

Thaumanoia

Wo Es gibt, soll Ich werden.

For Maria Balaska people are either opened-up (*Entschlossen*) or not. People either recognize their openness or they are spiritless (*åndløs*). She notes that Kierkegaard introduced the term 'spiritlessness,' *åndløshed*, "to describe an existence that relies solely on the categories of nature and culture to understand itself." When we regard (interpret, articulate) ourselves *only*, Balaska informs us, "as products of nature and culture" then "we fail to recognize our openness." She quotes Kierkegaard in support: "the lostness [*Fortabelse*] of spiritlessness, as well as its security [*Tryghed*], consists in its understanding nothing spiritually [*Intet forstaaer aandeligt*] and comprehending nothing as a task [*Opgave*]."¹

Balaska's concluding chapter, 'After Anxiety and Wonder,' underscores her point that there are just two kinds of human life. "Externally," she writes, "a life that exercises openness and is directed to possibility may not look very different from a spiritless life. . . . because this kind of life [opened-up] is not easily defined by specific observable facts, traits or activities. However, the orientation of their lives is shifted, and the overall tone is different [sc. from that of the spiritless ones, ontological losers]."²

In a moment of indulgence she allows "There is nothing wrong with making use of public interpretations." 'Wrong' quickly re-enters the picture to the extent these interpretations "obscure our openness and turn our human existence into a given rather than a question or a task." She explains that "When we rely too much on preconceived schemas and interpretations our understanding of ourselves and other entities is [quoting Stephen Mulhall] 'taken up by, what is typically said about them – how they are to be understood, how anyone and everyone understands them.'"³

For his part Mulhall interprets *Verfallen* to mean that

"Our interest in the entities themselves is deflected into an interest in what is said about them, and hence our desire to penetrate more deeply into their true nature is perverted into an endless search for novelty (whether new situations

¹ Maria Balaska, *Anxiety and Wonder: On Being Human* (2024) 99-100, quoting *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (ed. tr. Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson 1980) 95. Kierkegaard's sentence in its entirety: *Deri ligger netop dens Fortabelse, men ogsaa dens Tryghed, at den Intet forstaaer aandeligt, Intet fatter som Opgave, om den end formaaer at omfamle Alt med sin afmattede Klamhed.* <https://www.kb.dk/e-mat/dod/111408014975-bw.pdf> 103.

² A&W 103.

³ *Id.* 139 note 1, quoting Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* (2005) 51.

and experiences or new ways of talking about old ones) purely for novelty's sake, and a consequent inability to distinguish the insightful from the superficial—indeed an inability to find a grip for that distinction at all, a loss of any sense that discourse (human talk and thought, the *logos*) might be weighty or profound as opposed to free-floating and empty.”⁴

This strikes me as ontological Puritanism; entities are to-be-penetrated but only in the sanctioned way, by discharging our very various desires exclusively via the missionary position. Seeking novelty for novelty's sake is, in Mulhall's account, a perversion, degeneracy. As he explains it, our everyday *Verfallen*-state is one in which “an Adamic ability to name the essence of things has degenerated into the sophistic nightmare of words engendering more words in an increasingly turbulent Babel within which the very idea of an external reality to which human speech might be responsive and responsible is rendered null and void;” “covering over the oppressive absence of a genuinely demanding world in which they can take an interest by an endless round of bustling attempts to manufacture and satisfy specific needs (the turbulent Babel of fallenness).”⁵ So tacky. But the ontologically unclean have a role insofar as, in the words of Mary Douglas, “Where there is dirt there is system.” The system here is the ancient one of the saved and the lost, more precisely its avatars of the solid and the empty, the sober and the silly.

Further on *Verfallen* Katherine Withy comments that

“Rather than explaining why being must be concealed, or even why we are entity-directed rather than not, Heidegger explains why some of us are more mired [‘the mud and the blood and the beer’] in our everyday environmental experiencing than others, and so do not or will not (or would rather not) experience angst and recognise (our) being. That is, he explains why being is concealed in an aggravated way in some cases. Schematically, instead of explaining why human nature is x, Heidegger explains why some of us are more x than others. (A theological analogy: explaining original sin [*Wozu Schmutzer?*] vs. explaining why some people are especially sinful [filthy]).”⁶

Anxiety and wonder, according to Balaska, “share both the unsettling sense that the flow of one's life is suspended for no apparent reason and the more joyous sense that we have access to something bigger, beyond our everyday lives.”⁷ She quotes approvingly Kierkegaard's explanation (*Forklaring*) that one who boasts of never having experienced anxiety is ‘very

⁴ *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* 51.

⁵ *Id.* 51, 81.

⁶ “The Methodological Role of Angst in *Being and Time*,” <https://www.beyng.com/docs/Withy-Angst.html> .

⁷ A&W 3.

spiritless,' *meget aandlos*.⁸ Anxious wonder “may be rare,” she says, “but what is even rarer is the attempt and the capacity to understand it in the light of our existence, to recognize in it an insight about who we are and what we are for.”⁹

The inverse insight is that it is futile to seek a ‘who’ and its ‘for.’ These aims presuppose some *svabhāva*, ‘proper nature,’ ‘essence,’ *Eigentlichkeit*; whereas everything is in fact empty, *śūnya*; i.e. empty of *svabhāva*. Everything is ‘dependently arising,’ *pratītyasamutpāda*, pan-relational. Nāgārjuna’s further insight was that in a dialethic universe a contradiction may be true: we have an essence and we do not; we have a *telos* and we do not.¹⁰ A Nāgārjuna-Heidegger chimera would be:

There is no distinction whatsoever between *Alltäglichkeit* and *Geheimnis*.

What is the limit of *Geheimnis*, that is the limit of *Alltäglichkeit*.

There is not even the finest gap to be found between the two.¹¹

Balaska is a psychotherapist as well as a philosopher. She is concerned “whether there can be a space for our philosophical nature within psychoanalysis or whether the transcendent [exalted] dimension of our existence risks going unnoticed or unappreciated when we only associate our moods and emotions with worldly [lowdown] concerns.” She aspires then “to write in a way that is also accessible to psychotherapists.”¹² By this I understand her to proffer the *åndelig* grasp of anxious wonder as — she does not put it this way — the cure for ontological ADHD, *Verfallen*. Yet “A culture that believes in cure,” says Adam Phillips, “is living in the fallout, in the aftermath, of religious cultures of redemption.”¹³

‘Cure’ in psychoanalysis is often considered to be accomplished by the analysand’s assimilation of an ego-ideal promoted by the analyst. (‘Take, eat, this is my normal which is given for thee.’) After all, some such commodity is what the patient, or somebody, is paying for. Yet in Phillips’s view “What is most difficult to resolve and cure is . . . the patient’s belief in and quest for a

⁸ *Skulde derimod den Talende mene, at det er det Store hos ham, at han aldrig har varet angst, da stal jeg med Glade indvie ham i min Forklaring, at det kommerderaf, at han er meget aandlos.*
<https://www.kb.dk/e-mat/dod/111408014975-bw.pdf> 178.

⁹ A&W ix. »Eigentliche« Angst ist . . . selten. *Sein und Zeit* 190:
<https://www.beyng.com/pages/de/SeinUndZeit/SeinUndZeit.190.html> .

¹⁰ For dialetheism and its true contradictions see Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (2nd ed. 2002) and *One: Being an Investigation of the Unity of Reality and of its Parts, including the Singular Object which is Nothingness* (2014).

¹¹ *Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (tr. Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura 2013) 25.19-20, p. 102. The corresponding words in that verse are ‘saṃsāra’ and ‘nirvāṇa.’

¹² A&W x.

¹³ Adam Phillips, *The Cure for Psychoanalysis* ([2019] 2021) 153.

cure.”¹⁴ Phillips takes psychoanalytic treatment to be “an antidote to indoctrination; it is an enquiry into how people influence each other, into the individual’s history of living in other people’s regimes.”¹⁵ “Our sociality is *die Sache selbst*,”¹⁶ so to speak, and normativity, the laying on of tasks, is itself in question. Then, sounding quite as possibilitarian as Heidegger, Phillips says “The destination, the cure, is the individual’s newfound possibilities.”¹⁷ In Sandor Ferenczi’s formulation the patient is not cured by free association, the patient is cured when he can free-associate. When the patient can free-associate, says Phillips, she has, “as it were, access to an unfathomable unconscious that is only to a limited extent subject to explanation or interpretation,” an unconscious “in all its prolific, untrackable vagrancy.”¹⁸

Approximately, the ontopathology of everyday life is to Heidegger what the psychopathology of the same is to Freud: the phenomena of a primordial disclosive process: *UnbewussteSeyn*. Unfathomable, vagrant, uncanny, *dieses Wesen ist nichts Menschliches*¹⁹ and at the same time *allzu Menschliches*. Wonder ablunder.

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¹⁴ *Id.* 165.

¹⁵ *Id.* 163.

¹⁶ Thomas Sheehan, “A paradigm shift in Heidegger research,” 34 *Continental Philosophy Review* 183, 200 (2001).

¹⁷ *The Cure for Psychoanalysis* 163. Cf. *Höher als die Wirklichkeit steht die Möglichkeit*. *Sein und Zeit* 38: <https://www.beyng.com/pages/de/SeinUndZeit/SeinUndZeit.038.html> .

¹⁸ Adam Phillips, *On Giving Up* (2024) 106.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 6.2*: 377: <https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=6.2&pg=377> ; see also GA 9: 397: <https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=9&pg=397> .