered as self-determination that is certain of itself.[212]

The certainty of an ego that is present with its own subjective experiences provides the ground and foundation for all other claims to truth. From here, everything else becomes an object whose presence is also secured only by virtue of presencing in a secured region of subjective certainty.[213] Heidegger's grammar demonstrates the shift from the prior Greek conception. For the Greeks, something *presences* in a self-disclosure and in doing so, it holds sway; for Descartes, an object *is secured* in a representation on the part of a secure subject position.[214] This security is all the more necessary since freedom resides in self-determination rather than a liberation offered by God. Security in one's cognition leads to the security of self-determination.

Alongside the dominance of subjectivism, there is also the appearance of objects in such a way that they have objective existence before all subjects. Heidegger writes, "To the essence of the subjectivity of the *subjectum*, and of man as subject, belongs the unconditional delimiting forth [*Entshränkung*] of the sphere of possible objectification and

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[212] GA 5: 107/81.
[213] GA 5: 109/82.
[214] GA 5: 108/82.

the right to determine this objectification."[215] In part, this right of determining means that the presencing of anything is flattened to the aspects and dimensions that can be made present for *all* subjects. The particularities inherent to the mediation of a thing, as described in Chapter One, are not preserved in this object character of presencing of beings. Another implication of what Heidegger is saying is that the subjects *determine* the objectification, an agential power granted to the subject by virtue of her access to a secure foundation, namely the existence of her own subject position.

Heidegger carries this capacity for determining to severe implications. He writes:

> Man has become the *subjectum*. He can, therefore, determine and realize the essence of subjectivity—always according to how he conceives and wills himself. Man as the rational being of the Enlightenment is no less subject than man who grasps himself as nation, wills himself as people [*Volk*], nurtures himself as race and, finally empowers himself as lord of the earth.[216]

This passage presents something of a paradox. On the one hand, Heidegger is pointing out that the appearance of the subject contributes to the rise of a willing, power-possessing human subject. On the other hand, Heidegger understands the will as a historical sending that is not steered by particular subjects. The latter insight perhaps conveys a slight tone of ridicule toward the delusion of mastery. Regardless, we can see that Heidegger connects the appropriating, determining capacity of a subject's cognition to the determination of humans as the masters of the earth.

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[215] GA 5: 109-110/83.
[216] GA 5: 110-111/84.

C. Leibniz and the Rendering of Reasons

Leibniz supplements Descartes's philosophy of certainty by clarifying "what was entailed in the clarity and distinctness of cognition."[217] Heidegger dedicates his 1955-56 lecture course *The Principle of Reason* ("*Der Satz vom Grund*) to Leibniz's account of our cognition. This principle states that nothing is without reason (*nihil est sine ratione*), a metaphysical claim that shapes our cognition such that "Without exactly knowing it, in some manner we are constantly addressed by, summoned to attend to, grounds and reason."[218] The principle declares reason or ground to be a necessary feature of existents,[219] but it does so without clarifying the essential nature of reason itself.[220] Nonetheless, we accept the principle of reason because it resonates with how we think and thus illuminates our own cognitive practices to us. In particular, it illuminates that "our modus vivendi is motivated to somehow get to the bottom and found everything."[221]

Heidegger introduces another of Leibniz's formulations of this principle: *principium reddendae rationis.*[222] This translates as "the principle to give back reason":

> Reason as such demands to be given back *as* reason—namely back (re of *reddendae*) in the direction of the representing, cognizing subject, *by* this subject and *for* this subject... Only what presents itself to our cognition, only what we encounter such that it is posed and posited in its reasons, counts as

[217] GA 10 18/12.
[218] GA 10: 3/1.
[219] GA 10: 9/7.
[220] GA 10: 12/9.
[221] GA 10: 15-16/10.
[222] GA 10: 34/22.

> something with secure standing, that means, as an object. Only what stands in this manner is something of which we can, with certainty, say 'it *is*.'[223]

Our rendering of reasons founds and secures our cognition of particular objects such that we can claim that they exist. In this way, the principle of reason speaks of being. If it is the case that declaring existence to a being requires that we can provide a ground or reason for it, then "*being in itself essentially comes to be as grounding*."[224] Heidegger points out that while we expect this principle to shed some light on reason, it is an uttering of being in a concealed manner that in fact "lets us hear an accord (*Zusammenklang*) between being and reason."[225] This accordance comes about during the reign (*Herrschaft*) of the principle of reason, which occurs through the sending of being (*Seinsgeschick*) that Leibniz receives in his philosophical writings. It is at this point that cognition responds to the demand of rendering a ground or reason for the objects it intuits as existing.[226] This reign entails that being *qua* being withdraws and that beings as objects shine forth. Heidegger says that our responsiveness to the demand of providing reasons opens up "the possibility of what we call the modern natural sciences and modern technology."[227]

The epistemic mode operative in science and technology require a sense of certainty that entails our cognition is bepowered (*machten*) by the principle of reason such that we are rendering reasons at increasing levels.[228] The principle of reason articulates a demand for reason that we unwittingly hear and to which we constantly respond. This cognitive

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[223] GA 10: 41-42/27.
[224] GA 10: 73/49.
[225] GA 10: 73-76/49-50.
[226] GA 10: 81-82/55.
[227] GA 10: 82/55.
[228] GA 10: 46-47/30.

practice of rendering reasons is something that is exclusive to humans, the *animale ratione*. Even while other living beings have reasons and causes to their being, their cognition is not commanded to render reasons to itself.[229] This "bepowerment" of our cognition, and thereby of us more fully, occurs such that nature's processes become calculable and the "energies of nature as well as the mode of their procurement and use determine the historical existence of humanity on earth."[230]

D. Nietzsche and the Will to Power

At the end of the nineteenth century, the historical sending of being is most succinctly captured in Nietzsche's famous declaration, "God is dead." "God" represents the metaphysical, transcendent truths or sovereigns that grant order and meaning to the otherwise chaotic and ephemeral appearances of our immanent world. For this reason, the demise of metaphysics opens an era of nihilism. However, Nietzsche articulates this nihilistic moment as anything but disparaging. Without an operative value system descending from a transcendent source, Nietzsche says that the world is free to create a new system of values.[231]

In the absence of a metaphysical source, the new cosmological center is the human subject. Heidegger reads Nietzsche's philosophy as an explicit articulation of the end of metaphysics.[232] This "end" is a long process in which the gods flee and the subject emerges

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[229] GA 10: 63/42.
[230] GA 10: 83/56.
[231] GA 6.2: 25-26/5.
[232] Heidegger argued that Nietzsche failed to recognize the end of metaphysics and the will to power as a historical event, a contingency that is occurring in a particular disclosure. Nietzsche sees will to power as a more factual quality of human existence that is to be endured by affirming it. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 156-57.

as the center around which values orbit and whose evaluative capacity enables domination.[233] Because the value-positing part of a subject is the will, we can say that the decline of metaphysics correlates with the ascendance of human will. By the time of Nietzsche's thought, the will no longer disguises itself as reason or spirit.[234] The highest value is unrelenting will to power such that the human becomes the "ground and aim of all being."[235] This both affects the character of being and the essential character of human being.

Will to power is not the mere satiation of desire or craving. Will to power is always the seeking of power that can serve as an installment toward further production of power:

> Every power is a power only as long as it is more power, that is to say, an increase in power. Power can maintain itself in itself, that is, in its essence, only if it overtakes and overcomes the power level it has already attained... '[W]ill to power' means the accruing of power by power for its own overpowering.[236]

Any particular unit of power does not hold intrinsic value. Power is a peculiar sort of currency that one barters for the sake of more of the same currency. Nietzsche's thinking demonstrates a move toward an explicit sense of insatiable instrumentality.

However, the movement of this instrument is paradoxical. On the one hand, power is used to move someone powerful to another station of power, evincing a value for becoming or possibility. Nietzsche himself celebrates this as a way that his thought

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[233] GA 6.2: 30/9.
[234] Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 156.
[235] GA 6.2: 52/29.
[236] GA 6.2: 28/7.

overcomes the metaphysical order in which a permanent stability in a transcendent realm reigned over the imperfections of impermanence. On the other hand, the will to power is a value system by which power is only considered as much if it returns to power. Heidegger uses this feature of Nietzsche's thought to argue that Nietzsche's celebration of becoming is unwittingly one of permanence.

E. Technology and Modernity

In the previous chapter, I discussed the general structure of technology in terms of unbounded finitude. Heidegger paints a picture of the technological era such that beings position one another in a relentless chain of ends and means. In doing so, beings are so beholden to one other that their specific existence is over-conditioned to the point of becoming nothing of meaning on their own. In other words, they not only lack boundaries, but they are continually losing any semblance of finitude as they wash into the monotonous machinery of the technological era.

To avoid repetition, I focus this section on technology as a way of revealing, a type of unconcealment that brings forth.[237] In particular, it is helpful to see the fruition of will to power as the highest value. In modern technology this revealing is different from the Greek conception of bringing-forth in *technē* in the sense of *poiēsis*. Modern technology challenges and demands beyond the reductive stability of an object that is organized into a particular schema. The static character of an object is not characteristic of technologically positioned beings that must continually be available – first as water, then as pressure, then

[237] GA 7: 13/11.

as energy, then as electricity (ad infinitum).[238] Foremost among technological beings is the human herself: "Positionality means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve."[239] Technology places the human into a mode of revealing that involves ordering in to the technological standing-reserve, and further, reveals "nature, above all, as the chief storehouse of the standing energy reserve."[240] The technological character revealed for both the human and nature are on their way well before the rise of industrial modernity. They began at least as early as the mathematization of nature in theoretical physics (of Newton and Galileo) and the value-determining, authoritative subject (of Descartes).[241]

In the disclosure of technology, what is not clearly disclosed to the human is that her own position of master or lord over beings is also a positioning that technology claims. In doing so, technology drives out other possibilities of revealing.[242]

IV. Overall Arc of the Historical Narrative of the Will

The general arc of Heidegger's narrative is that metaphysics continues to rise as being withdraws. Corresponding with these movements, truth increasingly emanates from the intellectual apparatus of humans. In his 1941 essay, "Metaphysics as History of Being," Heidegger gives (at least) two related descriptions for what metaphysics is to demonstrate this point. He writes, "In the beginning of its history, Being opens itself out as emerging (*physis*) and unconcealment (*aletheia*). From there it reaches the formulation of presence

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[238] GA 7: 16-17/16-17
[239] GA 7: 21/20.
[240] GA 7: 22/21.
[241] GA 7: 23/22.
[242] GA 7: 28/27.

and permanence in the sense of enduring (*ousia*). Metaphysics proper begins with this."[243] The shift to which this statement refers already took place in ancient Greek philosophy between the Pre-Socratics and Aristotle. His second characterization reads, "Both factors, the precedence of beings and the assumed self-evidence of Being, characterize metaphysics."[244] Heidegger is effectively describing the tendency to focus on what something is—its qualities, its production, its use—while taking that same thing's existence for granted. Metaphysics marks a priority for discussing something's what-ness (*essentia*), while trivializing its that-ness (*existentia*)—its very presencing before us.

The shift from unconcealment to permanent presence allows the site of truth to move from being as presencing to a proposition that links predicates to a being in an established sense. A proposition is not explicitly beholden to the temporal unconcealment of being since it "establishes and thinks what is unconcealed by the adequation (*Angleichung*) of reason."[245] Intellectual reason offers certainty because of knowledge's reflexive verification process: "only that knowledge is valid as knowledge which at the same time knows itself and what it knows as such, and is certain of itself in this knowledge."[246] As truth hinges on the certainty supplied by human intellect, the notion of reality is adjusted according to what humans can effect.[247]

However, metaphysics does not appear to us as one possible historical disclosure because of the forgetting of being by being itself. Metaphysics is part of the sending of being that Heidegger characterizes as the "forgetting of being." This phrase points to the

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[243] GA 6.2: 367; Martin Heidegger, "Metaphysics as the History of Being" in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 4.
[244] GA 6.2 374-375/11.
[245] GA 6.2: 380/16.
[246] GA 6.2: 384/20.
[247] GA 6.2: 386/22.

way that unconcealment and the presencing of being withdraw such that "they remain inaccessible to human perception and representation."[248] The forgetting eclipses itself. The "forgetting of being" is a genitive in two senses: (1) what is forgotten is being, (2) the one forgetting is being. This forgetting means that the unfolding of being qua world has been covered over by the presencing inherent to positionality. In positionality, everything is fully present, available, and distanceless. The play between concealment and unconcealment does not presence as such; instead, we have an inventory of the standing reserve,[249] of instruments and instrumental thought.[250] We can say that this concealment is a lack of tending to the mediation of things, indeed to the mediacy that defies the very premise of objective presence. Thus, in the forgetfulness of being there is a contrariety between a mediating world and positionality, and yet, they are the same.[251] Both of these are the essence of being, but in different ways. World is the essence of being, and positionality as it prevails in our current world, is the forgetfulness of being.

This general arc shows us that in Heidegger's thought metaphysics and the will are centrally about the relation that the human has with being. If we think in Heideggerian terms, the human essence is in fact a mortal essence. The mortals are those who are there in the clearing of being as part of the appropriating event. The will is a disruption to this essence of receiving being and being responsive to the sending. However, if we think of the will as historical being itself, then it becomes difficult to understand the will as something that is outside of the sending of being. This is a complicated balance in

[248] GA 79: 50/48.
[249] GA 79: 52/49.
[250] GA 79: 60/57.
[251] GA 79: 52/49.

Heidegger's thought that warrants significant searching and reflection. In the final section of this chapter, I will parse out the nature of the ethical problem to which we are disposed by virtue of our willingly attuned post-modern world.

V. Implications of the will a Historical Sending

Scholarly debate abounds about whether Heidegger's historical narrative of the will accurately represents specific thinkers throughout the history of philosophy. James Watson argues that Descartes' ultimate foundation was God rather than the self-certainty of a subject. For Descartes, human perception is not perfect, and so scientific experiments leaning on empirical observation are similarly prone to inaccuracy. The perfect calculability of mathematical models of reality, however, corresponds to the perfection of the Creator. This was similarly the case for Galileo. For both of these thinkers who mark the beginning of the modern era, it was not the case that nature was reducible to its mathematical representations, but rather that these were the representations of nature that were reliable by virtue of their connection to a divine perfection.[252] Given the role of the divine in epistemic certainty, it is difficult to also defend Heidegger's claim that the human subject becomes the center of certainty.

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[252] James R. Watson, "Beyond Onti-Ontological Relations: Gelassenheit, Gegnet, and Niels Bohr's Program of Experimental Quantum Mechanics," in *Heidegger on Science*, ed.by Trish Glazebrook (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2012). Another issue that Watson discusses is whether Heidegger is sufficiently careful with the transition from Newtonian physics to 20th century innovations in physics, particularly those in Quantum Theory. Because quantum theory is not predicated upon the existence of an object in the same way as Newtonian science, Heidegger's more severe assessments of scientific discoveries in atomic physics seem like a generalization that has overstepped the limits of its relevant scope.

We can also question the accuracy of Heidegger's historical narrative due to the historical data sets that Heidegger does not include.[253] The single narrative arc presupposes not only something called "the West,"[254] but a fairly monolithic West in relation to the rise of willing characteristics, often eliding the differences among peoples within Europe. However, we can think of a variety of intellectual currents in "the West" and also recognize currents of thought and life that are not archived for various reasons, including prejudiced hierarchies that motivated the exclusion of certain groups from popular memory. In many ways, his celebration of ancient Greece works well with how he presents the rise of the will if one focuses merely on the notion of truth, but if we turn toward practices of domination—particularly those documented by philosophers of man over woman or master over slave—then we may be able to recognize the will already in much of Greek life.[255] Moreover, "the West," since ancient history, participated in exchange with peoples who are not considered Western as the term generally circulates (e.g. thinkers from Afghanistan and India). Given that this is the case, the title of "the West" without more specific determinations of the borders and temporal schemes included is not easy to understand.

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[253] Heidegger has responses to some of these concerns. In relation to the issue of accuracy, Heidegger would argue that historical reflection requires a more thoughtful engagement than the retrieval of facts and production of causal chains. In *Contributions to Philosophy*, he distinguishes *Historie* from *Geschicht*e. The former requires an objectification of the past that lends itself to manipulative calculation. The latter is "originary history," which construes temporality in a more dynamic, relational sense altogether. Originary history roots history in the truth of being as the holding sway of being. (See Daniela Vallega-Neu, "Rhythmic Delimitations of History," 93). The issue with this (speculative) response is that we cannot conflate a mode of being historical and a look back at specific sites throughout history. Being historical is a mode of being that is prepared by a select few who inaugurate another beginning, while a historical reflection is something that we can do right now as individuals with historical research methods.

[254] My use of quotation marks is meant to refer to Heidegger's language without also endorsing the categorical organization it presupposes.

[255] Caputo, "Demythologizing Heidegger," 536.

Questions abound almost immediately: Does not a broad, sweeping narrative over a long period of time warrant a larger burden of proof? Do the debates that animate the history of philosophy evince moments or glimmers of releasement from the will? Does the sway of the will hold as strongly for slaves in our world as it does for masters?

Though these are not negligible questions, it is not the aim of this project to fact check Heidegger's narrative against what we can otherwise discern or question about the history of the will. Nor is it within the scope of this project to assess the broader set of writings related to Heidegger's philosophy of history.

Regardless of the answers to these justifiable questions about historical accuracy, there are important implications for understanding the will as a historical arising. Foremost, doing so helps us change the dimensions that we generally ascribe to the faculty of the will, thereby helping us recognize the will in its subtler manifestations. If we only think of the will as willing on the part of specific individuals or groups, then we cannot begin to conceive of a released ontology that sheds the boundaries demarcating active and passive parties in events of action. The interdependent event that is configured in Heidegger's conception of history catalyzes our thought toward a different ontological schema than that which commonly pervades our everyday activity and willing endeavors. Understanding the will as historical helps us follow Heidegger's thinking of the will as occurring in a diffuse locale:

> Such power is *panoramic* and is thus totally different from a blindly urging form of energy set loose somewhere. Being panoramic (*das Weitumhershauen*) does not mean merely looking about, a gaze that roams back and forth among things that are at hand. Being panoramic is a looking

> beyond (*Hinaussehen über*) narrow perspectives. It is thus itself all the more perspectival, that is, a looking that opens up perspectives.[256]

The panoramic nature of the will not only implies that the will is larger than any individual perspective, but also that it is *prior to* these perspectives. This priority is not the sort that a single cause has to its effect. As discussed in the Introduction, Bret Davis connects the will with Heidegger's language of a *fundamental attunement* (*Grundstimmung*) to give the will larger dimensions than those of a faculty belonging to the subject. It is an ontological disclosure that places us into our subject positions open to a world of objects.[257]

Another implication of thinking the will as historical is that by doing so we can at least begin to get a sense of how widely the panorama of the will extends. The domain of the will includes even those projects that shrink the sphere of individual wills for the sake of aggrandizing some unified will (e.g., in the cas of a nation state). Moreover, it includes practices of passivity or submission.[258] In all of these cases, there is an agential locus and a corresponding patient locus. It becomes very difficult to think outside of these categories in our descriptions of events, but the boundaries demarcating dualistic subjects and objects are entangled with everything else related to the will. Moreover, the will perhaps appears most obviously to us in our volitional behavior, but it permeates many other aspects of our being, including our criterion for veracity and our way of establishing what exists. This chapter chose a particular focus in the historical exposition related to truth and knowledge, but there are features of our thought, schema, and world formation that similarly operate by virtue of the will as a historical sending. In this respect, a study of the will as a historical

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[256] GA 6.1: 582/147-148.
[257] Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 8.
[258] Davis, *Heidegger and the Will,*18-22.

sending forces us to confront the way that the will pervades much of our being, even for those who are not necessarily the bearers of power. The will is not only the recognizably explicit efforts that move in the direction power, but the intelligibility of a topography that demarcates spheres of power and spheres of weakness as opposing.

Finally, when we move the will into its larger dimensions as a historical sending of being we can begin to see our unshakeable relatedness to being. We saw in the first chapter (and will continue to see in Chapter Four) that we do not possess ownership over ourselves. Heidegger's thinking of the will brings this into ever more focus as it deals explicitly with the source of our individual agencies. Our sovereignty is not only related to what we see around ourselves currently, but also an entire historical arising that moved individual humans into the recesses of certain, reason-rendering intellect. It is by virtue of our necessary relatedness to being that we each have a will that we freely direct to the aims of our choice.

VI. The Will as an Ethical Problem

The project of ethical philosophy is not one that neatly correlates with Heidegger's thought. The primary reason for this is that moral philosophy locates the moral agent within the structure of a subject. This is not merely a perceiving and conscious subject but also one who is separated from the world she intuits. In order to assert a value for how being ought to be, one claims a position of authority over being. Being is turned into an object that can be measured or appraised by a particular subject.[259] The subject then also possesses

[259] Silvia Benso, "On the Way to an Ontological Ethics: Ethical Suggestions in Reading Heidegger," *Research in Phenomenology* 24, no. 1 (1994): 161.

the power to change being such that it would receive a higher appraisal. This configuration understands the subject as something that occurs apart from being in many respects. The subject can get involved with being to make it better or worse according to a certain value system, but the subject is given this specific moral character by virtue of their individual, separate sphere.

Heidegger takes issue with this metaphysical picture over and over again. A reverberating message in his thought is that there is no sphere that avoids entanglement with being such that it could rightfully stand over being in the way that a valuation would require. Being is not a static substance that we can examine, assess or characterize in this way. Indeed, the very subjective will that moral philosophy separates is a historical sending of being for Heidegger. Given the non-metaphysical core of Heidegger's thought, we find a theoretical tension between Heidegger's thinking and subject-centered, evaluative ethical philosophy. In other words, moral philosophy arises out of and further entrenches the notion of a boundaried subject who can assert authority over being as an object.

Another issue is that specializing in the specific arena of moral philosophy fragments being into separate spheres of thought and academic pursuits (moral philosophy, physics, chemistry, etc.). This practice of dividing being—such that moral philosophy can be thought as something separate from the philosophy of knowledge—coincides with a shift in focus from thinking being to thinking particular object beings.[260]

[260] Benso, "On the Way to an Ontological Ethics,"161.

Nonetheless, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that Heidegger's ethical preoccupations are readily familiar to any reader of his writings.[261] He does not prescribe "a body of principles or aims for conduct." Rather, he takes up the philosophical task of thinking "the essence or the sense of what makes *action* [*l'agir*] as such, in other words, of what puts action in the position of having to choose norms or values."[262] In Heidegger's thinking we move to the opening prior to that of choice or character, namely our very abode in being, our *ethos*. He argues that moral philosophy leaves this abode unthought, passing over the possibility of an originary ethics.[263] The will disrupts how we dwell in our abode by affecting our essential relation with being. However, our relation with being necessarily bears upon our relation with certain beings, which means that insofar as the will affects our relation with being, it also must affect our relation with beings. In this way, Heidegger gives us "a path for ethics" or ethical philosophy, even if he does so unintentionally.[264] Heidegger's central concern about the will is that the will disrupts the essence of the human. I start with a preliminary sketch of human essence and then articulate how the will disrupts this essence as well as some implications for how this disruption contorts our ability to dwell in our essence.

The primary trait of human essence is being ek-static: standing outside ourselves in the sense that we are brought to our finite disposition by virtue of our openness. If we can move out of the metaphysical schema of a subject, we can recognize this openness in the form of thinking, in which being comes to language through our making sense of it.

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[261] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Heidegger's Originary Ethics," in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. by Raffoul and Pettigrew, trans. by Large (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002) 65.
[262] Nancy, "Heidegger's Originary Ethics," 66.
[263] Benso, "On the Way to an Ontological Ethics," 160.
[264] Benso, "On the Way to an Ontological Ethics," 163.

This means that our ability to circulate in a meaning-laden spheres is not a function of us intrinsically, but a function of the mutual opening of being onto man and man onto being.

Heidegger opens his lecture course *What is Called Thinking?* describing thinking in a way that captures the mutuality of appropriation that occurs in essential thought. His very language disrupts a conception of thought as a subject reflecting on a sphere of objects through her own ability or willingness. Thinking is not merely something we do, but something that brings us to our existence as the sorts of beings who we are:

> For we are capable (*vermögen*) of doing only what we are inclined (*mögen*) to do. And again, we truly incline only toward something that on its side inclines toward us, toward our essence (*Wesen*), in that it grants our essence as that which holds (*hält*) us in our essence. Holding is actually herding (*hüten*), to let graze (*weiden lassen*) in the pastureland. However, what holds us in our essence holds us only as long as we on our side be-hold (*be-halten*) the holding (*das Haltende*).[265]

In this passage we see Heidegger use language and grammar to describe an event without a dominant actor. Thinking and human each incline toward each other, and it is through this mutual inclination—a mutual fondness and caring for one another—between the human and thinking that human thought is possible. This inclination is not rooted in selfish desire.[266] Thinking holds us in *our* essence. We must think of holding as a way of allowing free movement rather than constraining within certain boundaries. Thinking is able to do

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[265] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 8: Was Heißt Denken?* ed. by Paola-Ludovika Cariando (Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1954) 5; *What Is Called Thinking?* trans. by J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Perennial, 1976) 3.

[266] It is worth noting that Nancy uses the word "desire" to describe this affection in his writing, but he makes a point to say that we should not understand this in the sense of object-desire. Nancy, "Heidegger's Originary Ethics," 68.

this only insofar as we behold its holding—meaning that we let it release us into free movement.

Within the dynamic between thinking and humans, there is an affective register to which Heidegger's language directs us. *Mögen* most often means to like or want something, but it can also carry connotations of caring, being fond of, feeling, or favoring.[267] This set of meanings is lifted later in the passage when we come to *hüten*, which means to herd or shepherd, but also to take care of, guard, or watch over. In my translation I use "herding" since there is no reflexive pronoun and since the rest of the sentence evokes this sense, but between these words a tone of care resounds. In the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger gives *mögen* the sense of "to enable," "to preserve [something] in its essence, to maintain it in its element."[268] Thought shelters and preserves the manifestation (*Offenbarkeit*) of being by bringing it to language.[269] This means that being exposes itself to the human "as the opening of making sense," an exposition in which being "entrusts" itself to the human.[270]

Such sense-making cannot be reduced to the "common sense" or practical sense that can be applied in a particular project. As François Raffoul emphasizes, the relation to being that occurs in thought brings forth the useless, what cannot be measured merely in terms of results or the production of effects.[271] Heidegger differentiates such an essential relation with language from one in which "language surrenders itself to our mere willing

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[267] Capuzzi uses "favoring" in his translation of the "Letter on Humanism." Capuzzi, trans., "Letter on Humanism," 241.
[268] GA 9: 317/242.
[269] GA 9: 313/239.
[270] Nancy, "Heidegger's Originary Ethics," 74.
[271] François Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 228.

and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings."[272] He laments that essential thinking and language are not valued in a world that upholds the exactitude and certainty of the sciences as a thinking of a higher truth.[273] When appropriated as a tool for humans to utilize, language is no longer originary such that it brings being to language. This is a threat to the essence of humanity, to the appropriation of humans as finite but open.[274]

The thinking of the will coincides with a certain epistemic character. The difference between truth as unconcealment and truth as correspondence to an objective reality leads to the difference between an attentive appropriating and grasping for certainty. The metaphysical paradigm of the will seeks certain knowledge of objects that are understood as fully present and available. Certainty, as a knowledge form, is only applicable to the sort of thing that does not leave anything hidden. Any element of mystery evades certainty.

The limits of certainty become evident when we think of truth as unconcealment. The possibility inherent to a concealed dimension or essence continually disrupts the confidence and finality of certainty. Heidegger is, in part, encouraging a different conduct in our epistemic practices, one that is willing to by-pass the value for certainty in order to care about other ways things show themselves to us than their indubitable and objectively agreeable dimensions. The value system operative in understanding truth as certainty entangles us in a whole metaphysical system that includes a boundary between subjects and objects and a universally accessible sphere of material objects. It disguises the relational, middle-voiced, unbounded event that is occurring, such that we lose sight of the way that a so-called sphere of objects participates in our appropriation as subjects seeking

[272] GA 9: 318/243.
[273] GA 9: 314-15/240.
[274] GA 9: 317/243.

truth. We could argue that this relational configuration supports an ontological humility that removes the human subject from the position of master over objects and nature.

Heidegger never prescribes such a humility. The way that concealment itself is concealed in the modern epoch is not a human affair, and so turning toward truth as *aletheia* is not a lever whose turning is in our control. However, Heidegger's thematization of *aletheia* and of the thinker's receptive listening already encourage an epistemic comportment of openness – of deferring a decisively certain knowledge and of avoiding the presumption that what is true is fully available before oneself. We see an attitude about being bear upon one's epistemic projects with particular beings. Silvia Benso translates Heidegger's ontological reflections into an act predicated on a belief:

> The theme of listening...presupposes giving up the claim to comprehension and knowledge of everything. It amounts to an act of humility in thinking, joined to the firm belief that the other has something to say, that part of the truth—maybe even the whole of it—comes from the other, that a totalitarian possession of truth is not possible.[275]

Benso argues that while Heidegger avoids ethical prescriptions, he nonetheless opens a path for ethics, even if unintentionally.[276]

The will impedes this humble comportment in thought because it is inherently motivated by a value for power. It respects and listens exclusively to thought that adheres to this agenda. The form of thought that is upheld, then, is reason. Sonia Sikkha writes,

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[275] Benso, "On the Way to an Ontological Ethics," 170.
[276] Benso, "On the Way to an Ontological Ethics," 163.

> the values posited by the human will define what is good, and do so in terms of the needs and wants of the human subject. 'Nature' is accordingly understood as what opposes this will, needing to be mastered in order to secure the 'freedom' of human beings, which is itself interpreted in terms of willing. 'Reason' is the means for achieving such power.[277]

This respect for reason is not problematic in itself, but it becomes problematic because there is a lack of value for other disclosures that occur through thought than those that are certain, exact, and applicable to the domain of matter that engenders power. Thought is reduced to the clarity and calculability that yields instrumental value. This means that thought cannot be registered in the sayings of poetry or art, indeed any saying that evades the ontological establishment that inheres in a propositional representation.

In response to concerns about the public function of reason in upholding a critical world (namely the concerns put forth by Jaspers and Habermas), Sikka clarifies Heidegger's point:

> [Forms of speech such as the holy, sacred, poetic, or mythic] are essential to Heidegger's critique of (modern Western) reason, because they articulate the alternatives toward which he is trying to gesture. It is, again, not a matter of preferring obscurity over clarity, or poetry over reason, as a general rule. It is that obscure and poetic sayings are required to challenge the dominant presuppositions of the age, which pass themselves off as authoritatively self-evident under the aegis of reason.[278]

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[277] Sonia Sikka, *Heidegger, Morality, and Politics: Questioning the Shepherd of Being* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018) 209.
[278] Sikka, *Heidegger, Morality and Politics*, 210-11.

The will, in its exclusive endorsement of calculative reason, inhibits our communicative capacity rather than enhancing it. This is not a feat of reason on its own, but the value system of the will.[279] If we understand humans and being as mutually appropriated, insofar as meaning is essentially proper to us, then our lack of recognition and reception of certain thought forms is not only detrimental to neglected thought-forms, but to us. We fail to enjoy a dynamic, semantic milieu. Moreover, even within the paradigm of the will, we suffer a loss when we lose communicative avenues to link subjects alienated within their finite boundaries. Sikka swiftly makes all of the connections to show that the totalitarian authority of reason indeed serves the will as a reigning power rather than a faculty one can freely direct.

[279] I make this point because of our general ability to think reason and the will separately. Whether Heidegger would be willing to disentangle reason from its historical role in the unfolding of being is doubtful.

CHAPTER 4: Buddhist Critiques of the Will

I. Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to present a Buddhist critique of the will. Because Heidegger's understanding of the will as self-assertion, -preservation, and -enhancement is unique, there is not a similar term that encapsulates the function of *the will* in this precise way in Buddhist philosophy.[280] However, Buddhist philosophy thoroughly develops the problem of self-grasping, which is often understood as the root of human suffering. It is this general orientation of Buddhist thought that spurs my understanding of Buddhist arguments on matters of epistemology, metaphysics, language, or ethics as animated by a critique of the will. The Madhyamaka tradition in particular teaches that someone who is skillful diminishes self-assertion with a deeper metaphysical realization of interdependence (by understanding the self to be empty), and that in the absence of such a realization—namely in a state of ignorance about interdependence—preservation and enhancement follow closely behind, spurred by the poisons of attachment and aversion. Just as the assertion of a self with a specific and fixed nature disappears under Madhyamaka analysis, so too do claims of an ultimate reality or substantiality for entities that would contribute to preserving or enhancing the self. As a whole, I read the Madhyamaka philosophical project as one that targets boundaries that circumscribe a self or any of the things that enable the projects of its preservation and enhancement.

[280] The more standard words for "will," such as *cetanā*, are more closely aligned with the most conventional ways of understanding the will that we have in English, such as volition or intention.

Because of the soteriological interest of Buddhist texts and teachings, the metaphysical nature of boundaries is not usually of primary importance. Rather, the philosophy unfolds by studying how the upholding of such boundaries manifests in our conduct. In this chapter, I focus on how expositions on the will weave together complex metaphysical categories (the self, interdependence, emptiness) with the affective dispositions of willing (attachment, aversion, self-cherishing). A subtler set of willing affects also circulates in our epistemic ethos. We repeatedly see that qualifying ultimate reality as empty requires we address the affects of certainty and stability that structure other interpretations of ultimate reality. This is to say that the critique of the will disrupts, perhaps even targets, the certainty and stability found in willing epistemologies.

Before presenting a critique of the will, it is helpful to know the place of the self in Indian philosophy when Buddhist thought began with Siddhārtha Gautama's life in the sixth century BCE. In Indian philosophy, "the self" was continually explored and debated by philosophers with a range of interpretations for the nature of our existence. For that reason, the word *ātman* means different things among different parties. Beginning with the *Upāniṣads* (composed starting in the 7th century BCE), senses of *ātman* include what we might understand as the soul, body, breath, person, or the universe, and also include other notions specific to Indian cosmology, such as the cosmic bodies of *Prajāpati*.[281] Generally speaking, Buddhists negated the existence of an unconditioned, unified, and enduring substance with which a person could claim identity or claim to be his or her *self*. For them, the philosophical and soteriological problem is less concerned about the *Upāniṣads'*

[281] Brian Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India: Priests, Kings, and Women in the Early Upaniṣads*, SUNY Series in Hindu Studies (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2007) 7-12.

discovery of self-nature than the shedding of attachments to the self.[282] Indeed, Buddhists see both ignorance and suffering as rooted in adherence to a unified substance with which one identifies.

The Mādhyamikas target the vision of the self (*ātmadarśana*) or the view that the self is real (*satkāyadṛṣti*) because this is the cause of the afflictions that are generative of suffering, namely, the three poisons: attachment or craving (*rāga*, *tṛṣṇā*), aversion (*dveṣa*), and ignorance (*avidya*). Sara McClintock stresses that there is a holistic and comprehensive target when dealing with the self:

> [The] vision of the self is a primordial mistake; it is an erroneous perspective (*darśana*) produced in the mind through a process of continuous cultivation (*abhiyāsa*) of that perspective since beginningless time. It is not primarily a philosophical view but something much deeper.[283]

The vision of the self is intensely entrenched, not just as a claim, but as an orienting feature of existence. It expands well beyond an aspect of character (such as being greedy) or a type of conduct. It frames the whole of one's character and conduct, along with one's manner of seeing, understanding, and being in every possible sense. For this reason, one could consider the will to be at the root of a great many problems. I focus my critique of the will in this chapter on matters that are related to imposing boundaries around oneself and others.

One important difference between this exposition on the will and its critique and that of the previous chapter is that we have no notion of the will as a historical arising in

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[282] While these goals are significantly different, it is still the case that the Buddhist process of shedding the self involves a great deal of reflecting on the conditions and components of the phenomena that we take to be the self. Such reflection, however, generally culminates in reducing or eliminating one's self-cherishing.

[283] Sara L. McClintock, *Omniscience and the Rhetoric of Reason: Santaraksita and Kamalasila on Rationality, Argumentation, and Religious Authority* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010) 194.

Buddhist thought. Like all things in Buddhist philosophy, the will is heavily conditioned and dependent and is embedded in our immanent world. However, the sort of development through history and the associations between the will and modernity are missing in this account. Rather than understanding the will as an escalation, the will is taken to be a disposition that is beginningless (*anādi*), meaning that we have always been situated as self-cherishing beings. This is a historical claim, but it is a karmic sort of history. Our afflictions are dispositional and have a long, long past as we encounter them presently. Moreover, this entanglement with the past is a social entanglement that complicates any effort to locate the will in an isolated individual.

There are other Buddhist implications for thinking of the will historically. The insight of interdependence, for example, means that the will neither belongs fully to us nor arises fully from us. Thus, it is still the case that the will is not a faculty of the subject alone. Moreover, the will is not a necessary absolute. We can move from the will to nonwilling, as we will see in the Conclusion. Moreover, the fact that it is "beginningless" means that it is not simply a problem of personality but has a more sustained unfolding, which also suggests that moving away from the will is difficult. I will discuss further implications for the different roles of history in Heidegger and Buddhist thought in the synthesis to part two after this chapter.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of sovereignty, a concept that requires boundaries around a particular domain. I focus on a series of passages that present the conditions of political sovereignty as analogous to those of personal sovereignty. This section explains how a claim to sovereignty is a claim to control, and how such a claim is necessarily infelicitous given pervasive interdependence. In the second section, I show that

critiques of the binary of identity and difference are critiques of self-assertion and self-preservation. In this section, I examine two more problems stemming from the will: misrecognition caused by the reductive nature of boundaries, and a lack of care or outright hostility toward that which is different. I also include two illustrations of how Buddhist teachings engage our dispositions to claim identity or difference while also transforming these same dispositions. The final section advances my argument that there is a thorough critique of the will in Buddhist philosophy. I propose that the epistemic ethos in Buddhist epistemology is one that is continually responsive to unboundedness by targeting the auxiliary affects of willing dispositions like certainty.

II. Buddhist Critiques of Sovereignty and Control

Because of its emphasis on the beginningless conditionality of all things, interdependence poses a significant challenge for any effort to control situations. Nonetheless, we regularly resist the movement and bearing of conditions to assert control. I use the trope of sovereignty in this section to demonstrate how the walls that protect a particular sovereign contribute to the afflictions of attachment and aversion, which drive practices of self-preservation and self-enhancement.

The metaphysical incoherency between ownership and interdependence is seen in the description of the three main types of suffering.[284] Physical suffering (*dukkha-dukkhatā*, Pāli) arises from sickness, aging, and death, all of which are unavoidable given the inherent vulnerabilities of being embodied. The second type of suffering (*viparināma-*

[284] SN 45.165: Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., "Maggasaṃyutta, Connected Discourses on the Path," in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, a Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Somerville, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2000) 1561.

dukkhatā) stems from the fact that all things are impermanent, including any object or situation that satiates our desires. When our satisfaction is inevitably disrupted, we suffer because we have to live amidst conditions that deviate from our preferences. However, even before favorable conditions dissolve, we suffer because of the anxieties and fears of this impending dissolution. Suffering is both the grief after the loss and the anguish that arises even when loss is a mere possibility. The final type of suffering (*saṅkhāra-dukkhatā*) is conditioned suffering. This type of suffering follows from the fact that all existents are dependent upon a complex set of conditions, whether those preserving their material integrity (such as the conditions of health or youth) or those granting them a specific value, role, or significance within a particular context. We cannot claim possession over our own supporting conditions. Moreover, existents participate in the complex conditioning of other existents, which means that they also are not in full control of the effects flowing outward from their being or actions.[285]

These conditioned dependencies produce nets of entanglement that make it very hard to maintain a satisfactory level of control. An implication of ontological interdependence is that no one can have a full sense of self-determination. Amber Carpenter gives an "anatomy of suffering" in which she explains a standard and repeated argument in the Pāli canon against autonomy. Suffering is not primarily an experience of pain, but one of "impotence: in 'being done to' instead of 'acting upon'." She goes on to say that even though the experience of pain and that of impotence in the face of pain are

[285] Bhikkhu Bodhi glosses *saṅkhāra suffering* as "suffering due to formations." I lean on Stephen Harris for this sense of "conditioned suffering." Stephen E. Harris, "Suffering and the Shape of Well-Being in Buddhist Ethics." *Asian Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2014): 24.

perhaps conceptually distinct, they are nonetheless phenomenologically intertwined.[286] Carpenter further illustrates the connection between suffering and powerlessness through grammar in the Greek language. "To suffer" (*paschein*) is the passive form of "to do" (*poiein*). The latter is used for an active agent who "has control and authority over [their] movements," and the former is used in cases where such control and authority are absent. Thus, Carpenter argues, "Lack of such control is suffering, both grammatically and phenomenologically."[287]

This argument elucidates the connection between suffering and interdependent arising. If we claim power as sovereign agents whose command is meant to shape the way of things, the conflict between our self-understanding as an autonomous, willing agent and the reality of interdependence necessarily produces suffering. Claiming sovereignty is a futile exercise of resisting our constitution that not only leads to frustration but necessarily partakes in practices that create further suffering for oneself and others. Indeed, a central ethical implication stemming from the metaphysical teaching of interdependent arising is that in order to remove our suffering we must dissolve our desires to be in control, thereby coming into greater alignment with reality.

Carpenter's analysis highlights the limits of the "solution" to the problem of suffering offered by Buddhist philosophy in the Fourth Noble Truth. It is not the case that there is anything we can do to completely curb the inevitabilities of sickness, aging, and death, or the transience of the things that we love to have in our lives. Buddhist practice does not alleviate suffering by offering us a means of claiming world domination such that

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[286] Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Durham: Routledge, 2014) 16.
[287] Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, 16.

we can bend the world according to our will. However, we can learn to inhabit this situation in which we are not the centers of control and power, indeed a situation in which *there is no particular center of power whatsoever*.[288] The problem we are to focus on is not that we do not have control, but rather that we produce a discordance in our continual efforts to have and expand control. Recognition of suffering should encourage us to "alter [our] perspective and behavior [such] that the comfortable life of indulgence and power is no longer attractive."[289]

The issue of control and power begins with a particular domain, namely a self who claims power. In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, "The Simile of the Snake," we see that the appropriation of "I and mine" (*ātmātmīya*) in relation to the five aggregates is the starting point of a claim to sovereignty.[290] The Buddha connects the duties and responsibilities of kingly sovereignty to that of personal sovereignty. The domain of "I and mine" is the kingdom that must be protected, if not also aggrandized or enhanced. This domain is the responsibility of a sovereign king, meaning that it is his burden to continually accomplish preservation and seek enhancement.

In contrast to a sovereign, a wise person is able to relinquish their ownership over the aggregates. They then become disenchanted by the aggregates, are able to be dispassionate toward them, and finally, become liberated. The Buddha then describes this person through a series of metaphors that demonstrate the relief of abdicating their sovereign thrones: "one whose cross-bar has been lifted, whose trench has been filled in, whose pillar has been uprooted, one who has no bolt, a noble one whose banner is lowered,

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[288] Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, 18.
[289] Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, 8.
[290] I discuss the aggregates more explicitly in the following section on identity.

whose burden is lowered, who is unfettered."[291] All protective barriers that aid in preservation become defunct, including the gates surrounding a palace as the cross-bar is lowered and the water trenches beyond the gates that are filled in. Other symbols of power—a pillar or banner—are removed such that the palace no longer communicates or exhibits its status as a formidable sovereignty. Finally, the person is unburdened and unfettered, relieved from their duties as a concentrated power who is intent on protecting and expanding their domain.[292]

Structurally, a sovereign king is one whose will rules over other the will of others. Sovereignty requires that others submit their will to that of the sovereign, or else incur punishment for deviating. Thus, the structure of a sovereign divides the world into parties that are beneficial (or at the very least compliant) and parties that are hostile. We can align the categories of "beneficial" and "hostile" with the toxic affects of attachment (or craving) and aversion, respectively. Craving and aversion both signify movement toward what we

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[291] MN 22: Bhikkhu Ñaṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., "The Alagaddūpama Sutta, The Simile of the Snake," in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Somerville, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2015) 232-33.

[292] The claim to power and goals of preserving and enhancing power within kingship and governance are complicated topics for Buddhist philosophy to address. The very predicate of violence inherent to a social order makes it difficult for Buddhist philosophical approaches to align closely with the practices that perhaps stabilize peace and flourishing. While some texts put forth an understanding of righteousness (*dharma*) in terms of absolutes (e.g., non-violence), other texts promote a sort of rulership that is more context-dependent with compassion and skillful delivery of governing techniques (e.g., punishments) (420). Steven Collins makes a distinction between these two types of *dhamma* within the Pāli textual imaginaire and writes extensively about the complexity of interpreting texts that formulate a so-called "political philosophy" in pre-modern texts. In particular, he argues that extracting a pure political philosophy requires considerable care because of the work-like and performative functions of texts. The general issue is that we cannot simply extract prescriptions or rules applicable for all forms of governance because the text addresses the audience in many different ways at once. The political commentary is occurring alongside other performative functions of these texts. "The Perfect Moral Commonwealth? Kingship and Its Discontents," in *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities, Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire*, Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions 12 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 414–96.

want, whether that is the presence or absence of some person, object, or situation. Whether we are pushing things away in our aversions or bringing them close in our attachment, we are manipulating situations according to our preference, thereby seizing control. The poisons emphasize that as soon as we assert a self, we are already invested in preserving it and enhancing it. Our mechanism for doing this is control, which is necessarily impeded by the thorough and dispersed conditionality of all things. In these ways, the afflictive poisons stir our inclinations and efforts toward maintaining and enhancing our sphere of power.

In addition to the fact that interdependence frustrates claims to exercise sovereignty, there are other problematic implications to asserting control in this way. Objects that are rendered beneficial or hostile are reduced to their features and qualities that qualify them as such, which means that they are only recognized in relation to the will either pulling them closer or pushing them away. The sovereign becomes the standard or reference point for determining the value of everything else. If any entity is an object of attachment, then it is conquered or claimed so that it can participate in the projects of the sovereign. If any entity is an object of aversion, then it is considered antagonistic, not necessarily because of any normative problem, but merely because of its misalignment with the goals and aims of the sovereign. These "objects" could be any sort of thing, including specific people, lifestyles, ideas, environmental conditions, or species of animals.

This process is effectively what happens when groups of people identify with a political sovereignty. There are advances that are made for the sake of acquiring what the sovereign wants (or for which they have attachments) and also many violent defenses (or aversion tactics) to preserve what the sovereign claims to be theirs from possible intruders.

Additionally, a sovereign encroaches on another sovereign to gain goods that enhance its power. In Āryadeva's *Four Hundred* (*Catuḥśataka*), he points out that kings are essentially "Royal Thieves".[293]

> If it is not harmful action
>
> For a king to attack weak defenses,
>
> Then that is ever more the case
>
> For others, such as thieves![294]

In his commentary, Candrakīrti goes on to point out that a scenario in which there are "weak defenses" indicates that the thief took some form of property without violence or harm (beyond the loss of property). Whether the sovereign sphere is a kingdom or an individual, the nature of acting for the sake of preserving and enhancing oneself is the same.[295] Considering a possible objection, Āryadeva addresses the matter of how the king's sacrifice earns him honor:

> The sacrifice of all of one's possessions
>
> For liquor and so forth is not respectable.
>
> I wonder why the sacrifice of oneself
>
> In battle is respectable.[296]

Once again, Āryadeva shows that the exercises of sovereignty are structurally the same as the risk calculus of gamblers, or people who are otherwise considered undeserving of respect. There is both the possibility of losing everything and also the possibility of winning

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[293] This phrase comes from Karen Lang's title for this section of the text. Lange, *Four Illusions,* 199.
[294] Lang, *Four Illusions*, 199 (CŚ IV.16).
[295] Perhaps one could argue a potential difference through some versions of social contract theory. The pre-modern context that Candrakīrti is assuming does not have that structure in place.
[296] Lang, *Four Illusions*, 200 (CŚ IV.17).

everything. For a gambler, this all takes place as an economic exchange. For a king at war, the king could die or he could gain land or wealth for his kingdom. The risk assessment highlights that the king is not deserving of any honor that is not also awarded to the gambler. In his commentary, Candrakīrti points out that a king who is fighting in war in fact commits much more significant moral offenses than a gambler driven by addictions.[297] The malicious intentions and the violent inflictions on one's enemy allow craving to also stir aversion, while the gambler is generally not interested in destroying anyone else as he or she strives for wealth.

Āryadeva and Candrakīrti make particular claims about what righteous kingship is and is not with reference to a broader set of political viewpoints in their contemporary arena. These points about the king's actions highlight how the assertion of a sovereign sphere stirs the process of categorizing the broader world into objects of attachment and aversion, for the sake of both preservation and enhancement. Moreover, they show that the conduct of a political sovereign in relation to attraction and aversion is of a very similar nature as that of a thief or gambler driven by desires to obtain certain conditions and avoid others. The similarity of king and thief, a juxtaposition of otherwise opposite characters, again gestures to the fact that claiming a sovereign domain will necessarily lead one to willing practices of preservation and enhancement, and further, that one's station in life is not insulation from this affliction.

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[297] Lang, *Four Illusions*, 104.

III. Claiming Identity, Claiming Difference

In Chapter Two's discussion of unbounded finitude, we saw one implication of interdependence: that we can neither uphold claims to a particular *identity*, nor can we uphold claims to there being a plurality of *different* things. In either case, there is an implied ontological claim to existents occurring within boundaries. In regard to claims of a single, self-identical existent, the issue is that there is a reduction of sameness across a field that in fact shows a great deal of variance. In regard to claims of a plurality of different existents, the problem is that we cannot locate precise sites of separation. Any particular positioning of a break between entities is not ultimately real, even while the finite disclosures offer a degree of intelligibility. The sort of harsh separation implied with difference is simply not operative.[298]

In this section, I consider these metaphysical insights as they apply to the domain of the self (*ātman*). In the first division, I focus on the way that claims to identity are not receptive to temporal change. Identities are tightly grasped as an effort of preservation. In the second division, I move to the issues stemming from harsh claims of separation or difference between self and other. Finally, I provide two textual illustrations of the way that neither identity nor difference are functionally operative categories.

A. Identity

One argument that is put forth against the existence of the self focuses on the incoherence of a unified, singular thing. The concept of a self implies *one-ness* (*ekatva*) but the referent of a so-called self has many, many parts and is decisively not singular

[298] See Section IV on the Radicality of Limits in Chapter Two.

(*aneka*). This sort of argument is applicable to claims about a wide range of things. In the case of the self, however, more than just numerical incoherence is at stake. Because one identifies with the self, everything within a particular set of boundaries is appropriated as "I," which gives rise to clinging or attachment to the qualities that are seen as "mine."

One account in the Pāli canon argues that the so-called self is composed of five aggregates or *kanda*s (or *skandha* in Sanskrit). These five aggregates are form (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).[299] By breaking the so-called self into these five different "heaps" that comprise our being, we can no longer claim a fully unified, single thing which is the self. When we see that the self is composed of these five aggregates (or is a composite in any sense),[300] the self becomes pluralized, a property that is incoherent with the notion of a *single* self. As Matthew Kapstein points out, this is the very status that a self is supposed to occupy: it is that to which the plurality of traits or aspects of existence relate or in which they cohere.[301] In effect, Buddhists refute the existence of a single substrate that holds together distinct parts because it is an arbitrary and false imposition of unity upon a field that lacks it.

The problem posed by plurality expands if we include the lack of stability to each of the five aggregates. Through time, each element of the plurality further includes

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[299] The correlating Sanskrit terms are: *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saṃjñā*, *saṃskāra*, *vijñāna*.
[300] Jay Garfield makes the point that the specific names of the aggregates are not really heavily at stake in the argument of no-self that comes out of the aggregates. Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way,* 142.
[301] Matthew T. Kapstein, *Reasons Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought*, Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2001) 55.

innumerable pluralities.[302] The rhetorical choice to call each of these components of the self a "heap" or a "pile" encourages us to recognize the way that they do not have a distinct and enduring form. We add to the piles and also remove elements from the pile on a regular basis. Even if it is not the case that we consider the self to be permanent or eternally enduring (in the manner that certain theories of rebirth put forth), the claim of momentariness in Buddhist metaphysics disrupts the relative stability we grant the self, even in commonplace and contemporary understandings. The shifts in the piles are not simply occurring at occasional periods of transition or transformation. The aggregates and their various conditions are renegotiated moment to moment. Thus, in addition to containing a plurality of elements, we also cannot claim any singularity to each of these elements insofar as they exist in time and as changing "bundles".

This metaphysical argument is intended to diminish one's sense of ownership over a boundaried sphere. As the Buddha introduces the aggregates, he says that these things we appropriate to ourselves are the very objects of clinging or attachment (*upādāna*), the things about which we say, "This is mine, this is I, this is my self."[303] Because of this attachment, we are (karmically) burdened by carrying these heaps or bundles.[304] This burden is one of many ways that the *sutta* canon represents the aggregates as disadvantageous. Buddhaghosa, a fifth century commentator, summarizes the language describing the aggregates throughout the *sutta* canon: "the aggregates as objects of clinging should be seen as an enemy with drawn sword…as a burden…as a devourer…and as

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[302] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga,* trans. by Bhikkhu Ñanamoli (Onalaska, Washington: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1991, 433-477 (XIV, 33-184).
[303] Buddhaghoṣa, *The Path of Purification,* 484 (XIV, 216).
[304] MN 22: Bhikkhu Ñaṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., "The Alagaddūpama Sutta, 233.

impermanent, painful, not-self, formed, and murderous."[305] Buddhaghosa's list illustrates the aggregates' range of negative consequences, from their simple inconvenience as a burden to their being "murderous."

Part of the problem with attachment is that the objects of clinging are impermanent and transient, meaning they will inevitably dissatisfy our desire for them, as they do not sustain the exact same existence moment to moment. However, there is more at stake than our personal disappointment. Attachment entails both a certain imagining of what exists in some particular manner and an effort to preserve this precise manner of existence. These actions prohibit receptivity toward what is actually taking place when that reality deviates from the form to which one is attached. In some cases, attachment means that one is simply inhospitable to reality because of the higher valuation that one maintains for something that used to exist. We can imagine someone aging, and because of a particular manner of envisioning their nature (in relation to their physical features, social regard, etc.), one devalues who they have become relative to that ideal. In other cases, the attachment can obscure what is taking place altogether as one grasps a prior form that no longer exists. In these cases, the problem is that one does not sufficiently recognize what is unfolding because of the way that their attachments distort their understanding of reality. The value of preservation that exalts what was simply because it came prior disallows value for what is.

This value system stirs an epistemic problem: the imposition of unity to the domain with which one identifies (or to what one calls the self) does not allow recognition of what undermines such unity. This disallowance is precisely the mechanism of imposing

[305] Buddhaghoṣa, *The Path of Purification,* 485 (XIV, 226).

boundaries. The boundaries mark rigid limits for what something is, trying to prevent the influence of conditions upon what is held within the boundaries. This stability attributed to selfhood fails to recognize one's metaphysical constitution as something that does not rest in a substantial and enduring form. As the so-called self is actually changing in dynamic dependence upon other conditions, Buddhist arguments against metaphysical identity over time are efforts to uproot practices of preservation.

B. Difference

If identity is what is claimed by a set of phenomena within a particular set of boundaries, then difference can be rendered as that which occurs in relation with what is on the other side of the boundary. That which is different is what is rendered as "not mine." However, when the Buddha says that one should understand the aggregates to be "not mine," part of what is implied in his manner of negation is that "mine" is no longer an operative category because of the realization of no-self. In contrast to saying "not mine," difference upholds a sphere of mineness while distinguishing other things from that sphere. Thus, within claims of difference, we also see a claim to identity. A metaphysical implication of difference, then, is that there is a plurality (*aneka*) of entities, each of which is distinguishable from the others. In Chapter Two, I discussed Nāgārjuna's critique of separations and the manner in which this critique was conducive to thinking in terms of unboundedness, or the condition of having a limit at which something does not decisively end.[306] In this section, I continue to think of difference as a claim to being separated, but

[306] See the quotation from the *Root Verses* on page 97.

rather than thinking about entities or moments in a causal chain, I consider instead the claim of separation between oneself and another.

The biggest problem with claims to difference is a lack of impetus to respond to that with which one does not identify. The priority of the self renders what is different to perhaps be hostile, but it need not necessarily be so severe. An other is also just outside of the realm of one's concern. Thus, one of the benefits of moving away from the boundaries of identity and difference is that one generates care or compassion (*karuṇā*) with equanimity (*upekṣā*) such that it is distributed to all beings. This generation of care occurs in Śāntideva's chapter on the Perfection of Contemplation (*dhyānapāramitā*) in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*Entry into the Way of Awakening*). Here we can see the importance of non-difference for a bodhisattva intent on relieving the suffering of *all* beings. Śāntideva avoids collapsing others' suffering into being the same as his own because it is not the case that we can feel each other's suffering (8.93). He says that despite this, all sufferings call a response:

> The one who has suffering does not exist. Whose suffering would it be?
>
> Invariably, all sufferings are without a possessor.
>
> They are to be warded off because they are suffering. Why limit this?[307]

Śāntideva's manner of responding is not to claim access to or knowledge of the suffering. He does not see others' suffering to be the exact same as his, but he also does not consider it to be outside of his sphere of responsibility. While these verses take a deeply ethical tone,

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[307] 8.101-102: *yasya duḥkhaṃ sa nāstyasmātkasya bhaviṣyati* || *asvāmikāni duḥkhāni sarvāṇyevāviśeṣataḥ* | *duḥkhatvādeva vāryāṇi niyamastatra kiṃkṛtaḥ* || P. L. Vaidya, Ped. *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva with the Commentary Pañjikā of Prajñākaramati*. Buddhist Sanskrit Texts 12 (Darbhanga, Bihar: Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960) 158-59.

the larger point is metaphysical: if it is not the case that we have identities with distinct boundaries, it is also not the case that we can put anything entirely outside of the domain to which we tend. The "vision of the self" is what compels one toward prioritizing their own suffering over others, but in the absence of this, the logic of a priority no longer upholds.

Another way to see non-difference is through the fact that self and other are mutually dependent in their distinction. There is no self without an other, and vice versa. The entire essence of either category is that they demarcate what the other is not, meaning they require each other, even to the point of inseparability. Nāgārjuna highlights this sort of conceptual configuration among distinctions:

> What is distinct is distinct in dependence on that from which it is distinct; it is not distinct apart from that from which it is distinct.
>
> When x is dependent on y, it does not hold that x is distinct from y.[308]

Nāgārjuna shows that distinction and separation are in fact incoherent. In order to be distinct—in the way that a self is from its other—one is in fact dependent. Thus, the problem with difference is a subset of the problem of being independent in general.

C. Illustrations

These arguments against the self are meant to disclose our misunderstandings of identity and difference, and thereby contribute to their uprooting.[309] The remainder of this

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[308] 14.5: *anyad anyat pratītyānyan nānyad anyad ṛte 'nyataḥ | yat pratītya ca yat tasmāt tad anyan nopapadyate* || I use the translation from: Siderits and Katsura, trans. *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2013) 149-50.

[309] I borrow this language from Matthew Kapstein in his characterization of Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṅgraha* (*The Gathering of Truths*). Kapstein notes that analytical and argumentative form

section will proceed by highlighting this dual function of the Buddhist philosophical project in relation to imprudent boundaries constructed between the self and other. Each of the illustrations below come from texts that have very specific forms. The first is Śāntideva's *Entry into the Awakening Mind* (which is also discussed briefly above), a meditation manual that proceeds by stirring and quieting particular moods through a series of reflections. These moods are all oriented toward generating the awakening mind.[310] As a meditation manual, the majority of this text does not provide reasoned arguments. Rather, it addresses the concerns of a practitioner who herself has a particular sort of understanding and disposition. The second illustration is a narrative that is used in commentary to the *Dhammapada*, a canonical Pāli text. It is titled "Not Hatred for Hatred" and tells the story of two characters who are karmically entangled for many lifetimes because of their mutual hatred toward each other. It similarly addresses audiences with a particular (willing) understanding by simultaneously speaking with the categories operative in the world while also disrupting them.

1. The Perfection of Forbearance

Śāntideva's *Entry into the Awakening Mind* focuses on generating *bodhicitta*, or the awakening mind, which is intent on the bodhisattva goal of relieving the suffering of all beings. Throughout this process, we see rational appeals that dispose the practitioner

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of the text occurs within a project that strives for understandings to permeate our being more generally. In particular, Śāntarakṣita is intent on removing all "'mistaken views of the self' (*vitathātmadṛṣṭi*)," which are perhaps put forth by certain philosophical interlocutors, but also are possibly harbored (even unwittingly) by any of us with respect to the sort of existence we understand ourselves to have. Kapstein, *Reason's Traces,* 15.

[310] Paul Williams, ed. *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, trans. by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 12.

toward affects, whether it be energy to accomplish the bodhisattva ideal, praise and awe toward bodhisattvas, or humility in relation to one's own faults. In the sixth chapter, Śāntideva focuses on the Perfection of Forbearance (*kṣāntipāramitā*), which is the capacity to bear unfavorable conditions without the arising of ill will. We can think of this perfection as an antidote for the poison of aversion.

Śāntideva has an extended passage in which he considers his hatred toward an enemy who is causing him harm. The difference inherent to the relations we have with our enemies is the archetype of alterity—an other that compels us to think in terms of strict boundaries to protect ourselves from transgressions. Śāntideva argues that, just as we are dispossessed in our own process of coming into existence, it is also incoherent to attribute particular qualities to a so-called other, as though they would have full control over their existence. Reflecting on the implications of dependence is meant to dissolve hatred toward our enemies.

Śāntideva therefore tries to dispel tendencies to think in terms of a sovereign other. He writes:

> In this way, all things are dependent on another's will,
> and even that will (upon which something is dependent) is not sovereign (*avaśa*).
> In the absence of activity (*aceṣṭeṣu*), in the manner of a magical creation,
> where does one direct this sort of anger?[311]

[311] 6.31: *evaṃ paravaśaṃ sarvaṃ yadvaśaṃ so 'pi cāvaśaḥ | nirmāṇvadaceṣṭeṣu bhāveṣvevaṃ kva kupyate.* Vaidya, ed. *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva,* 89.

The phenomenon that is like a magical creation is namely one of a unified self that belongs to another. This language of the self being *like* a magical illusion is not uncommon for Śāntideva or for the Mādhyamikas in general. While there is a real appearance of a unified self who is the other, we must approach this appearance in the same way we do an illusion – as something that *can* deceive us but need not do so necessarily. Just as we saw with the mirage in Chapter Two, the appearance of unified selves is not completely invalid, such that we are hallucinating or are having fully unreliable experiences. Nonetheless, such a phenomenon demands further engagement. In this case, Śāntideva uses the matter of dependence to dispel the appearance of ownership on the part of someone who has qualities or habits that are unfavorable. Because nothing is independent or has ownership over their existence, there is no real substrate (such as a self that belongs to another) at which we can reasonably or justifiably direct our anger.

In the commentary, Prajñākaramati emphasizes the degree to which it is the case that one is not independent or the cause of oneself. He says, "There is a cause also of the cause of the self, meaning (*iti*) it is not possible for anyone to be sovereign (*svavaśitā*) in the continuum of beginningless cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*)."[312] He connects one's particular stream of existence to the broader cycle of *saṃsāra*, which is the unending process of states arising and ceasing. The fact that this process is beginningless (*anādi*) makes it clear that there is no particular author or source to which one can decisively root responsibility.[313] This metaphysical understanding gives the practitioner the ability to

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[312] *evaṃ sa heturapi svahetoritianādisaṃsāraparaṃparāyāṃ na svavaśitā kvacidapi saṃbhavati* | Vaidya, ed., *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 89.

[313] This particular meditation is not in relation to responsibility as it is relevant to a political philosophy or in relation to justifiable blameworthiness in action theory. It is specifically focused on generating forbearance towards one's so-called enemies so that one can be invested in relieving the suffering of *all* beings.

disentangle their aversion from the whole personhood of their enemy. In other words, the reflection on dependence at an abstract level helps one dissociate their aversion from the person who is other to them. Ten verses later, Śāntideva says that it makes more sense for him to hate the hatred belonging to his enemy (and compelling his enemy's violence) rather than the person who possesses it.[314] These verses proceed by disrupting claims of identity across a series of things with a more complex composition of dependence.

At other points in this chapter on forbearance, Śāntideva uses the possibility of identity as a way of generating acceptance toward conditions that were seen as unfavorable in prior moments. He considers his own involvement in streams of suffering:

> Previously, I caused pain of this sort for living beings.
>
> Therefore, as the cause of calamity for [other] living beings, this [suffering] is adjoined (*yuktam*) to me.[315]

Here we see a general karmic argument for the way that actions have effects which also have to be endured. Śāntideva understands that he himself is the seed of unfavorable conditions, so having to similarly endure unfavorable conditions is something he can understand. However, in this verse Śāntideva is not directly connecting his actions with those of an enemy who is trying to cause him harm. The issue of what one deserves is not necessarily a neat causal argument, as much as it is meant to generate some degree of understanding (however unsatisfying for many audiences) for one's unfavorable conditions. The suffering that he is presently enduring is not neatly separable from prior

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[314] *atha pratyapakārī sthām tathāpyete na rakṣitāḥ | hiyate cāpi me caryā tasmānnaṣṭāstapasvinaḥ* || Vaidya, ed., *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 94.

[315] 6.42: *mayāpi pūrvaṃ sattvānāmīdṛśyeva vyathā kṛtā | tasmān me yuktam evaitat sattvaopadravakāriṇaḥ* || Vaidya, ed., *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 92.

moments in the stream of existence with which he identifies. It is the possibility of identity with the cause of suffering that allows him to forbear unpleasant circumstances.

He later leaps into a more explicit entanglement with his enemy. He says:

> Those who injure me are really impelled by my actions.
>
> For this they will go to the realms of hell.
>
> Surely it is they who are in fact harmed by me.[316]

In this moment, we lose sight of who suffers and who brings forth suffering. In every way we can understand the causal chains described in this verse, there is a loop that returns the cause of suffering to the one who suffers: my actions attract harm from others that cause me to suffer; or, others harm me, and because of my suffering, others will suffer in hell. The cycle of karmic consequences highlights a lack of possession for any single party over the source or cause of suffering as well as the occurrence of it.

These passages present a skillful play between claims to identity and difference. More specifically, they address a practitioner in their disposition to experience identity or alterity in their own being or in their manner of attributing qualities to others' being. The meditation occurs through a process that does not simply invert identity or difference in its applications, but rather moves to a point where the boundaries demarcating these spheres are no longer there. The reason there can be this sort of play is that neither pure identity nor pure difference are in fact operative beyond certain frameworks we use.

2. "Not Hatred for Hatred"

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[316] 6.47: *matkarmacoditā eva jātā mayyapakāriṇaḥ | yena yāsyanti narakānmayaivāmī hatā nanu* || Vaidya, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 93.

In the commentary to the *Dhammapada* (a widely known text in the Pāli canon), there is a narrative, "Not Hatred for Hatred," that demonstrates the manner in which there is neither identity nor difference between so-called actors.[317] I briefly retell the central plot of the story and then provide analysis that relates it to the specific themes discussed in this section.

At the start of the story, a mother learns that her son's wife is barren. They find a second wife so that her son can have a child. When the second wife becomes pregnant, the first wife prepares her food. Worried that the birth of an offspring will cause her to lose any influence or power in her marriage and family, the first wife slips poison into the food which then causes the second wife to miscarry. The second wife is none the wiser until her third miscarriage. This time the medicine makes her ill and causes her death. In her last breaths she curses the first wife and wishes that she herself be reborn as an ogress that devours the first wife's children.

From this point, the story takes a familiar pattern through a series of rebirths. The first wife is reborn as a hen and the second wife is reborn as a cat. The cat eats the hen's eggs three times. In the next life, the hen is reborn as a leopardess and the cat is reborn as a doe. The leopardess eats the doe's fawn three times. The doe is finally born as an ogress and the leopardess a woman with a comfortable social status. As Ranjini and Gananath Obeyesekere comment, their various positions in this series of rebirths shows that the lines

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[317] Eugene Watson Burlingame, trans., *Buddhist Legends: Translated from the Original Pāli Text of the Dhammapada Commentary, Part 1* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1921) 170-175. Another version of this story also exists in a narrative text that is directed to a lay audience: Ranjini Obeyesekere (trans.), *Saddharmaratnāvaliya* of Dhrarmasena Mahasami, ed. Kirialle Gnanavimala, (Colombo, 1971). For further commentary on this story, see: Charles Hallisey, and Anne Hansen, "Narrative, Sub-Ethics, and the Moral Life."

between victim and aggressor become blurred.[318] Not only do we lose sight of who was the initial aggressor as readers, but as they change roles over and over again in this relation, it seems to matter less which one was the first or second wife at the beginning of the story when we met them.

In the final birth narrated in the story, the ogress consumes the offspring of the woman twice. Upon her third attempt, the mother makes it a little more difficult. Nonetheless, the ogress finds this family of mother, father, and baby while they are traveling. To protect her child the mother goes to a nearby monastery where the Buddha is giving a teaching to an assembly of monks. The mother puts her baby at the Buddha's feet and begs him to protect her child.

The Buddha, of course, is the catalyst for relieving their antagonistic entanglement. He tells the women that without his intervention they would have continued in this cycle of enmity for an aeon. His first direction is for the mother to allow the ogress to hold her baby, a gesture of extraordinary trust. The ogress immediately grew tender toward the baby and wept.[319] To complete the resolution, the Buddha tells the woman to take the ogress home and feed her rice porridge (the same meal the original first wife fed the other wife). Eventually, they have a symbiotic relationship in which the ogress's ability to predict the

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[318] Obeyesekere and Obeyesekere, "The Tale of the Demoness Kālī," 323.

[319] This moment of weeping is significant in the story and in relation to the larger Buddhist themes. Obeyesekere and Obeyesekere write: "The demoness holds the child and her long pent-up emotions springing from a variety of motives—such as deprived motherhood, cannibalism, and violence—now surface, and she weeps. The context makes clear one motive for her weeping: the child in her arms releases her own frustrated maternal love and (*we* might add though no peasant listener would) her guilt." They go on to say that the demoness also weeps because this moment of transition for her makes her anxious about how she will sustain herself if she no long will eat humans. Obeyeskere and Obeyesekere, "The Tale of the Demoness Kālī," 328.

weather allows the woman and her family to be successful farmers; and the woman continues to provide her with shelter and food.

As Obeyesekere and Obeyesekere argue, this narrative is able to entangle these characters by virtue of the fact that there is no clear protagonist or villain. If we work through the karmic chain, we discover that the ogress is the second wife who was killed and endured miscarriages at the hand of the other wife. Thus, the initial victim becomes the final aggressor.[320] Obeyesekere and Obeyesekere further argue that this quality in this story is a species of a larger occurrence in many Buddhist narratives: "Our Buddhist tale, like others of that genre, counters the tendency to reification of oppositional thought."[321] When we consider this story alongside Śāntideva's chapter on Forbearance, the oppositional structures of good and evil or hero and villain coincide with appropriations of self (the default heroes of our stories) and other (the role of potential villains). Moreover, the karmic entanglement of these two characters further demonstrates that one's existence is not fully separable from others'. These characters are born into the world (over and over again) already in relation to each other and serve as the orienting project of each others' lives, whether they are the ones seeking revenge or trying to avoid the others' revenge. In this sense, their personal character is necessarily in relation to hateful and vengeful dispositions that they have toward each other.

This story illustrates the metaphysical problems with inscribing limits between some self and its others. It simply is not coherent to narrate the stories of these women separately from one another, nor can we avoid humanizing the sense of envy and revenge

[320] Obeyeskere and Obeyesekere, "The Tale of the Demoness Kālī," 332-333.
[321] Obeyeskere and Obeyesekere, "The Tale of the Demoness Kālī," 332-334.

they have toward one another given the suffering they cause for each other. Moreover, it is also worthwhile to note that a valuation system was in circulation at the very start such that these women are distinguished as "the fruitful wife" and "the barren wife" as the story is narrated.[322] If it were not the case that reproduction was the primary function of women in this household (or presumably in households more generally), then the cycle of hatred would have never began. In this way, the story exhibits how a certain determination for the identity of something is necessarily conditioned by a range of factors, including the value system and goals operative in a particular place and time. The fact that a person's identity can be a reflection of the world in this way illustrates the point made earlier that a single identity is not sufficiently attentive to the range of qualities that are collapsed into the domain it claims. In this case, the identity of the barren wife is attributed to her, even though the quality of being "barren" is only central to her identity because of the social context in which she moves. Just as identities create unnecessary separations through difference, they also overwrite complexity with a simple and singular name that has priority in a circulating value system.

This story demonstrates the karmically historical nature of the will. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, karmic history is beginningless (*anādi*) and is also diffuse given the range of conditions with which one becomes karmically entangled. When we see a span of several lifetimes, the characters' aversive tendencies (that promote their self-preservation and enhancement) have a long development and escalation until the birth of the ogress. This story can be expanded to include broader dimensions. We can imagine a situation with a community of people on either side of the vengeful antagonism who are entangled in

[322] I purposely withhold from using these phrases to distinguish the two as I retell it.

each others' afflictive tendencies through multiple lifetimes. We can also imagine this same story reaching back beyond the birth in which the two women marry the same husband. As we saw in Chapter Two, Buddhist narratives often allude to previous lives as prior stage-setting, whether for the sake of character development as in *Life of the Buddha,* or for the sake of bringing a dramatic element to a conflict, as in this story. This sort of unboundedness encourages us to further consider the manner in which the valuations associated with female fertility escalated and dispersed. Moreover, it encourages us to consider any willing tendency to be the result of a long process of becoming.

IV. An Epistemic Ethos that Critiques Willfulness

Buddhist philosophers are often trying to strike a balance between defending or explicating the practices through which we claim truth criteria and avoiding any commitments to objective ontological claims. In other words, Buddhists want to claim that we have meaningful and important ways of communicating our understandings to each other while also upholding an attentiveness to the way that all things are empty of a static and intrinsic reality. The Mādhyamikas, in particular, aim to avoid falling into a paradigm that deflates truth such that there are no criteria for veracity, and also want to avoid upholding truth as anything more than contingent and immanent.

I argue that the general Buddhist epistemic ethos evinces a critique of efforts for self-enhancement through knowledge. As we saw in the previous chapter, a wide range of metaphysical claims underwrite a philosophy that makes particular assertions about what is knowable and what that knowledge actually means. Heidegger emphasizes the historical development of knowing as certain knowledge and its predication on our automatic manner

of providing reasons to account for what we see. He argues that these features of knowing develop into a definitive knowledge of objects, which in turn develops into calculative manipulation and deployment. In this section, I provide expositions of two passages that encourage a careful relationship to knowledge. The first is a discourse from the Pāli cannon in which the Buddha refrains from answering questions. This passage sets up the fact that truth is not something that we indifferently possess, but something that affects us. For this reason, teachers have to be skillful in their way of teaching students. The second passage is from Nāgārjuna's *Sixty Verses on Reason* and contributes to the argument that our relation of identity with a self disposes us toward ossifying reality into knowable units. Nāgārjuna argues that it is because of the security that is desirable for a self that we strive for certain knowledge of stable existents. Emptiness undermines the desirable stability we grant to the knower, to knowledge, and to what is known. Rather than attempting a thorough exegesis of epistemological philosophy for the Mādhyamikas or the Pāli canon, a task that is outside of the bounds of this project, I discuss some aspects of this philosophy that highlight a critique of the will. Overall, I understand this ethos to be one that makes room for a sort of knowledge practice that attends to what is irreducible to propositional forms or claims.

A. Poṭṭhapāda and Distracting Knowledges

I begin with a *sutta* discourse in which the Buddha refrains from sharing his abundance of knowledge because of his consideration of what is skillful. One of the

Buddha's venerable qualities that he acquired at his awakening is omniscience.[323] Because of this quality alone, he is granted a series of praising epithets. He is "the fully enlightened Buddha, endowed with wisdom and conduct, Well-Farer, Knower of the worlds, incomparable Trainer of men to be tamed, Teacher of gods and humans, enlightened and blessed."[324] Despite knowing everything, the Buddha does not indulge every request for knowledge of specific facts or the nature of things. In one discourse, he enters a debating arena where people met to discuss various matters. [325] This is not unlike the sort of place people go to for the sake of playing sports, such as a neighborhood basketball court or a soccer field, where they engage in friendly competition and continue to challenge each other. Poṭṭhapāda, a wanderer in the arena, asks the Buddha a series of questions about whether the world is eternal, the soul and body are the same, or the Tathāgatā[326] goes on existing after death. For each of these the Buddha says that he neither declared it to be the case or not be the case.[327] When Poṭṭhāpada asks him why he did not declare the truth about

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[323] For a thorough treatment of thorough treatment of what the Buddha's omniscience entails and how this status is rationally defended, see Sara L. McClintock, *Omniscience and the Rhetoric of Reason: Santaraksita and Kamalasila on Rationality, Argumentation, and Religious Authority* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010).

[324] Maurice Walshe, trans., "Subha Sutta: About Subha, Morality, Concentration, Wisdom," *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1995) 172.

[325] The sutta describes "a crowd of wanderers, all shouting and making a great commotion, indulging in various kinds of unedifying conversation, such as about kings, robbers, ministers, armies, dangers, wars, food, drink, clothes, beds, garlands, perfumes, relatives, carriages, villages, towns and cities, countries, women, heroes, street- and well-gossip, talk of the departed, desultory chat, speculations about land and sea, talk of being and nonbeing." Maurice Walshe, trans., "Poṭṭhapāda Sutta: About Poṭṭhapāda: States of Consciousness," *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1995) 159

[326] Literally, this translates as "The one gone thus and come thus." It is a name for the Buddha whose realization about the nature of reality renders "birth" and "death" inaccurate ways to talk about his arising and cessation.

[327] Walshe, trans., "Poṭṭhapāda Sutta," 164.

these matters, the Buddha's response is that knowing these things does not affect anyone's soteriological path toward the cessation of suffering and the attainment of liberation.

Upon the Buddha's departure, the other people in the arena tease Poṭṭhāpada because he settled for the Buddha's unsatisfying response to his questions.[328] The text reads as though these other hobby-debaters and wanderers uphold merely the truth of the matter, without any regard for what the truth will do to them. They value this knowledge insofar as it would grant them ability to claim victory over opponents in debates about matters others are required to merely speculate. In general, they consider knowledge to be something they *have*. For these types, who treat debates as a sport in which there are determinate winners and losers, knowledge functions as a possession that affords them certain exchanges and superiority. This relation of possession indicates that what is known is seen to have the character of a static object that can freely move into the possession of various knowers without itself changing.

This scene illuminates a few noteworthy aspects of a Buddhist conception of knowledge and truth. Foremost, the Buddha discourages seeking knowledge about the nature of our world for the sake of mere arrogance. This part of the text targets our conduct. Secondly, any truth that the Buddha delivers must be interpreted in relation to his skillfulness as a teacher. His teachings are—necessarily—a compassionate contribution to his addressee's path for removing suffering. In this way, the discourse offers us a hermeneutical directive that is not only applicable to this specific text but to the broader context of Buddhist teachings. All debates and teachings must be oriented toward the

[328] Walshe, trans., "Poṭṭhapāda Sutta," 165.

aspiration of removing suffering. The Buddha's silence similarly must be understood in this respect.[329]

This insight nonetheless produces further questions. Why were the matters under question worthy of withholding? One possibility is that knowing the answers to these questions could harm Poṭṭhāpada and others present to hear the Buddha. For example, on a fairly simple register, this knowledge could encourage some people in the debating arena to pursue debates in a way that distracts them from a more intimate engagement with the truths where they are questioned, tested, understood, and practiced. The information could also be the sort that would overwhelm the audience, causing harm by virtue of the anguish it produces. For example, if the Buddha knows that the universe is not infinite, and further, could tell us when exactly it is going to end, it may be a compassionate gesture to simply refrain from sharing that information.

Perhaps the most philosophically interesting possibility is that the Buddha is not sharing the *facts* of these matters because there is soteriological benefit in lacking certainty about the nature of Tathāgatas after their death, the soul-body relation, or the dimensions of the universe. I find this to be a compelling implication of this *sutta* as it stands in relation to pieces of Madhyamaka thought.

B. The Madhyamaka Critique of Grasping Truth

For Mādhyamikas, ignorance is not centrally the absence of knowledge in relation to a particular object or domain (as we generally understand it), but a large-scale misapprehension of the way things are due to a lack of sufficient realization of

[329] Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul*, 51-54.

interdependence and impermanence. A more conceptually appropriate translation of *avidyā* is *misknowledge,* which characterizes a state in which one has a globally misguided way of understanding and knowing. To offer another helpful translation, Jay Garfield describes *avidyā* as primal confusion. Relaying the Tibetan philosopher Tsongkhapa (14th-15th century), Garfield says that primal confusion highlights ignorance as a "positive superimposition (*samāropa*) of a characteristic on reality that it lacks."[330] As we will see below, in the case of ignorance, this superimposition grants a particular sort of existence – one with a stable and enduring essence or nature. Both "misknowledge" and "primal confusion" expand the notion of ignorance to include a gross misunderstanding rather than a mere gap in knowledge.

This notion of ignorance highlights the fact that Mādhyamikas do not consider the central epistemic problem to be avoiding falsehood.[331] They are instead concerned with the status we grant truth such that we could ever expect it to be stable, determinate, or certain. The Mādhyamikas hold that ultimate truth is also empty, as we saw in Chapter Two, which means that there is no truth that exceeds the immanent conditions that are presently transpiring. If emptiness is operative even for emptiness itself, then a relation to truth requires that we must always return to the phenomena before us that are necessarily conditioned and dependent.

Nāgārjuna argues that the ignorant practice of reaching for a more stable sort of truth, such that we grant determinate reality to things, stirs the other two poisons

[330] Jay Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* 9.
[331] The later Mādhyamikas do have more to say about the importance of upholding standards for conventional truth. This is not antithetical to the point I am making about how we grasp truth, but rather is a different part of the terrain of epistemological philosophy.

(attachment and aversion). In the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*, or *The Sixty Verses on Reason*, Nāgārjuna says:

> Upon assenting to existing things,
> malignant and severe views surround (*parigrahaḥ*) [one],
> attachment and aversion arise,
> [along with] disputes that spring from these.[332]
>
> That [act of assenting to existing things] is the cause of all views;
> Without it, there is no arising of afflictions.
> Therefore, when [things] are understood,
> views and afflictions cease.[333]

The starting point for Nāgārjuna is taking phenomena to be existents (*bhāva*) that are self-identical and enduring. In other words, one grants a stronger ontological account than that of being a collocation of conditions that support a certain set of conventions. The prefix *pari* in the Sanskrit participle *parigraha* generally means "around" or "fully," while the verbal root *grah* means to take hold of, accept, or seize. I read this with an implicit metaphor in which views surround, enclose, or fence in a person into a certain frame of understanding.[334] For Nāgārjuna, views (*dṛṣṭi*) have this ability to limit us by virtue of creating a dogmatic boundary for the way we see reality. The view is repeatedly operative

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[332] 46: *rāgadveṣodbhavas tīvraduṣṭadṛṣṭiparigrahaḥ | vivādās tat samutthāś ca bhāvābhyupagame sati* ||. Cristina Anna Scherrer-Schaub (ed.), *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti,* 287.

[333] 47: *sa hetuḥ sarva-dṛṣṭīnāṃ kleśotpattir na taṃ vinā | tasmāt tasmin parijñāte dṛṣṭi-kleśa-parikṣayaḥ* || Scherrer-Schaub (ed.), *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, 288.

[334] To my point, Loizzo translates *parigraha* as "trapped." Scherrer-Schaub translates it into French as *l'embrassement*, which can mean to take something up or to embrace. She also inserts *fausses* as an adjective of view. Together, these translation choices emphasize that one is deceived or otherwise misled into seeing things a certain way.

in one's way of engaging with the world, whether or not we submit to this view upon reflection. In his commentary, Candrakīrti explains that the views that correlate with attributing pure existence are malignant (*tīvra*) because they set off a series of thoughts that are difficult to escape.[335]

Nāgārjuna understands that ignorance about what exists subtly gives rise to the other two poisons. Ignorance slips past our reflection and perniciously settles into our way of prescribing normative values and developing desires. This manner in which ignorance settles into our values and desires is the formation of a view that surrounds us. Starting in the early Pāli *suttas*, grasping reality in this way is likened to incorrectly grasping a snake such that it is able to strike back.[336] In the case of snakes, there is a safe way and a dangerous way to hold them. Similarly, if we misapprehend reality, we are at risk of dangerous views that are conducive to suffering. When we hold existents or truths to be independently real, void of any conditioning by surrounding beings or semantic structures, then we grasp them in a way that is dangerous.

If one adheres to an independent self that is fully one's own being, then this produces an orientation through which one understands all other entities. Thus, once all other things are reduced to a specific essence, such that they are categorized into a particular understanding of existence, they are conducive to being further categorized according to how they relate to oneself. As we saw earlier in this chapter, they can be categorized as either beneficial or harmful to the self to such a decisive degree that they draw not specific attachments and aversions, respectively.

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[335] Scherrer-Schaub (ed.), *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, 288.
[336] MN 22: Bhikkhu Ñaṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., "The Alagaddūpama Sutta," 227-28.

If we continue to think about suffering as the experience of powerlessness, then this ignorant practice of attributing independent existence is an effort to overcome our powerlessness. Namely, it is an effort to overcome our very constitution. This makes a great deal of sense insofar as the impotence that Carpenter describes is the effect of all things being dependently conditioned (and conditioning). The connection that Nāgārjuna draws between afflictions and firm senses of existence for things shows that erasing interdependence, even if unwittingly, is not merely an epistemic failure, but also one of conduct.

This balance between upholding truth and knowledge while also tempering their authority continues to develop in rigorous debates among both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. I chose these selections from the Pāli canon and Nāgārjuna because they have already become familiar in this project. While this point could be furthered with discussion of a wider ranger of Buddhist epistemological texts,[337] these discussions highlight the manner in which truth does not exist as something to possess or claim. Grasping truths in these ways will necessarily affect one's conduct. I have shown that the Buddha and

[337] Another especially rich discussion exists in the debates animated by *apoha* or exclusion theory in the formation of concepts. Apoha entered Buddhist philosophy through the work of Dignāga (fl. 425), was further developed by Dharmakīrti (fl. 625), and was engaged a great deal by later Madhyamaka thinkers, Śāntarakṣita (8th century) and his student Kamalaśīla (8th century). This theory argues that we determine what something is through a process of othering that is oriented by our past impressions and also by our projects.[337] In a different project centrally about epistemic assertions of power and more space to orient my readers to the intricacies of *pramāṇa* (instruments of knowledge), these texts and debates would offer resources for further consideration of how unskillful handling of knowledge can entrench one's willfulness. For a set of essays providing conceptual orientation and critical engagement with and discussion of apoha theory, see: Mark Siderits, Tom Tillemans, and Arindam Charkrabarti, eds., *Apoha, Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

Nāgārjuna teach an epistemic ethos in which skillfulness with truth is a higher priority than certainty.

V. Conclusion

The central goal of this chapter is to show that because self-cherishing (through assertion, preservation, and enhancement) is the central problem in Buddhist philosophy, there is a substantive critique of the will in these sources. The problems emerging from the will are manifold, but all are generally related to the problem of suffering. As we saw early in this chapter, the aim is not to gain the sort of control that would remove the frustrations that impede one's satisfaction. Rather, Buddhist philosophy seeks to reorient our existence such that our central interests are no longer to seize and enhance our power.

This requires a significant change in our topography. Nāgārjuna's movement away from identity and difference is a piece of Buddhist thought disrupting the binary of one or many. If we are to move away from seeking power, it seems that we also must move away from seeing ourselves within a particular set of boundaries that present us as one unified thing, separate from what is beyond our limits. The difficulty of such a movement is respected and heeded by the performative elements of these texts that skillfully play with the way that identity and difference can spur affects that themselves generate a greater realization of interdependence.

Part II Conclusion: Synthesizing the Problem of the Will

I. History

One considerable difference between Heidegger and Indian Buddhist thought is their differing accounts of history and the role it plays in the will. For Heidegger the will must be historical in order for him to avoid being a metaphysician (like he says Nietzsche was) that makes absolute claims about what is. The will must be something contingent and it also must be something that occurs in the world rather than in the private existence of particular subjects. In contrast, Indian Buddhist thought does not have an account of history even while there is a consistent and thorough critique of the will that avoids the pitfalls of metaphysics in a number of ways.

My aim in this project is not to force Heidegger and Buddhist thought into a confrontation to see which of them is more teneable or defensible. Instead, the worthwhile exercise in this project is to consider what the implications are when we understand the will as historical or lack such an account. More specifically, I am interested in the implications as they bear upon an understanding of the will as an ethical problem and an ethics of nonwilling. Before these considerations, it is worth noting that there are some ways in which the implications of history are also present in Buddhist philosophy, some of which I briefly mentioned in the discussion of "Not Hatred for Hatred."

In particular, Buddhist philosophy avoids the metaphysical issue that Nietzsche encounters because there is no argument that self-cherishing is necessary. In the later chapters of Nāgārjuna's *Root Verses*, he shows that a number of central Buddhist teachings are empty. This is also a teaching that exists in a number of Mahāyāna texts, such as the

Heart Sutra. The implication is that the Buddha's teachings, while worthy of reverence and insightful, are not to be upheld as absolute such that they have a necessity to them. This means that even the First Noble Truth, "This is suffering," is contingent. The Buddha articulated a problem that he saw in the world around him and offered teachings to address a state of existence prevalent in the world. However, the prevalence of the problem of the will should not be conflated with its necessity. Additionally, the emptiness of the will allows for the possibility of shedding the will. As discussed in Chapter Two, emptiness is the lack of closure and the conditioned status of any phenomena.

Perhaps one of the most important pieces of thinking the will as historical is that this thought dislocates our possession of the will and of the various ways in which we claim power. In this respect, Heidegger's thinking of the will as historical is a skillful way of uprooting our claims to power as distinctly our own. This is one of the work-like features of Heidegger's thought that is preparatory for twisting free of the will. Insofar as Buddhist texts also have these performative features of bringing the will into sight and loosening our grip on power-centered projects, this difference in their thought does not necessarily pose a challenge in either direction such that we need to reconcile the fact that one of them explicitly thematizes the will in terms of history and one does not.

II. Knowledge

Given that an intrinsic value for seeking knowledge is tempered by both critiques of the will, how should we understand the status of knowledge without ourselves falling into willful tendencies?

The central implication in these critiques is that knowledge is not as simple as the model of correct correspondence suggests that it is. Foremost, our knowledge is not merely of propositional facts that we are able to collect. Nor is it the case that knowledge is simply our manner of accessing what is beyond our boundaries and in an external sphere. As we see in the Buddha's decision not to answer certain questions and in the escalation from certainty to reason-giving to calculabitlity, our manner of knowing can have a range of effects on who we become. It disposes us into having particular capacities, to occupy particular dispositions, and to encounter the world through a particular set of categories. This is all to say that knowledge is not *only* about being correct with reference to a field that is to be known. It also is a manner of encountering the world and being repeatedly affected by that encounter.

In addition to knowledge having a range of operations beyond correctness, the critiques of the will temper the authority we grant to knowledge. This tempering is not for the sake of rendering claims to knowledge false when one is confident that they are true, nor is it a mere humbling with respect to one's ambitions for knowing. Rather, this moderation toward knowledge is for the sake of avoiding its authority as totalizing. As we have seen with reference to karmic opacity, the appropriating play of the jug, and *the nothing*, there are flashes and domains of mystery that are richly disclosive even if they do not impart knowledge. However, these phenomena require a receptivity to the concealedness in order to not simply be ignorant. This receptivity goes significantly beyond a mere humility in relation to what does not have knowledge, such that one simply avoids committing epistemic errors for what cannot be founded. It is an encounter that at once evades knowledge and also discloses a manner of being that evades the relation between a

knower and what is knowable. There is neither the same sort of partition as between subject and object nor the relation of mastery on the part of the knowing subject.

The critique of the will does not require an outright rejection of knowledge or of rational deliberation, but it does encourage an effort to avoid allowing these epistemic modes from claiming total reign over one's being. While we are used to celebrating what it is that we know, the critique of the will also brings us to appreciate what remains concealed from us and how that concealedness otherwise conditions us.

III. Cross-Cultural Complements

While there is undoubtingly an account of the will in both Heidegger's philosophy and Buddhist philosophy, these accounts contrast in many respects. In this section my goal is to show how they deepen one another. We already saw that their different accounts of the will developing in history gives us both a panoramic view of the will developing throughout the history of "the west" and a structure to imagine it developing interdependently among karmic streams through the span of many lifetimes. Both of these historical dimensions help us think of the will apart from a subjective faculty or personality trait.

To further our thought of the will as occurring in dimensions beyond the internal vicissitudes of a person, the conjoined accounts give us as comprehensive view of what is involved in preservation and enhancement. Buddhist philosophy emphasizes the assertion of a particular identity as that which will be preserved and enhanced and the manner in which this is more of an experiential claim than a metaphysical one. The sensation of "I and mine," along with the affective afflictions of attachment and aversion give us a sense

of what it *feels* like to be attuned by the will. Moreover, teachings emphasize the pervasive nature of these experiences such that they exist unrecognizable at our roots even when we are not necessarily being "selfish." They appear in our manner of grasping determinations or seeking knowledge and in primary affective encounters with the world. These feelings are in fact subjective experiences, but the fact that they stem from the demarcation of an identity significantly complicates *what* the will is. Even if these personal experiences occur with a first-person relation, they are structured by the sort of individualistic arena in which sovereign people encounter either limits to or opportunities for their freedom.

In contrast to the lived experience of claiming an identity, Heidegger focuses on the disposition of a subject who is opposed to a sphere of objects. He considers the obstacles of skepticism and the satisfaction that reason offers when dealing with the chasm between one's internal mind and the external world. Similarly, a subject is able to assert mastery over the earth or objects because of her privileged position as a subject. She reigns as the orienting hegemon. Because of the different features of identity and subjectivity, the expositions in the previous chapters cover a wide range of manifestations for the will, granting us a broader set of phenomena through which we can recognize the attunement of the will.

CONCLUSION: An Ethics of Nonwilling

To conclude this dissertation, I would like to present a partial account of what an ethics of nonwilling entails. Heidegger's most concentrated treatments of releasement from the will or nonwilling (*Gelassenheit*) occur in two texts. The first is a "Memorial Address" that he delivered in 1955 at the celebration of the 175th birthday of the German composer Conradin Kreutzer. The second is in the last part of the "Triadic Conversation," a text I discussed in earlier chapters that contains a fictional conversation between a Scientist, a Historian, and a Guide.

These texts include a few particular phrases that invite us to begin thinking what an ethics of nonwilling might look like and how we are to go about bringing it forth. In what follows, I use some of these descriptive phrases to parse out what nonwilling means in terms of action and knowledge in the first two sections. A central goal in this conclusion is to connect discussions from earlier chapters about other parts of Heidegger's philosophy to the descriptions we encounter here. However, there are also techniques and examples from Buddhist texts that we have discussed that are helpful for imagining and affecting an ethics of nonwilling. In what follows, I weave the relevant illustrations, techniques, and discussions from the collections of Heidegger and Buddhism together. In this regard, the synthesis between their thought is more evident in this conclusion than in previous parts of this project.

I. Action

In the "Triadic Conversation" Heidegger says that releasement goes "beyond the distinction between activity and passivity" and requires a "higher acting" that is not activity.[338] While this characterization is through negation, the preceding chapters include accounts and arguments that help us fill in this phrasing with positive descriptions. In particular, the ontology of unbounded finitude helps us give accounts of events that neither rely on attributions of activity nor passivity to particular entities. It partly is able to do this because it provides a topography that does not have any application for these determinations. To provide a simple analogy, we can think about a set of phenomena for which it does not make sense to apply particular descriptors. Imagine I am evaluating the experience of sitting in a chair and am asked to consider whether that experience is spicy.[339] Sitting in the chair does not have taste, so it makes no sense to locate any specific flavors, but it also is not sensible to call those flavors absent. We can neither call sitting in the chair spicy, nor can we say it is not spicy.

To say that that nonwilling is beyond the binary of activity and passivity means that nonwilling does not have any application for activity or passivity. In correspondence with the holistic character of the will, an ethics of nonwilling is an attunement that determines the topography of existents. Thus, it is beyond activity and passivity because active and passive do not apply to the phenomena within this topography.

The reason for this is that unbounded finitude releases the boundaries that the will imposes around an actor. As we saw in Chapter Four, the will renders an actor independent

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[338] GA 77: 108-109/70.

[339] We can bracket any figurative sense of these flavors so that we are only dealing with them as tastes.

with sovereign control over her conduct or actions. This sovereignty is especially implied when activity and passivity are situated in an oppositional binary such that neither activity nor passivity are contaminated by each other. Being passive means that one is being acted upon or that the locus of the actor is elsewhere, and being active means that one is an independent actor.

Simply understanding or knowing the details of this ontology does not necessarily bring one to recognize it in the unfolding of events that are generally accessed as actions performed on the part of a distinct and independent actor. I argue that one way we can go beyond this binary is through narratives that reveal finite acts as interdependent constellations. In Chapter Two I presented a reading of the scene from *The Life of the Buddha* in which Siddhārtha leaves his father's palace. I argued that this so-called act involves a range of conditions that occur far beyond our supposed actor's accomplishment or efficacy. This is not simply to say that there are conditions that occur prior to an act in order to compose the scene in which the act is possible (though this also is true). Aśvaghoṣa narrates this scene in such a way that the occurrence of deities shining light, *yakṣa*s padding the noise of horse hooves, and gates opening are conditions that are concurrent and necessary to Siddhārtha's successful accomplishment of departing. Thus, if the act is departing, it is difficult to parse out precisely who it is that accomplishes this act. By whose effort is departing completed? Syntactically, we say "Siddhārtha departed from the palace," but by Aśvaghoṣa's illustration of this scene across a multi-loka tableau, the relation between the actor and the act is immediately complicated. Simultaneously, it is not simply the case that Siddhārtha yields to these intervening conditions in passive submission such that we can redistribute the locus of the action to another condition (which would thereby

become an actor). Neither activity nor passivity are appropriate to any of the parties involved.[340] There is a sense in which this poetic artwork is able to open us to a manner of accounting for events that goes beyond the conventionally prevalent structure of acts.

While Aśvaghoṣa assumes an eye that can see into many realms, an eye he acquires through various transmissions of the Buddha's life story, in our daily practices of giving accounts we have to deal with the opacity that unboundedness necessarily carries. In other words, going beyond activity and passivity means that we recognize a particular act performed by a particular actor as an unconcealment that has correlating concealed dimensions. In Chapter Four, we saw how Śāntideva considers this concealedness as he cultivates forbearance. He has to merely imagine how an actor who is harming him was brought to this very act. This aspect of karmic opacity, such that any account of the past carried into the present is always necessarily incomplete, is effectively brought to the mind of a meditator for the sake of revealing an actor to be empty of an independent and self-grounding nature. Without such a nature, we cannot easily disentangle what is active and what is passive. Śāntideva considers the possibility that he himself is not solely the recipient of his enemy's harm but also was part of the story that brought his enemy to this harmful act. He is both actor and acted upon. Śāntideva shows us that narrating in such a way that active and passive spheres are not distinct generates tolerance toward what would otherwise be felt as antagonism. Here we see that the simplicity of assigning credit or blame

[340] One detail of this scene that does not contribute to this account is that the freedom of the horsekeeper is completely taken away by deities. He is effectively hypnotized such that he is a vessel for their will. This part of the story falls back into the will by discerning these parties as separate from each other and acting upon one another. Nonetheless, this detail does not necessarily affect my argument. Aśvaghoṣa gives us some examples of narrativizing with insight into what is involved in unbounded finitude, but given that unbounded finitude is an insight I am crystallizing in this project with the help of his narrative and other philosophies, it is not the case that his narrative style was committed to consistently uncovering unbounded finitude.

is not sufficiently attentive to the flimsiness of the active/passive binary. By removing the boundary between these supposed opposites, we are able view both acts and actors with less judgment and less of a sense of distance from ourselves.

Similarly, Heidegger has multiple ways of unseating the locus of the agent in his account of *the thing*. In particular, Heidegger says that we are conditioned (*bedingt*) by the thing (*das Ding*), despite the fact that we often see ourselves, as agential subjects or the ones who are acting upon it. Even if I can say, "I hold the jug," or "I fill the jug," Heidegger brings attention to the fact that the jug is also holding me in my use of it. We can recall the way that the jug facilitates the relations we take up while involved in festive occasion or divine ritual. This emphasis on Heidegger's part expands the narrative of a given event such that the active component is not unique insofar as it is active, nor is the passive component ever solely passive. However, it is important to note that his analysis goes beyond noticing concurrent *acts*, one on the part of the thing and one on the part of the jug. The jug and the mortal using the jug are appropriating each other. In his description of the mirror play, we see that their finite own-ness is a "holding sway" that they are brought to through the other, who itself mirrors back its own appropriators. Ownership for any finite entity always points elsewhere. Similarly, what appears as distinctly active and passive components necessarily are intimate to each other.

This component of Heidegger's thought is easier to bring into relief with consideration of the Buddhist notion of momentariness and impermanence. Neither the actor nor patient are continuous, such that they exist *as* that actor or patient prior to the encounter. While there are elements of their being that are continuous, the particular being they become in this moment is part of the mirror play they enter in this particular event

(namely what we otherwise call an act). The continuity is certainly not negligible (as we saw in the unboundedness that connects aspects of the Buddha's story), but insofar as a particular being is a certain sort of actor (a knower, maker, teacher, etc.), this is not a nature that it has necessarily and always. The being becomes this through the encounter with its patient (what is known, made, taught, etc., respectively).

The releasement of boundaries between activity and passivity attends to their mutual conditioning. In Chapter One we saw that this sort of conditioning character of things can only be encountered or recognized if we leave behind the arrogance that we assume as subjects. Thus, while Śāntideva helps one see that the self with which one identifies may be involved in the existence and actions of another, Heidegger also shows us that other things are involved in those acts that we take to be our own. Both of these points are meant to diminish one's arrogance, whether the arrogance one has while judging another or while claiming credit for oneself.[341]

I argue that these examples of narrating an event begin to show how we can leave behind activity and passivity as binary opposites. There is still a considerable amount that such narrating does not accomplish, however. While I can look at a person and recognize a complicated set of conditions constituting the so-called actor, or recognize how meaningful things affect me, there are a number of other instances in which these sorts of narrations remain unconvincing. For instance, if I am in an office, and I drop a ball (perhaps a stress ball on my desk) that I was holding in the prior moment, there is little more to say about this event than "I dropped the ball." In other contexts, dropping a ball might in fact

[341] In Chapter One I discussed Heidegger's claim that the subject must not be so arrogant so as to disregard the way that she is conditioned.

involve a broader narration. If I were a professional baseball player who dropped the ball before tagging a baserunner, that event may also bring to the fore the fact that the person who threw the ball to me did so haphazardly, or that I am affectively recovering from a bad play I made in a previous inning, or maybe that the rain that had just started was an added element that had taken sides with the batting team. Moreover, the ball also positioned me as the key player for my time, as someone who can fail or succeed in that event. The finite act of dropping the ball is intelligible as that particular act through being situated in that game, major league baseball, or those weather conditions. Thus, the narration of a particular act can bring forth conditions such as institutions, psychology, and nature. Because this sort of narration is not convincing in all cases (as noted above), I suggest this form of narration has a manner of weaning us off from the will or a way of preparing ourselves for nonwilling.

These ways of considering what it means to go beyond activity and passivity also show us that nonwilling entails telling stories that are conducive to forbearance or tolerance, receding from arrogant positions, entangling oneself in what presents as other, and having a sensitivity and receptivity to one's impermanence. This is to say that leaving the binary is not merely a metaphysical project. It has substantive ethical implications for mundane comportment and understanding.

II. Knowledge

In his "Memorial Address" Heidegger describes *Gelassenheit* in terms of two related comportments: a "releasement toward things"[342] and "openness to the mystery."[343] Heidegger repeatedly frames these as conducive to a sort of meditative (*besinnende*) thinking, which he contrasts from calculative (*rechnende*) thinking. Thus, there is a considerable element of nonwilling that disrupts our epistemic practices oriented toward certainty and rational calculation.[344] To think nonwillingly requires that the boundaries enclosing a decisive determination of any being are released to allow continual recognition and response. Unbounded finitude holds open any claims to knowledge, not because of a deep-seated skepticism, but because finite disclosures are always still open.

One practical suggestion that Heidegger gives is to say both "yes" and "no" to technology, or to take an in-between position that is not rooted in being indecisive but rather in being careful.[345] Saying yes means that we let technical devices into our daily life. Whether or not we enjoy managing our operations in such a way, technical devices are a part of basic survival in the economic conditions of our world. Even with respect to an ethics of nonwilling, there is no virtue in simply avoiding the will by reverting to a premodern lifestyle in the midst of a modern world. However, this use of technical devices need not deceive us. The accompaniment of saying no means that we leave them alone "as

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[342] GA 16: 527/54.
[343] GA 16: 528/55.
[344] For this reason, I find it difficult to fully accept the broader rhetorical point Heidegger makes in this address about rootedness in "a new ground and foundation" (GA 16: 529/57). In another project I will trace Heidegger's discussions of the home (*das Heim*), homeland (*die Heimat*), and uncanniness (*die Unheimlichkeit*) as they related to the will and to what an ethics of nonwilling entails.
[345] GA 16: 527/54.

things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher."[346] Heidegger highlights that what is required to see technological objects as things is to say no to the status of being "absolute." In this context "absolute" means that it has an absolute determination, such that any further determining is closed off and also that there is nothing left for it to show us beyond the presence it already has. In Chapter One this was precisely the description that we attribute to objects. What is absolute has no concealedness or opacity. With respect to technology, saying no means that we do not take its manner of appearing as truth, but allow it to show us what is driving it, where it is going, and how it understands the nature of humans. To see a technological object as a thing, we open ourselves to bearing witness to the thing's unbounded existence as a conditioning thing that conditions us and is also itself deeply conditioned.

This is closely related to the second quality that Heidegger gives us, the "openness to the mystery." Heidegger says that the mystery is what both shows itself and also withdraws.[347] To be open to this means that we allow such withdrawal and also that we open ourselves to being touched by this withdrawal. In the previous section, we saw how any given act has opaque dimensions, dimensions that withdraw from our view or experience thereby disallowing claims to the possession of certain or final knowledge. Because unbounded finitude renders everything liminal, the satisfaction of certainty is not appropriate. The mystery calls for a certain sort of epistemic humility such that one does not presume clear and certain knowledge as a possibility. However, Heidegger's formulation of *being open* to this withdrawal is not a mere humility in relation to what one

[346] GA 16: 527/54.
[347] GA 16: 528/55.

does not know. For instance, if I am humble in front of my medical provider about the prognosis for my sickness, this does not necessarily mean that I have opened myself to a mystery. I simply deferred to someone else who has expert knowledge and authority over the relevant field of knowledge. In this deferral, I nonetheless presume that there is certain knowledge to be had with sufficient training in medicine.

This sort of humility falls into passivity and remains within the domain of the will, while openness to the mystery requires a responsiveness that is neither active nor passive. Openness to the mystery means that we are attentive to that which appears without appearing as full presence. It is a humility that concealment itself evokes from us such that certainty is no longer the desirable aim. If we recall the discussion in Chapter One about death, Heidegger's formulation of death as a shrine demonstrated that the inherent mystery to death facilitates a relation without bringing something purely to presence. To open ourselves to withdrawal means that we continually engage with withdrawing things as though they are shrines, as though their manner of retreating from us has something else to show us. This requires some value for a manner of thinking that is not calculatively productive in a mechanistic sense. Saying no to technology means we permit ourselves to engage in such thought without scorning the lack of certainty or computational promise.[348] One must be open to being affected by that which does not have an explicit use.

This movement between yes and no is also part of what is occurring in the two levels of truth (conventional and ultimate) for Mādhyamikas (and Buddhists more broadly). In Chapter Two, I discussed how the Madhyamaka claim that ultimate truth is empty is effectively a claim that any sort of claim to truth is never insulated from impermanence or

[348] GA 16: 519/46.

dependence. Further, I argued that to say that something is empty of a decisive nature means that it has innumerable possibilities for its being. Thus, there is an implication that the emptiness of ultimate truth turns us toward possibility that does not readily present itself as such in the sort of finite appearance that a conventionally real thing or conventional truth might have. Nonetheless, we must not avoid conventional reality, just as we must still say yes to technology.

To summarize the techniques for this epistemic part of nonwilling in these philosophies, we have a simultaneous affirmation of what circulates meaningfully in our world and a negation of this being the full story. Heidegger brings our attention to moments of disclosure for concealment or flashes of insight. He encourages an attentiveness to aspects of phenomena that are easy to avoid or even stifle (as one might choke the feeling of anxiety while confronting the possibility of the nothing). In Nāgārjuna's *Root Verses* and even in Śāntideva's chapter on the Perfection of Wisdom, we learn through analysis that various beings are empty of an independent and static nature and also learn (through these models) how to do similar analysis ourselves. Nāgārjuna takes existents and concepts that are otherwise difficult to shed from as the orienting poles of our understanding, thereby calling on us to allow analysis to break through the truths that we hold onto (and that hold us in our understanding and views) to show us interdependence.

III. The Scope of this Project

One consistent point throughout this dissertation is that the will is dispersed and entrenched. In light of this there are considerable difficulties in simply twisting free of it. If we consider the way in which nonwilling disassembles the suppositions of sovereignty,

this is hardly imaginable for any particular party to do unless other spheres that understand themselves as sovereign also let go of these suppositions. The boundaries one might construct to protect a sovereign sphere are not easy to remove unless others are able to withhold an opportunity for dominance, manipulation, or violence. In other words, for a single individual to enter nonwilling, there is a tremendous risk of becoming passive to the will of others by virtue of inevitably being dominated by others' willing assertions. In relation to sovereignty, an ethics of nonwilling seems to open the possibility for a great deal of corruption for any lone willing subject in our midst. Beyond sovereignty, too, the immense span of the will through time and space nonetheless remains a significant problem for an ethics that we might "take up."

There are many ways in which Buddhist philosophy, narratives, and hagiographies put forth an ethics of nonwilling to a radical degree. Indeed, Śāntideva altruistically dedicates the whole of his being—bodily, mentally, behaviorally, affectively—to relieving the suffering of others. We also see narratives, such as *The Holy Teachings of Vimalakīrti*, in which everything encountered is a bodhisattva, or a being who gives teachings to reduce our suffering in one way or another. This requires the sort of vision where one not only understands beings to no longer be harmful, but also requires that one is able to receive all of existence as beneficial. In future projects, I will explore how these specific ethical teachings can help us see what sort of existence one would inhabit if the topography of being were in fact experienced as a field of finite beings that are neither identical nor different from one another, lacking withholding boundaries, and continually recognized as open.

The present project, however, takes a more modest approach to an ethics of nonwilling and suggests what is within reach while we are still disposed toward asserting power, claiming a sense of identity or difference with respect to different existents, and allowing certainty to give us a sense of closure—among other prevailing willing behaviors. I consider the openings granted through mysteries, thoughtful analysis, or narrativizing to be conducive to cultivating a larger sort of receptivity that dismantles walls (institutional, national, and personal) that function as boundaries while also allowing auspicious finitude to shine.

Appendix I: Heidegger's Texts and Translations

This list includes all of the works by Heidegger that are cited throughout this dissertation. I include the bibliographic information for the German *Gesamtausgabe* editions and the translations that I reference.

(1) Heidegger, Martin. *Gesamtausgabe Band 4: Erläuterungen Zu Hölderlins Dichtung*. Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1981; *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry*. Translated by Keith Hoeller. First Edition edition. Amherst, N.Y: Humanity Books, 2000.

(2) Heidegger, Martin. *Gesamtausgabe Band 5: Holzwege*. Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1977:

   a. "The Age of the World Picture." In *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt, 115–54. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977.

   b. Heidegger, Martin. "Origin of the Work of Art." In *Off the Beaten Track*, translated by Julian Young, 1–56. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

(3) Heidegger, Martin. *Gesamtausgabe Band 6.1: Nietzsche (1936-1939)*. Edited by Brigitte Schillbach. Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1996; *Nietzsche, Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*. Edited by David Farrell Krell. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. San Francisco: Harper One, 1991.

(4) Heidegger, Martin. *Gesamtausgabe Band 6.2: Nietzsche Volume II*. Edited by Brigitte Schillbach. Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997; *Nietzsche,*

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(5) Heidegger, Martin. *Gesamtausgabe Band 7: Vorträge Und Aufsätze*. Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000; *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977.

(6) Heidegger, Martin. *Gesamtausgabe Band 8: Was Heißt Denken?* Edited by Paola-Ludovika Cariando. Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1954; *What Is Called Thinking?* Translated by J. Glenn Gray. Reprint edition. New York: Harper Perennial, 1976.

(7) Heidegger, Martin. *Gesamtausgabe Band 9: Wegmarken*. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann. 2nd ed. Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1976; *Pathmarks*. Edited by William Mcneil. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

(8) Heidegger, Martin. *Gesamtausgabe Band 10: Der Satz Vom Grund*. Edited by Petra Jaeger. Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997; *The Principle of Reason*. Translated by Reginald Lily. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996.

(9) Heiegger, Martin. *Gesamtaustgabe Band 77: Feldweg-Gesprache*. Edited by Ingrid Schüßler. 2nd ed. Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 2007; *Country Path Conversations*. Translated by Bret W. Davis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

(10) Heidegger, Martin. *Gesamtausgabe Band 79: Bremer Und Freiburger Vorträge*. Edited by Petra Jaeger. Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1994. *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking by Martin Heidegger*. Translated by Andrew J. Mitchell. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012.

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