

How to kill a dragon in Heideggerese

Whisht! Lads, haad yor gobs,
Aa'll tell yez aall an aaful story
Whisht! Lads, haad yor gobs,
Aa'll tell y' about the worm.¹

angues virumque cano. We learn from Watkins and West that there are two sorts of hero in our world—dragon-slayers and all the rest.² Lambton, Indra, Apollo, Perseus and Hercules, Thor and Saint George, Ripley,³ Conan,⁴ Potter,⁵ Abercromby⁶ and Alice⁷ are all dracocides; Arjuna, Aeneas, Gawain, Roland, Achilles, Ajax, and Hector are not. Most heroes are not. 'Dragon-slayer' is the marked form; the unmarked does many mighty deeds (chiefly the killing of human beings) but does not engage the Worm.⁸

A related mark-structure occurs in the Archaic verse πόλλ' οἶδ' ἀλώπηξ, ἀλλ' ἐχῖνος ἐν μέγα.⁹ About the Typhoeus myth Watkins writes,

“The monster is mentioned once elsewhere at *Theogony* 304-8, in the form of Τυφάων, whom ‘they say’ (φασί, again traditionally) lay with the dragoness Echidna and sired Orthus, Cerberus, Hydra, and Chimaira. In ἔχιδνα, ἔχις we have a good Indo-European word for ‘snake’, as well as in the ‘hedgehog’ ἐχῖνος as ‘snake-eater’, both with cognates in Germanic (German *Igel*), Balto-Slavic, and Armenian.”¹⁰

¹ C. M. Leumane, “The Lambton Worm” (1867). Lively cover by The Tossers in *The Lair of the White Worm* (dir. Ken Russell 1988): (strobing) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8n6z-WRCd0>. Traditional version with above-quoted chorus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTsH0M3It5Q>.

² Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (1995) and M. L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (2007).

³ *Alien* (dir. Ridley Scott 1979).

⁴ *Conan the Barbarian* (dir. John Milius 1982).

⁵ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998). Also Neville Longbottom, who slays Nagini (a female Nāga) with the (presumably vorpal) Sword of Godric Gryffindor in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007).

⁶ *Reign of Fire* (dir. Rob Bowman 2002).

⁷ *Alice in Wonderland* (dir. Tim Burton 2010).

⁸ In West's theme-gathering “Elegy on an Indo-European hero” the generic Urukleves (‘Broadfame’) slaughters men and horses by the hundreds but no dragon. The modal hero never encounters that “adversary of a different order who lurks in Vedic, Greek, and Norse mythology and who seems to represent an Indo-European concept: a monstrous reptile associated with water, lying in it or blocking its flow.” *IE Poetry and Myth* 504, 255.

⁹ Archilochus fr. 103; Ernest Diehl, *Anthologia lyrica graeca* (1925) Vol. I, p. 241: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000003016763&view=1up&seq=282>.

¹⁰ HKD 452.

But hedgehogs eat bugs, not snakes. So nearer maybe ‘snake-foil,’ on account of the quills. When Sir John returned from Palestine “he consulted a Sybil on the best means to be pursued to slay the monster” and was told that “he must have his best suit of mail studded with spear blades;” i.e. arm like a hedgehog.¹¹ To the Greeks the distinguishing feature of the ἔχινος was ‘spikiness;’ in Plato the sea urchin is ἔχινος θαλάττιος.¹² A serpent’s aversion to swallowing or constricting such a prickly cooter is plausible folk ethology. It suffices the hedgehog then to know one big thing – how to thwart a snake. Most heroes are foxes, rarely hedgehogs.

The one big thing *we, per* Watkins, must learn is “Why does the hero slay the serpent? What is the function of this widespread if not universal myth, or put another way, what is its meaning?” Lauding theirs as “a profoundly innovative study” Watkins cites Benveniste and Renou’s characterization of the task: “a question of discovering, beneath the developments which a supple phraseology had extended and infinitely varied, the fundamental data of the myth: the scheme which generates the amplification (*le schème générateur de l’amplification*). . . . Every study of a mythological fact must strive to reconstitute its formation within the framework of the Veda, to discover *le schème générateur de l’amplification* as well as the process of development.” “My own study,” Watkins professes, “is primarily the formulas themselves as linguistic and poetic entities. I hope first to define more precisely the set of formulas and their properties, to show just how exiguous a base is that ‘*schème générateur*.’”¹³

This notion of exiguous scheme generating amplification manifests among Heidegger-haunts in Gordon’s thesis: “that the Davos debate illustrates the way that philosophical ideas ‘ramify,’ how they take on a variety of cultural and political meanings.” So the chief task as Gordon sees it,

“is to follow philosophical concepts themselves as their meanings branch out into the wider world to which they already implicitly belong. It is to understand how concepts ramify. The ramification of any given concept is of course multiple and forever open to change.¹⁴ The connections and associations by which

¹¹ Cuthbert Sharpe, *The Worme of Lambton* (1830) 8. In the event the worm, “closing on the Knight, clasped its frightful ‘coils’ around him, and endeavoured to strangle him in its poisonous embrace. But the Knight was provided against this expected extremity, for the more closely he was pressed by the worm, the more deadly were the wounds inflicted by his coat of spear blades, until the river ran with a crimson ‘gore of blood.’” *Id.* 11-12. Same motif in episode 9 of *The Terror* (AMC, 1st season 2018); a character attaches forks all over his clothing so that when he is devoured by the (mammaloid) monster the beast will be fatally weakened by internal bleeding.

¹² *Euthydemus* 298d. As for ‘urchin’: “**ghers-** To bristle. . . . 2. Lengthened-grade form **ghēr(s)-*. URCHIN, from Latin *hēr, ēr*, hedgehog.” *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (rev. 3rd ed. Calvert Watkins 2011) 31.

¹³ HKD 299, 297; translating from Emile Benveniste and Louis Renou, *Vr̥tra et Vr̥dragna. Étude de mythologie indo-iranienn*e (1934).

¹⁴ Like metaphor: “But in fact there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention, and much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character. When we try to say what a metaphor ‘means,’ we soon realize there is no end to what we want to mention.” Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” in *Inquiries into Truth*

philosophical arguments take on added significance are the fruits of argument but also of imagination, and in tracing their development one tracks not necessary entailments but strategies of interpretation by which the potentialities of a given idea are developed, transformed, and revised. Paradoxically, however, a concept begins to ramify the instant it is conceived; there is no moment of pure thought that does not immediately take on a further meaning. Conceptual ramification is therefore nothing ‘external.’ It is the concept itself, conceived according to one of its historical possibilities.”¹⁵

For Watkins’ poetics the analog of Gordon’s “concept itself” is the verbal formula. His book’s Part Two (‘How to kill a dragon in Indo-European’) “is devoted to the ‘signature’ formula of the Indo-European dragon-slaying myth, the endlessly repeated, varied or invariant narration of the hero slaying the serpent.” He begins in the Rigveda with the phrase *áhann áhim*, “he/you SLEW the SERPENT.” This basic formula

“recurs in texts from the Vedas in India through Old and Middle Iranian holy books, Hittite myth, Greek epic and lyric, Celtic and Germanic epic and saga, down to Armenian oral folk epic of the last century. This formula, typically with a reflex of the same Indo-European verb root **g^hen-* (Vedic *han-*, Avestan *jan-*, Hittite *kuen-*, Greek *πεφν-/φον-*, Old Irish *gon-*, English *bane*), shapes the narration of ‘heroic’ killing or overcoming of adversaries over the Indo-European world for millennia. . . . The variations rung on this basic formula constitute a

and Interpretation (1984) 263. Like myth: “Since it has no interest in definite beginnings or endings [*insoucieuse de partir ou d’aboutir franchement*], mythological thought never develops any theme to completion: there is always something left unfinished. Myths, like rites, are ‘in-terminable.’” Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Mythologiques Volume One* (tr. John and Doreen Weightman 1969) 6.

¹⁵ Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (2010) 3-4. For example the magnificently ramifying concept which Aristotle fashioned from Plato’s teaching: MATTER SEEKS FORM (in Watkins’ convention of “using English upper case (and normal English word order) to identify the semantical and lexical constituents of a reconstructed formula” HKD 42). Cf. Heidegger’s scorn for a generator-scheme current in his academic milieu: “Perhaps this seemingly profound question about bridging the gap between the real and the ideal, the sensible and the non-sensible, the temporal and the timeless, the historical and the suprahistorical, is only a foolish undertaking that doesn’t even care to ask whether one actually thinks these ‘opposing pairs’ as simply and easily as such lists make it seem Nonetheless this foolishness gets the semblance of a justification as follows. First you invent these two regions, then you put a gap between them, and then you go looking for the bridge. ‘Take the gap and build the bridge.’” Martin Heidegger, *Logic: The Question of Truth* (tr. Thomas Sheehan 2010) 76-77. And the subject-object schema—don’t get him started: “This problem forms the basis of all those possibilities which are tried out over and over again and let loose on each other in endless discussions: the object is dependent on the subject, or the subject on the object, or both on each other in a correlative manner. This constructivistic forehaving, almost ineradicable on account of the pertinacity of a sedimented tradition, fundamentally and forever **obstructs access** to that which we have indicated with the term ‘factual life’ (‘Dasein’). . . . 90% of the literature is preoccupied with ensuring that such wrongheaded problems not disappear and are confounded still more and in ever new ways [i.e. by amplification, ramification].” Martin Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (tr. John van Buren 1999) 63; my emphasis.

virtually limitless repository of artistic verbal expression in archaic and preliterate Indo-European societies.”¹⁶

From ancient times “the Vedic ‘dragon’ Vṛtra owes his personalized existence to an Indo-Iranian divine epithet **vṛtra-ǵhan-* ‘smashing resistance’. There was at the outset no dragon named Vṛtra: he was just the Serpent, *ahi*, and Indo-Iranian **vṛ-tra-* was a neuter noun of instrument (*-*tro-*) from the root *vṛ-* ‘block, obstruct, close, cover.’” I.e. ‘Vṛtra’ means ‘Blocker,’ thus **vṛtra-ǵhan-* (by the law of schoolyard jingling) ‘Blocker-Knocker.’ ‘Slay, smash’ **g^hhen-* has a variant semanteme ‘overcome,’ as Watkins shows in his chapters on the root **terh₂-*, “with derivative meaning ‘to cross over, pass through, overcome, vanquish’; the English cognate is *through*.”¹⁷ So “we have the full Vedic verb phrase in an etymological figure:

índro vṛtrám **atarad** vṛtratúrye

Indra **overcame** Vṛtra at the Vṛtra-**overcoming**.”¹⁸

From this example and others Watkins reconstructs “an additional mythological theme with its verbal lexical expression in the formula

HERO **terh₂-* ADVERSARY.”¹⁹

Now Heidegger tells us that resistance, *Widerstand*, is met in a *Nicht-durch-kommen*:

“Resistance is encountered in a not-coming-through, and it is encountered as a hindrance to willing to come through [*als Behinderung eines Durch-kommen-wollens*]. With such willing, however, something must already have been disclosed which one’s drive and one’s will *are out for* [***aus sind***]. . . . *The experiencing of resistance—that is, the discovery of what is resistant to one’s endeavors* [***strebensmäßiges Entdecken von Widerständigem***]*—is possible ontologically only by reason of the disclosedness of the world. . . . the character of resisting presupposes necessarily a world which has already been disclosed.*

¹⁶ HKD 10.

¹⁷ *Id.* 343, 298. “In scholarly usage it is now customary to write the noncoloring laryngeal as *h₁*, the a-coloring laryngeal as *h₂*, and the o-coloring laryngeal as *h₃*. . . . when the evidence indicates the presence of a laryngeal in the root but does not permit us to specify its identity any further, such a laryngeal is given the notation *h_x* or *H*. in current scholarly usage.” *American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* xvi-xvii.

¹⁸ *Id.* 344; bold in original.

¹⁹ *Id.* 345.

Resistance characterizes the ‘external world’ in the sense of entities within-the-world, but never in the sense of the world itself.”²⁰

When the hammer of world-disclosure fell into human hands suddenly everything needed pounding. As in,

I tell now the manly [*vīryāṇī*] deeds of Indra,
the foremost which he did armed with the cudgel.
He slew the serpent, drilled through the waters,
he split the belly of the mountains.²¹

If you will squint with me back beyond this image we may just catch sight of – could be a mirage – an archaic *schème générateur de l’amplification*:

HUMAN **terh₂*- HINDRANCE.

Anyhow a pervasive theme of *Being and Time* is Dasein’s vocation to, so to speak, overcome Vṛtra at the Vṛtra-overcoming. For instance, Dasein

“falls prey to [*verfällt in*] the tradition of which it has more or less explicitly taken hold. This tradition keeps it from [*nimmt ihm ab*] providing its own guidance . . . When tradition thus becomes master [*hierbei zur Herrschaft kommende*], it does so in such a way that what it ‘transmits’ is made so inaccessible [*so wenig zugänglich*], proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed [*verdeckt*]. Tradition . . . blocks our access [*verlegt den Zugang*] to those primordial ‘sources’ [*den ursprünglichen »Quellen«*] from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn.”²²

The *rishis* imagined this pickle as cosmic cattle pent up in the cave of Vala, “cows being a standard Vedic metaphor for anything capable of giving nourishment.”²³ What to do?

“If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition [*verhärteten Tradition*] must be loosened up [*Auflockerung*], and the concealments [*Verdeckungen*] which it has brought about must be

²⁰ *Being and Time* (tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson 1962) 253-254; emphasis in original. *Durch* descends from **terh₂*- according to <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Reconstruction:Proto-Germanic/%C3%BEurhw> .

²¹ *Rigveda* 1.32.1, tr. Watkins HKD 304.

²² *Being and Time* 42-43.

²³ *IE Poetry and Myth* 259. The Vala myth is “a cosmogonic variant of the dragon-slaying myth.” HKD 72. The root *vṛ-* of *Vṛtra* “is the verb of the blockage of the waters, and the same verb furnishes the name *Vala* [fn.: “With ‘popular’ *l* for *r*.] of the cave where the (rain-)cows are pent up and of the demon who holds them prisoner.” *Id.* 298. On the cosmicity of bovinity see Kenneth R. Valpey, “The Release of Cosmic Cows” in his *Cow Care in Hindu Animal Ethics* (2020); <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-28408-4> .

dissolved [*Ablösung*]. We understand this task as one in which by taking *the question of Being as our clue*, we are to *destroy* [*vollziehende **Destruktion***] the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences [*ursprünglichen Erfahrungen*] in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since.”²⁴

The Rigvedic Hymn to Indra cited above continues in relevant part:

He smashed the Serpent that lay on the mountain;
Tvaṣṭṛ fashioned for him the roaring *vajra*,²⁵
Streaming like lowing cows,
the waters ran straight down to the sea.

...

Demon’s wives, Serpent’s herd they had stood
shut in, the waters, as the cows by Paṇi.
The waters’ cleft that had been blocked,
by smashing Vṛtra he opened it up.

...

You won the cows, hero, you won the Soma,
you freed the seven streams to flow.²⁶

Bernard Williams credited Heidegger with little else beyond the suggestive interpretation “that Nietzsche’s claim of ‘philosophising with a hammer’ means, not smashing things, but to ‘tap all things with a hammer to hear whether or not they yield that familiar hollow sound.’”²⁷ O.K., hollow sound detected now what? Nietzsche characterized Step Two as ‘What a joy to destroy.’²⁸ Hammer speaks to its brother Diamond and asks *Und wenn eure Härte nicht blitzen und schneiden und zerschneiden will: wie könntet ihr einst mit mir — schaffen?*²⁹ Hollingdale translates: “And if your hardness will not flash and cut and cut to pieces: how can you one day – create with me?” Sounds like something the *vajra* would say, or roar.

²⁴ *Being and Time* 44. Section 6 is entitled *Die Aufgabe einer Destruktion der Geschichte der Ontologie*.

²⁵ “Indra’s weapon is most often called a *vájra*-, probably ‘smasher’, from the same root as Greek *πάγνυμι* ‘smash, break’. From the Sanskrit comes Tocharian A *waśir*, B *waśīr* ‘thunderbolt’. This is a very old noun, represented not only in Avestan *vazra*- but in the second element of the Greek heroic name Mele(w)agros. It gives also, as a loan-word in Finno-Ugric, Finnish *vasara* ‘hammer’ and Mordvinian *užer* ‘axe’. It must originally have denoted an ordinary club or celt.” *IE Poetry and Myth* 251.

²⁶ *Rigveda* 1.32.2, .11, .12; tr. West *IE Poetry and Myth* 256-257.

²⁷ Bernard Williams, “Nietzsche’s Centaur,” Vol. 3, No. 10 *London Review of Books* (4 June 1981); reviewing two other books and Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Vol. 1: The Will to Power as Art*, (tr. David Farrell Krell 1981).

²⁸ *die ewige Lust des Werdens selbst zu sein, — jene Lust, die auch noch die Lust am Vernichten in sich schliesst...* Friedrich Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophirt*. (1889); *Was ich den Alten verdanke* ¶ 5.

²⁹ *Id.*, *Der Hammer redet*.

Anyway another of Heidegger's retellings³⁰ situates both dragon and treasure in Dasein. *Das Man*, the 'they,' "is an existentielle; and as a primordial phenomenon, it belongs to Dasein's positive constitution."³¹ *Das Man*, like Tradition, is a Vṛtra lording over Dasein in "stubborn dominion" (*hartnäckige Herrschaft*), a "real dictatorship" (*eigentliche Diktatur*). Dasein has already "surrendered itself" (*ausgeliefert hat*), and "stands in subjection to Others" (*steht in der Botmäßigkeit der Anderen*). *Das Man* "prescribes" (*schreibt*), "keeps watch" (*wacht über*), and "suppresses" (*niedergehalten*) for the sake of maintaining its "inconspicuous domination" (*übernommene Herrschaft*).³²

What to do? "If Dasein discovers the world in its own way and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic being, then this discovery of the 'world' and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away [*Wegräumen*] of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up [*Zerbrechen*] of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way [*selbst abriegelt*]."³³ A job for the *vajra* of *Angst*.

The prize cow is the truth of existence;³⁴ which truth is finitude: the truth of existence is the finitude of existence. Blessings then flow, according to Heidegger:

"Once grasped, the finitude of existence [*Endlichkeit der Existenz*] snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of easily available possibilities—taking it easy, treating things lightly, shirking responsibility—and brings openness [Dasein] to the simplicity of 'choosing its fate.' . . . 'Choosing one's fate' is the powerless superior power (ever ready for adversity) of silently and dreadfully understanding oneself in terms of one's own lack-in-being. . . . Only an entity whose being

³⁰ Not to claim he ever had the myth explicitly in mind; more like *die Sprache spricht*, as here: "I therefore claim to show, not how men think in myths [*comment les hommes pensent dans les mythes*], but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact [*comment les mythes se pensent dans les hommes, et à leur insu*]. And, as I have already suggested, it would perhaps be better to go still further and, disregarding the thinking subject completely, proceed as if the thinking process were taking place in the myths, in their reflection upon themselves and their interrelation [*les mythes se pensent entre eux*]." *The Raw and the Cooked* 12; emphasis in original. Cf.: *Il n'y a pas d'Oedipe primitif. Ce qui est primitif, ce sont les thèmes qui, en s'articulant les uns aux autres sont devenus d'abord les gestes d'Oedipe, puis sa vie et enfin son caractère.* Marie Delcourt, *Oedipe, ou la légende du conquérant* (1944) ix.

³¹ ***Das Man ist ein Existenzial und gehört als ursprüngliches Phänomen zur positiven Verfassung des Daseins.*** *Being and Time* 167; emphasis in original.

³² *Id.* 164-165; *Sein und Zeit* 127.

³³ *Being and Time* 167.

³⁴ "The most primordial [*ursprünglichste*], and indeed the most authentic [*eigentlichste*], disclosedness [*Erschlossenheit*] in which Dasein, as a potentiality-for-Being [*Seinkönnen*], can be, is the truth of existence [*die Wahrheit der Existenz*]." *Being and Time* 264; emphasis in original.

co-originally comprises death, lack, freedom, and finitude—the way care does—can exist by ‘choosing its fate’.”³⁵

With this move Heidegger ramifies the myth; specifically its component of “Indo-European eschatology, the Indo-European doctrine of final things;” namely that “what is crossed over, overcome, is death;” the formula for which is HERO OVERCOME (**terh₂-*) DEATH.³⁶

Endorsing the conclusions of the scholars Fontenrose, Ivanov, and Toporov, Watkins apparently believed that “The dragon symbolizes Chaos, in the largest sense, and killing the dragon represents the ultimate victory of Cosmic Truth and Order over Chaos. As part of the Frazerian ‘dying god’ myth, it is a symbolic victory of growth over stagnation or dormancy in the cycle of the year, and ultimately a victory of rebirth over death.”³⁷

For Heidegger by contrast there is no possibility of victory over death: “Anticipatory resoluteness is not a way of escape [*kein Ausweg*], fabricated for the ‘overcoming’ [»*überwinden*«] of death; it is rather that understanding which follows the call of conscience and which frees for death the possibility of acquiring power over Dasein’s existence and of basically dispersing all fugitive self-concealments [*flüchtige Selbstverdeckung im Grunde zu zerstreuen*].”³⁸

Heidegger turns the dragon’s avatar Death against its avatar *das Man* in order to free Dasein for choosing its fate. As for Death, it will not be slain, vanquished, or overcome; the truth of existence is it ends.

μῦθος *virumque cano*. As Watkins puts the issue, “We must consider a particular aspect, and a particular thematic variant, of the dragon-killing myth and its expression. There is a negative aspect of the hero; he can be a sort of monster.”³⁹ And ‘you know what they say about Heidegger’: he is a sort of monster, his thought unapproachable because polluted by anti-Semitism. What, if any, mechanism of action in the dragon myth operates to bring about this uncleanness that bars the way?

³⁵ *Sein und Zeit* 384-385; as translated by Thomas Sheehan and Corinne Painter, “Choosing One’s Fate: A Re-Reading of *Sein und Zeit* ¶ 74,” 29 *Research in Phenomenology* 63 at 66-67 (1999).

³⁶ HKD 352.

³⁷ *Id.* 299. On this I’m with Davidson: “What I deny is that metaphor does its work by having a special meaning, a specific cognitive content. . . . to suppose it can be effective only by conveying a coded message is like thinking a joke or a dream [or a myth] makes some statement which a clever interpreter can restate in plain prose.” “What Metaphors Mean” 262.

³⁸ *Being and Time* 357, emphasis in original.

³⁹ HKD 398. Nietzsche said it: *Wer mit Ungeheuern kämpft, mag zusehn, dass er nicht dabei zum Ungeheuer wird.*

The fourteenth verse of the Hymn to Indra presents a famous crux: Why does the hero run away? Norelius translates:

What avenger of the serpent did you see, Indra, that fear went into your, his slayer's, heart and you crossed nine and ninety streams like a frightened falcon [crosses] the spaces?⁴⁰

Norelius reviews the evidence from a range of texts and concludes

“that the theme of the monster-slayer's flight and illness has very ancient, and in all likelihood Proto-Indo-European, roots, and that the view of Dumézil and Woodard, that the motif can be explained in the light of the berserker-like rage that was thought, in many Indo-European and other ancient societies, to seize or possess warriors, can be substantiated by considerable evidence. This rage was conceived of as an internal heat or ardor, a ‘fever’ that ultimately threatened to destroy the warrior himself, or could turn him against his compatriots in blind battle-frenzy. Thus, the mythical hero sometimes becomes guilty of some form of crime that has to be expiated.”⁴¹

Norelius does not discuss the Greek analog of Indra's flight: “Apollo killed Python when he arrived at Delphi, and he then had to go away and be purified for eight years.”⁴² “Like Apollo after slaying Python . . . Indra after slaying the serpent Vṛtra must run away.”⁴³ The reason why Apollo must run away was plain enough to Walter Burkert: “The purificatory god was himself in need of purification, for he had killed.”⁴⁴

“It is a basic feature of the hero that he is a killer,”⁴⁵ and the Indo-European world held the shedding of blood to incur miasma, pollution, in potentially every case. Reviewing the Greek

⁴⁰ Per-Johan Norelius, “Indra's Flight and Affliction: Vedic Reminiscences of an Indo-European Myth,” 45 *The Journal of Indo-European Studies* 333 (2017). ‘Avenger’ for *yātāraṃ*, and Norelius notes that the word *yātī-* “seems to be derived from a root *yā-*, ‘to injure, attack.’” *Id.* 334 fn. 2.

⁴¹ *Id.* 365.

⁴² “Similarly when Cadmus arrived at Thebes, he killed a great serpent that guarded the spring of Ares, and had to go away and serve Ares for eight years.” M. L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (1971) 72. “after the slaying of the dragon at Delphi, Apollo fled to Tempe or Crete . . . for purification. The Homeric hymn knows nothing of purification; the Tempe tradition derives from an aitiological connection of uncertain date with the Septerion [or Stepterion, festival at Delphi] . . .; the Cretan tradition might be older. . . though one could argue that the very idea that the dragon's death required purification was created by the Septerion tradition.” Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (1983) 378. Arguing the latter now runs up against Norelius' evidence pointing back to very ancient roots.

⁴³ *HKD* 399.

⁴⁴ Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (tr. Peter Bing 1983) 130, discussing the Septerion. You can't get far in the Library of Apollodorus without coming upon this schema: X killed Y so he lit out for Otherland where Z (usually the local king) purified him.

⁴⁵ *IE Poetry and Myth* 454.

evidence Parker cites the epithet *miaiphonos* applied to Ares in Homer, and glosses it as ‘one who kills in a polluting way.’⁴⁶ Unexpiated *miaiphonia* provokes vengeance, either divine (e.g., the Furies’ pursuit, accursed progeny, etc.), or human (by the decedent’s kin). Evidently Vṛtra-smashing, like Pythoctony, is *miaiphonia*; so Indra, too, ‘saw it coming’ and fled to be cleansed.

The miasma attaching to Heidegger’s expressed anti-Semitism can be understood in terms of the dragon myth as *das Man*’s vengeance on him for freeing Death to conquer (temporarily) *das Man*. Trawny notes that “it has long been known that Heidegger shared banal anti-Semitic stereotypes with the majority not only of Germans, but perhaps even of Europeans.”⁴⁷ In other words the very source of Heidegger’s anti-Semitism was none other than *das Man* itself, an existential component of his own constitution, **Heidegger’s** ‘they.’ He got it at the kitchen table, at the playground, in the schoolroom, and at every other site of inculturation where he was thrown into homely hateways, and they into him.⁴⁸

Then, Trawny continues, “at a certain stage along the path, the philosopher admitted anti-Semitism into his thinking.” More precisely, “he admitted a *being-historical anti-Semitism* (seinsgeschichtlicher Antisemitismus).”⁴⁹ In the *Black Notebooks* composed before 1948, “and especially between 1938 and 1941, Heidegger comes to speak more or less directly of ‘the Jews.’ They are transposed into a being-historical topography or autotopography (since every

⁴⁶ *Miasma* 134. ἄρες ἄρες βροτολοιγὲ μαιφόνε τευχσειπλήτα. *Iliad* 5.31.

⁴⁷ Peter Trawny, *Heidegger and the Myth of a Jewish World Conspiracy* (tr. Andrew J. Mitchell 2015) x. Trevor-Roper: “Why did social struggle, in those two centuries, invariably revive this bizarre mythology [of witchcraft]? We might as well ask, why has economic depression in Germany, from the Middle Ages until this century, so often revived the bizarre mythology of anti-semitism: the fables of poisoned wells and ritual murder which were spread at the time of the Crusades, during the Black Death, in the Thirty Years War, and in the pages of Julius Streicher’s Nazi broadsheet, *der Stürmer*? The question is obviously not simple. It carries us beyond and below the realm of mere intellectual problems. We have here to deal with a mythology which is more than a mere fantasy. It is a social stereotype: a stereotype of fear. . . . How such stereotypes are built up is a problem in itself; but once they are built up, they can last for generations, even centuries. The stereotype in German society has long been the Jewish conspiracy.” Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The European Witch-craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” in *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change* ([3rd rev. ed. 1984] 2001) 153.

⁴⁸ “. . . Heidegger could voice an anti-Semitism to Arendt of the sort not uncommon in the 1920s and 1930s. His was directed against the Jews in the universities above all. In this regard he speaks in a letter [to his wife] from October 18, 1916, of the ‘Jewification’ [*Verjudung*] of our culture and universities’—a situational assessment that at this time, as I have already mentioned, was so common as to be even shared by Jews.” And Heidegger could reply to Jaspers’ complaint of “the evil irrationality of the Elders of Zion” fabrication that “There truly is a dangerous international band of Jews.” *Heidegger and the MJWC* 80, 27.

⁴⁹ *Id.* 2. “There is an anti-Semitism in Heidegger’s thinking that—as befits a thinker—undergoes an (impossible) philosophical grounding, but this does not get beyond two or three stereotypes. The being-historical construction makes it all the worse. It is this which could lead to a contamination of his thinking.” *Id.* 87-88.

location bears a corresponding relation to the self) in which they are assigned a particular and specific significance, one that is of an anti-Semitic nature.”⁵⁰

The most salient features in Heidegger’s autotopography never changed—some Vṛtra blocking the *Weg* to a *Quelle*. Heidegger had a flair for taking-X-as-obstacle whenever the next account of ‘overcoming’ required one; i.e. every time.⁵¹ This time he redeployed “that stupid suburban prejudice” (Ezra Pound) ready-to-hand in the ‘they.’

“In general, the opposite of everything Heidegger sought to save philosophically—‘rootedness,’ ‘homeland,’ what is ‘one’s own,’ the ‘earth,’ the ‘gods,’ ‘poetry,’ etc.—appears to be transposable onto ‘world Judaism.’”

“As little as Heidegger can disperse the suspicion of anti-Semitism, so much do we have cause to say that he directly founded a further type of it. For him, Judaism and Christianity converge in the technological actuality of the ‘will to power.’ . . . Heidegger’s anti-Semitic statements have a direction. . . . ‘Jewish-Christian monotheism’ is represented as the origin of the ‘modern system of total dictatorship,’ a well-known strategy of Heidegger’s, according to which National Socialism is an epiphenomenon of Judaism.”⁵²

‘World Judaism’ was thus in Heidegger’s topography a further type of Vṛtra. Yet, by *peripeteia*, not with the force he intended for the concept, but rather as *das Man’s* vengeance; a barring-of-the-way-to-**Heidegger**, a mind odor repelling many who might otherwise approach.

Recall now the interpretive principle cited above: “Conceptual ramification is therefore nothing ‘external.’ It is the concept itself, conceived according to one of its historical possibilities.” So we ask whether Heidegger’s apparently innovative ramification of the dragon myth, of Vṛtra as the *Wesen* of a human group blocking Dasein’s being-historical way, has precedent in some earlier, analogous historical possibility taken up by the myth.

Jamison and Brereton note that “the greatest enemy of Indra, Vṛtra, is a Dāsa.” The phrase West translates as “Demon’s wives” they translate literally as “their husband was the Dāsa.” What’s a Dāsa?

⁵⁰ *Id.* 6.

⁵¹ E.g., “The problem was not merely that the philosophy of form remained dependent on an earlier ontology or was itself incapable of plumbing the deepest levels of human Dasein. The problem was that Cassirer’s philosophy actually conspired to *obstruct* this deeper purpose: ‘in itself it blocks the path to doing so.’” *Continental Divide* 134, quoting MacNeill and Walker’s translation of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*; Gordon’s emphasis.

⁵² *Id.* 34, 89-90.

“The Āryas fought among themselves, but their enemies were often groups of non-Āryas, called Dāsas or Dasyus, who may, or may not, have been non-Indo-Aryans. . . . The Dāsas and Dasyus were people who had not adopted or not yet adopted the customs and behaviors of the Ṛgvedic Āryas and therefore were not part of the Ārya community. . . . Like the Dasyus, the Dāsas are also humans and usually they are enemies of the Āryas. Indra destroys them . . . and their fortresses . . . [T]he poets sharply distinguish between Āryas and Dāsas . . . and worry that the Dāsas have wealth that should belong to Āryas . . . In summary, the Dasyus and Dāsas are overlapping categories of peoples opposed to the Āryas, and the poets call on the gods to defeat them for the sake of the Āryas.”⁵³

Jamison and Brereton go on to assert that “They must have been people and cultures either indigenous to South Asia or already in South Asia—from wherever or whenever they may have come—when the carriers of Ṛgvedic culture and religion moved into and through the northwest of the subcontinent.”⁵⁴ Modern experience of historical possibility, however, shows that *das Man* can take both indigenous people **and** immigrants (‘replacers’) as *Vṛtra-Dāsa*, ‘those-blocking-our-*Bewegung*.’

His repetition of this historical possibility of the myth exhibits one of Heidegger’s core doctrines; in Gordon’s words, “that human existence is marked by a nearly irresistible drive to lose oneself in public interpretations that do violence to the truth of the phenomena. This tendency, which Heidegger calls *Verfallen*, or *falling*, is said to distort and disguise that which has been disclosed. It follows that Dasein exists simultaneously ‘in truth’ and ‘in “untruth””.”⁵⁵

Noo lads, Aa'll haad me gob,
That's aall Aa knaa about the story,
Of Martin H.'s wobbly job
With the ontologic worm.

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⁵³ Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India* (2014) 55-57.

⁵⁴ *Id.* 57.

⁵⁵ *Continental Divide* 169.