
I. Introduction

In a lecture course given during the winter semester of 1921-22, Heidegger claims that it is impossible to be a true philosopher without giving up one’s belief in God, insisting that “philosophy, in its radical self-positing questioningness, must be in principle a-theistic.”¹ It is interesting, then, that so much of his later philosophical work includes mention of religious aspects such as “gods” and “the holy”. Most notable, of course, is the excerpt from a 1966 interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel* in which he claims that “only a god can save us.”² Heidegger’s mentions of divinities and the holy are thought to be mostly characteristic of his later, more obscure work and because of this, the significance of these religious references are in danger of being ignored or downplayed. As this paper will show, however, some of Heidegger’s earliest work explicitly discusses religious experience and the holy, and the insights he has regarding the role and function of the holy in this early work are insights which appear and re-appear implicitly throughout his entire corpus in the guise of discussions of Being-as-such (or on the way to his formulation of the role of Being-as-such). I contend that one ought to pay very close attention to these potentially difficult or obscure religious notions and how they show up in the work of Heidegger, for they get to the heart of some of his

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most profound and significant ideas.

In this paper, I intend to first show Heidegger’s insights on the holy in some of his earliest work through a discussion of his early ideas on mysticism as presented in his 1918 lecture sketches entitled “Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism.” I will also indicate the deeper significance of his early analysis of the holy for his long-term projects. To this end, I will try to show how Heidegger’s first musings on the essence of the holy foreshadow some of his later, more mature thoughts on what exactly the holy might be and how we human beings ought to comport ourselves towards it, as presented in Heidegger’s essays and lecture given from 1939 to 1942 included in a compilation entitled *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*. Lastly, I will show that Heidegger’s early and late insights on the holy are most significant because of their close relationship to Being-as-such as presented by Heidegger in his later works.

II. Early Heidegger on “the Holy” as Revealed Through Mysticism

As stated above, the primary endeavor of this paper is an examination of Heidegger’s changing conceptions of the holy, beginning with his insights on the holy from early lecture sketches. In order to clearly understand early Heidegger’s view of the holy, I believe it is most helpful to begin by investigating similarities between his analysis of mysticism in his lecture sketches from 1915/16 and Rudolf Otto’s analysis of

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3 I will also attempt to briefly show that Heidegger’s discussions of mysticism are heavily influenced by Rudolf Otto’s 1917 book *Das Heilige - Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen.*
mysticism from his 1917 work, Das Heilige. It is my contention that their similar understandings of mystical experience, which is essentially a direct encounter with the holy, indicate a similar understanding of what “the holy” is.

Let us proceed by noting relevant similarities between Heidegger’s analysis of mysticism from The Phenomenology of Religious Life and Otto’s analysis of mystical experience from Das Heilige. Firstly, like Otto, Heidegger notes that a particular kind of experience (as opposed to a strictly rational or ethical engagement with the topic or notion of the divine or holy) of the holy is of paramount importance in mysticism. Early Heidegger insists that knowledge of mystical experiences “arises only in actual having-experienced.” This is similar to Otto’s claim that the holy must first be understood through a “unique, original feeling-response.” One’s encounter of the holy comes not through understanding religious concepts or following ethical commands, but through lived experience of this something holy. According to Otto, one can only understand the

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4 Such a comparative analysis is warranted, I claim, because of 1) Heidegger’s explicit analysis of Otto in The Phenomenology of Religious Life and 2) the fact that Heidegger brought Das Heilige to the attention of Husserl as particularly significant and even potentially intended at one point to review this text. (See John Van Buren, “The Earliest Heidegger: A New Field of Research” in A Companion to Heidegger, (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 21.


6 Please note that in discussing Otto’s analysis of the holy here, I sometimes switch out Otto’s original word “numinous” in favor of “the holy”, in order to be terminologically consistent throughout the body of the paper. I am justified in doing so because an experience of the holy is termed by Otto as an experience of “the numinous”. Furthermore, that “something” holy which one experiences directly in mystical experience is termed the “numen” and is described as “numinous”.

holy by feeling the holy “[begin] to stir, to start into life and into consciousness.” As Otto remarks, the holy “cannot... be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind.”

Importantly, for Otto, components of one’s mystical experience reveal essential aspects of that which is encountered in that experience: the holy. Interestingly, Heidegger seems to say a similar thing in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* when he claims that “the determinations of sense of... ‘the absolute’... are to be discovered only in the specific structures of the constituting experience.” So what are these components shared between mystical experience and the holy? In his lecture sketches, Heidegger ties mystic experience to a feeling of mystery, as is clear in his aside about the “mysterious” mystic moment of “unstructured unity of intuition and feeling.” Otto makes the same claim in *Das Heilige* when he notes that the mystic experiences the holy as a “mysterium tremendum.” Otto breaks down this phrase by explicating the two terms it contains. First, the practitioner immersed in mystical experience feels an all-pervasive and awe-inspiring resonance in the presence of the mysterium – or mystery – of the holy, which is “hidden and esoteric... beyond conception or understanding... [and] extraordinary and

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This mysterious element of the holy can be felt, but not conceptualized, and the only proper feeling that the practitioner can have in the face of this encounter with the holy as wholly other is one of stupor and amazement. Otto then goes on to explain that *tremendum* refers to an emotional response which includes (often simultaneous) feelings of awe, majesty, and urgency. The practitioner, in the presence of the holy, trembles with a feeling akin to dread, experiencing the holy as over-flowing, overpowering, and unapproachable. This dread soon turns to a deeper and more profound mystical awe and brings forth a feeling which serves as a “subjective reflection of [the] majesty” and power of the holy. This characterization falls directly into line with Heidegger’s characterization of mystic worship as “exuberant astonishment” and with his description of his investigation into mysticism as a “phenomenology of admiration and astonishment.”

Rudolf Otto continues his description of the *tremendum* of the holy by noting that the practitioner’s experience of profound awe “[points] to something beyond itself [and is] but one moment of a completer experience.” It is in this crucial moment of the experience of the holy - this *tremendum* - the self is no longer understood as an isolated

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14 Otto believes that the holy is mysterious to the mystic because the nature of the holy is “wholly other”. The holy is not mysterious simply because we cannot understand or comprehend it. Rather, its “wholly otherness” resides in the fact that it is of a completely different and incommensurable kind and character than our own (Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 29.)


and differentiated “I” or even as something perfectly real. In mystic experience, the personal self comes to be identified with “the transcendent Reality” and the holy eventually comes to be apprehended by the practitioner as a “plenitude of being.” Essentially, Otto claims that in mystical experience, the mystic practitioner is not a subject experiencing a holy object; rather, this fallen experience of the world is transcended and the practitioner experiences herself as unified with the holy. This sounds very much like Heidegger’s characterization of mystical experience as the “transcendence” of typical experience which he describes as a “loosening up of the subject-sphere.” Here, it is clear that Heidegger believes that the mystical subject in the midst of a mystical experience is immersed in a world that is not driven by the subject/object opposition. In fact, according to Heidegger (and once more, similarly to Otto) the mystic practitioner experiences herself as completely unified with the holy in the culmination of a mystical experience. Heidegger stresses this when he notes that in mystical experience, there is an “absoluteness of object and subject in the sense of radical unity and as such unity of both: I am it and it is I.” Heidegger goes on to claim that claims that in a mystical encounter, “absolute value coincides with absolute oppositionlessness, that is, lack of determination, which is to say coincides with the

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20 Heidegger, The Phenomenology of Religious Life, 238.
object only as the object. Only as such is [the absolute] present to the mystic subject.”

This quote puts forth the claim that the holy – that which is encountered in mystical experience – is encountered as it is in its essence by the mystical subject. The holy it is not experienced as an object for the subject’s perusal, since the focus is on the “absolute oppositionlessness” of “the absolute.” Rather, the holy is experienced as it truly is: as essentially and mysteriously inseparable from the mystic.

Next, Heidegger explicitly mentions the prominence of dwelling or receptivity for the mystic, insisting that “receptivity [is the] originary activity of the religious world” and that “openness to values” is required for mystic experience. This means that in order to come into contact with the holy via mystic experience, one must cultivate an openness and a letting-be so that the holy can show itself. This is related to Otto’s point which insists that in the moment of mystical experience, the practitioner is not encountering some rationally thematized and projected element of the divine. Rather, the holy shows itself to the practitioner engaged in mystical experience in its essence, untainted by the rationalization or projections of the practitioner. This is because the mystic comports himself with a kind of Gelassenheit: a dwelling or letting-be.

At this juncture, it may be helpful to summarize early Heidegger’s conception of the holy as it appears in his lecture sketches on medieval mysticism. Firstly, the holy is

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22 Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 241. – Also, note that “the absolute” here is that which is encountered in mystical experience – in other words, the holy.


encountered through the mystic's experience, and it can be understood properly by a particular individual only if it is experienced directly by that particular individual. In other words, one can only come to grasp the nature and significance of the holy if one comes to encounter it directly through mystical experience. Secondly, components of mystical experience reveal components of the holy for Heidegger; the characteristics or qualities of mystical experience reveal something about the characteristics and qualities of the holy itself. Importantly, it seems that it is only through attempting to understand the mystical experience that one can attempt to understand the nature of the holy in early Heidegger, since he refrains from characterizing the holy itself explicitly. According to Heidegger, mystical encounters are characterized by an experience of mystery, astonishment, and admiration. The mystic is awe-struck and amazed by the incredible nature of the holy. Importantly, the holy evokes these reactions because it itself is mysterious, astonishing, and worthy of admiration. One is overtaken and overwhelmed by the holy because it is and is experienced as full of power, majesty, and an overflowing "plenitude of being.” I believe that the strength of the analogy between Heidegger and Otto's analyses of mysticism is most helpful here, since Otto gives a more thorough and comprehensive description of what the holy evokes and thus, what it might be. For Heidegger, one’s experience of the holy essentially transcends the usual experience of the individual as a subject over and against a world of objects. Instead, in mystical experience, the practitioner is united in a mysterious and profound way with the holy. This unity with the holy is only possible because of a comportment of Gelassenheit – dwelling, receptivity, or openness – on the behalf of the mystical practitioner. The mystic
must be in a relationship of complete openness and letting-be to the holy before the holy will show itself to the mystic.

III. Heidegger on “the Holy” as Revealed Through Art

In order to transition between Heidegger’s earlier and later conceptions of the holy, I would like to show how earth for the artist and the holy for early Heidegger’s mystic are closely related. This will be helpful as a transition between early Heidegger’s insights from 1917 on the holy and later Heidegger’s insights on the holy, which show up in several essays between 1939 and 1968. This comparison will also be beneficial because a discussion of the similarities between the holy and earth will begin to indicate the significance of Heidegger’s early conception of the holy for his long-term projects.

In Heidegger, as mentioned above, mystical experience as an encounter with the holy is an encounter with something that transcends the individual self and his or her purposeful engagement. This notion of a supra-personal element which is experienced through cultivating a comportment of receptivity or dwelling in openness can be found in Heidegger’s 1935 essay entitled “The Origin of the Work of Art.” In this essay, the supra-personal element is Being-as-such or earth as disclosed through the artwork, which comes into an engagement with the individual through its being “worlded” in a particular way by an artist. This “worlding” as the work of the artist is the way in which the artist makes earth intelligible to observers of the artwork. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger notes that “the essential nature of earth, of the unmasterable and self-closing bearer, reveals itself, however, only in its rising up into a world… [The] strife [between earth and world] is fixed… within the work’s figure and becomes manifest through this
figure."\textsuperscript{25} Here it is clear that earth is something which shows itself to the observer of the work of art. Earth for Heidegger is a word that refers to Being-as-such as an overflowing plenitude of being. This overflowing plenitude of being can be revealed only through being made intelligible by an artwork, but importantly, earth transcends the individual human subject as a source of meaning: it is something inherently meaningful that humans are able to come into contact with at particular moments of unconcealment. This is what Heidegger is gesturing at when he discusses truth as unconcealment, claiming that “the unconcealment of beings\textsuperscript{26} puts us into such an essence that all our representing remains set into, and in accordance with, unconcealment… if the unconcealment had not already set us forth into that illuminated realm\textsuperscript{27} in which every being stands for us and from which it withdraws.”\textsuperscript{28} When we are engaged with an artwork in the proper way, earth is unconcealed to the human being as something that was already there and that transcends the subject. Truth as unconcealment in the artwork is therefore closely analogous to the unconcealment of the plenitude of being in mystical experience through an encounter with the holy. In fact, earth, revealed through the “worlding” of the artwork, is the


\textsuperscript{26} Very significantly, in his 1960 revisions to this essay, Heidegger changes “beings” here to “Being” [as] the Event”. This will be important to remember for the discussion of the holy in later Heidegger’s work on Hölderlin’s poetry.

\textsuperscript{27} Here, “illuminated realm” is changed to “clearing” in Heidegger’s 1960 revision.

\textsuperscript{28} Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 29.
“inexhaustible” plenitude of trans-subjective being and in this way, earth itself is markedly similar to the holy as encountered by the mystic. Furthermore, in order to be in an authentic relationship to a work of art according to Heidegger, one must cultivate a comportment of Gelassenheit, or dwelling. As Heidegger claims, “one must transform all familiar relations to world and to earth, and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to dwell within the truth that is happening in the work.” This dwelling is a comportment of receptive openness to the disclosure of truth through the work of art and the disclosure of truth in the work of art is essentially an encounter with the bountiful, excessive richness of meaning offered forth by earth (or Being-as-such). This dwelling with the truth of the work harkens back to the talk of “openness” and “receptivity” which a mystic must cultivate in order to encounter the holy.

Since Being-as-such (in the “Origin” essay, earth) is such a crucial aspect of Heidegger’s thought and since the holy as it is discussed in 1917 shares striking similarities with Being-as-such as it is discussed in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” we can start to understand that Heidegger’s early insights on the holy in mystical experience are actually quite significant and may even show themselves as the seeds of some of the most important and profound themes in his work.

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IV. Later Heidegger on “the Holy” as Revealed Through Poetry

At this point, early Heidegger’s conception of the holy and how its relationship to his later notion of earth indicates a continued influence of the role and function of something like the holy into his middle-late work has been shown. So it is also at this point that one may proceed to look to Heidegger’s later work on Hölderlin to see his mature ideas on the nature of the holy and how human beings come to encounter it. The published essays on Hölderlin that I will be focusing on will be “As When On a Holiday…” and “Remembrance.” I will also bring in analyses of later Heidegger’s notion of the holy in these volumes by Julian Young, John Richardson, and Reiner Schurmann. Perhaps the most obvious place to start an investigation into later Heidegger’s notion of the holy is his 1939 essay on entitled “As When on a Holiday.” The focus of this section will be on that 1939 essay, but the discussion of the holy will include notions from the aforementioned essays on Hölderlin from both 1942 and 1968.

In “As When on a Holiday,” Heidegger begins his interpretation of the poem with a discussion of the role of nature in Hölderlin which, it is crucial to note, seems to share a number of similarities to Being-as-such as conceived of by the later Heidegger. Nature in Hölderlin, according to Heidegger, is that which is “wonderfully all present” and “captivates and enraptures.”31 The “totality of what is real” is a result of nature and nature “withdraws from all producing and nevertheless … passes through everything with

Due at least in part to the omnipresence of nature, nature is “primordial and prior to everything” as that which “inspires everything” and “lets [the] togetherness of everything real appear in its connectedness;” in this function, nature is a “unifying unity.”

The movement of nature is analyzed by Heidegger as that of the ancient Greek concept for nature, φύσις. As φύσις, nature is the “open which has already come to presence in everything;” it is an “emerging… arising… [and] self-opening.” This space which nature opens up is that space in which mortals and immortals are able to encounter one another. Furthermore, nature qua φύσις names a “rising-up which goes-back-into-itself… [and] the coming to presence of that which dwells in the rising-up and thus comes to presence as open.”

Nature in Hölderlin as read by Heidegger is prior to everything and thus primordial. Nature is present in everything and everything that is is a consequence of nature. Since nature has the movement of φύσις, it continually flares up and then retreats back into itself. This “flaring-up” is what Heidegger calls the “coming to presence” of nature, and nature essentially comes to presence as an openness. When nature comes to presence as openness, a clearing is opened up in which human beings and divinities are

32 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 75.
33 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 82.
34 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 82.
35 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 79.
36 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 82.
37 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 79.
able to come into contact with one another in a way that they are usually unable to. Importantly, however, nature does not just reveal itself through a rising-up of presence; it also withdraws from human beings. This time of withdrawal can be understood as nature’s falling back into itself; it is the “downside” of the φύσις curve or the inevitable “falling” after the “rising-up.”

Heidegger’s understanding of nature in Hölderlin is crucial because nature “unveils her own essence as the holy” and is “begotten out of holy chaos.” This means that nature reveals both that her deep essence is the holy and that this essence is borne from itself. Importantly, this means that the holy for Heidegger is in a particularly unique way which includes the fact that it is borne from itself, out of its own openness which is the “gaping out of which the open opens itself.” Since nature reveals herself as the holy, one may apply all of the different characteristics of the nature that Heidegger lists above to his conception of the holy in his later work. In addition to these characteristics, though, Heidegger assigns particular features explicitly to the holy. Some of the “holy” features that Heidegger lists are similar to the aforementioned characteristics of nature. For example, the holy is “primordial, unbroken, and whole… [and] holds in its fabric the essence of all.” Furthermore, the clearing of sorts which nature opens up is identical to that space opened up by the holy. In “Remembrance,” Heidegger notes that “this open

opens itself when there arrives that which is above men and gods, in that, coming from high above, it first lets an open emerge so that something true (unconcealed) can be. This opening in advance is the holy.” ⁴² Here, it is essential to notice that the holy is both the opening of the clearing as a happening and that which gives the open. These similarities between nature and the holy are crucial to mention, but Heidegger importantly expands his discussion past these similarities in his discussion of the relationship between the holy and poets.

According to Heidegger, the holy inspires awe and terror; it is unapproachable and can be disturbing. Although it is unapproachable, human beings are also intimately acquainted with it. The intimacy of the holy, as Heidegger notes, is “the intimacy of that which is nearest.” ⁴³ Since the holy also usually remains concealed, human beings usually fail to notice the nearness of it. There are, however, certain individuals who have special access to the holy. These individuals are the poets, who as “initiated ones” are able to know the holy through “divination.” ⁴⁴ This means that Heidegger believes that poets are capable of discovering the holy via a special kind of intuition which acts as insight into the holy. As Heidegger says in a 1942 essay entitled “Remembrance,” the poets “say the holy.” ⁴⁵ Although the poet has this special relationship to the holy, however, the poet cannot “exhaust [the holy’s] essence or force it to come to him” since the holy in its

⁴² Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 169.
⁴³ Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 95.
⁴⁴ Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 85.
⁴⁵ Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 110.
“richness… grants an excess of meaning as can scarcely be uttered.”46 That is to say: the holy in its inexhaustible fullness offers more meaning to the poet than he can ever convey. Although the poet can “say the holy,” the poet can never say all of the holy or show all of the holy at once. Furthermore, the poet cannot come into contact with the holy without mediation. Mediators between the holy and the poets who are nearer to the holy itself – those whom Heidegger calls “gods” – are required in order to convey the holy to the poets by way of a “lightning-flash.”47 Still, the essence of a poet is not grounded in his reception of this revelatory illumination from the gods; it is grounded in his experience of being fully “embraced” by the holy. This relationship between the gods and the poets is complicated, moreover, because in order for gods to appear, the poet’s saying as a “showing [and] veiling-unveiling”48 is needed. According to Heidegger, the holy is “foretold poetically”49 by the poet and it is this which allows for the gods to appear. The poet must present the holy and “through this saying the gods come to feel themselves. Thus they will bring themselves to appear in the dwelling place of man upon this earth.”50 What this essentially means is that the holy must be conveyed by the gods through the poets without the poets’ realization. As John Richardson notes, “the poets

46 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 87.
47 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 90. – Also, the role of this “lightning-flash” will come to have greater significance as the paper develops.
48 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 218.
49 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 137.
50 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 145.
must proceed in a kind of ‘madness’ in which the gods speak through them.” At the same time, however, the poets themselves are responsible for creating these gods. This is so because the gods are unable to communicate with human beings and convey their divinity without having the poets as a conduit. The poets must unveil the gods in a particular way, and in doing so, the poet allows the gods to “appear.” The poet cannot do this without the gods, however, for the gods are closer to the holy and thus are required for the transmission of the holy first to the poets and ultimately, to other human beings.

Heidegger has more to add on the role that the holy plays in the shaping of history. According to Heidegger, the holy is not something that we encounter as “the empty endurance of something present at hand.” Rather, the arrival of the holy is a happening or an event; it is “the coming of the beginning.” What kind of beginning it is that commences with the revelation of the holy? For Heidegger, it is a new historical beginning. He says this explicitly when he claims that “the holy… grounds another beginning of another history… [essentially] deciding in advance concerning men and gods, whether they are, and who they are, and how they are, and when they are.” This means that the holy, through determining history, determines how men and gods, as historical being, are.

The last aspect of the holy to be discussed here is the proper comportment to the


52 Who or what these gods are and the significance of their transmission of the holy will be left for a few paragraphs later.

53 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 96.

54 Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, 97-8.
holy. This proper comportment is introduced through a discussion of what is properly poetic. In this discussion, Heidegger claims such a comportment is “dwelling,” or Gelassenheit. Poets for Heidegger must “point out the poetic itself and found it as the ground of all dwelling.”\(^{55}\) That is to say that in order to be able to cultivate a comportment of receptive openness, the poet first must open up a special kind of access to the holy as a space or clearing in which one may dwell. As Julian Young mentions in an essay on Heidegger on “Der Ister,” “the holy… [as] that which is to be poeticized… grants possibility of human dwelling.”\(^{56}\) Heidegger’s most explicit treatment of dwelling as a comportment to the holy is found in his essay “Remembrance,” in discussion of the holy in relation to a wedding festival from Hölderlin’s work which is noted as “the primal event (Ereignis)... in which the holy greets, and in the greeting appears.”\(^{57}\) The holy rises up and greets one through the primal event of the festival and this greeting lets the wedding festival be what it is.\(^{58}\) This greeting that Heidegger mentions is what he calls the “primordial greeting” of the “letting-be of a being in its being.”\(^{59}\) Therefore, the


\(^{57}\) Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, 126.

\(^{58}\) As John Richardson mentions in his book *Heidegger*, when the holy reveals itself through particular gods to the poets – here, I contend that the festival seems to be one such “god” – an “angle of receptiveness” (353) characteristic of the comportment of dwelling is required.

\(^{59}\) Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, 126.
rising-up of the holy as an event opens up a clearing in which one is able to dwell with holy, or let the holy be.

It should be rather clear by this point that Heidegger’s discussion of the holy in Hölderlin closely resembles his picture of Being-as-such. Indeed, at this juncture I would like to assert that the holy is none other than Being-as-such, and most importantly, Being-as-such as it discloses itself in the “event of en-owning,” or Ereignis. This claim even seems to be supported by Heidegger himself in his 1946 “Letter on ‘Humanism’” when he notes that the holy as the “essential space of divinity… comes to shine only when being itself beforehand and after long preparation has been lighted and is experienced in its truth.”\(^{60}\)

It may be helpful to explicitly draw a comparison between the holy and Being-as-such here by reviewing the nature of Being-as-such and human beings’ relationship to it. For Heidegger, Being-as-such is that which is primordial and all-present; just like the holy, its presence is imbued in everything and it “holds in its fabric the essence of all”. Being is both that which is nearest to human beings and also that which is farthest away. Although human beings “have” Being, it is difficult for them to properly encounter Being; it is the hardest thing for human beings to see precisely because it is that which is closest to them. Being both conceals itself in its withdrawal and shows itself as a self-opening: it is the condition of the possibility of truth as unconcealment. All of Being, however, can never be unconcealed at once; because it is an overfull richness and

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inexhaustible plenitude, only particular snapshots of being can be disclosed at any given time.

Importantly, both the holy and Being-as-such play a world-historical role in Heidegger. It has already been mentioned that the holy for later Heidegger commences a new historical beginning. Through determining history, the holy determines the way that human beings are, just as human beings’ fundamental sense of reality of human beings in any given epoch is shaped by the way that Being-as-such shows up within that epoch. In essence, a particular facet of Being-as-such is revealed through a particular metaphysical worldview, and that metaphysical worldview “provides a temporarily unshakable understanding of what and how entities are.” This means that the way that Being-as-such manifests in a particular metaphysical worldview determines how human beings understand themselves and their world for that particular period.

Additionally, the way in which human beings relate and come to encounter Being is also similar to the way that they relate and come to encounter the holy. First of all, just like in the case of the holy, there have to be mediators between human beings and Being in the form of “gods.” One may ask: given the above reading of the holy, what should one make of all of Heidegger’s seemingly abstract talk of gods and poets in regards to Being? As Iain Thomson suggests, we can understand gods in later Heidegger as great works which are able to “fundamentally [transform] an historical community’s ‘understanding

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of being.”

If we think of gods as those works able to transform our understanding of being, then we can understand these works as needing a conduit or creator: in this case, the poet. What is conveyed through the works as gods, however, cannot just be an expression of the poet; it must be a particular disclosure of Being-as-such or, as Heidegger calls Being-as-such in his *Elucidations*: the holy. The poets act as a conduit for the gods, which disclose the holy. In this way, the gods need the poets in order to reach other human beings and the poet needs the “divine inspiration” of the gods who are nearer to the holy (or Being-as-such). This is very similar to the way that an artist, for Heidegger, discloses Being-as-such in the work. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the artist acts as a kind of vessel for the work of art, which discloses Being-as-such in a particular way. One sees, then, that mediation is needed for the disclosure of both the holy and Being-as-such. It should also be noted that certain special individuals are able to disclose either the holy or Being. The poets disclose the holy through the poem as a “god” of sorts, and the artist discloses Being through the work of art as a “god” of sorts in the way the artist “worlds” the earth. Yet in both of these cases, the disclosure comes from beyond the individual who creates the work; Being speaks *through* these individuals and it is because of this that such individuals are able to convey such deeply meaningful aspects of this Being.

We can also relate Heidegger’s notions of the holy and Being if we turn to his essay entitled “The Turning”, originally presented as a 1949 lecture in which Heidegger discusses the turning of the danger of Being:

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In this turning, the clearing belonging to the essence of being suddenly clears itself and lights up. This sudden self-lighting is the **lightning-flash** [*das Blitzen*]. It brings itself into its own brightness, which it itself both brings along and brings in. When, in the turning of the danger, the truth of being flashes, the essence of being clears and lights itself up.

Here, Heidegger calls the self-lighting of Being a “lightning-flash”. The essence of Being is shown in truth when Being lights itself up and unconceals itself. This lightning-flash seems to me to be the primordial Event of *Ereignis* in which Being-as-such is given and then re-appropriated by human beings, which allows them to come into their own being.

should harken back to his discussion of the poet and the gods in “As When on a Holiday.” In this essay, Heidegger claims that the gods “throw the lightning-flash” of the holy into the soul of the poet. I believe that the use of this image is not accidental in these two separate essays. In fact, the “lightning-flash” thrown into the poet’s soul by the gods is the happening of the holy as an Event in which the holy is given in a particular way that allows for the re-appropriation of the holy, much like the event of the “lightning-flash” which illuminates Being from “The Turning.” This shows that the discussion of the holy in *Elucidations* as that which must be given in *Ereignis* - an “event of en-owning” – is directly parallel to Heidegger’s discussion of Being which needs to be given in a similar (if not identical) kind of event. Just as the illumination of the holy by way of a lightning-flash handed to the poet by the gods gives the holy, Heidegger’s

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63 Emphasis mine.

*Ereignis* “gives Being... [and] accomplishes Being properly.”

Another crucial similarity between the holy in later Heidegger and Being-as-such is that the proper comportment that one ought to have towards both of these is one of *Gelassenheit*, or dwelling. As Reiner Schurmann notes, *Gelassenheit* “names Being’s way to be”: that is to say, Being “lets beings be.”

Since Being’s way to be is one of dwelling, then in order to encounter Being in a meaningful way, human beings must also cultivate this profound receptivity and openness. As Schurmann claims, dwelling is a “condition for a thing’s truth to happen,” and so in order for the truth of Being as unconcealment to show itself, human beings must foster a comportment of dwelling. This mirrors the way in which one must cultivate an openness for the holy in order for the holy to be revealed.

V. Turning Back to Early Heidegger on the Holy: the Overall Significance of the Holy in Mysticism for Heidegger’s Projects

The investigation and analysis of how Heidegger’s conception of the holy develops from his early work to his later work is now completed, and so at this point it is worthwhile to note the significance of such a project for understanding Heidegger. It is my claim – and I believe I have shown – that the insights Heidegger has regarding the holy in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* foreshadow some of the most important


67 Schurmann, “Heidegger and Meister Eckhart on Releasement,” 315
ideas and themes of his later philosophy. One can see that the qualities and characteristics of the holy in early Heidegger share a similarity with earth in his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art.” In turn, the qualities and characteristics of earth (as well as the way that human beings encounter it) in this essay anticipate the qualities and characteristics of the holy in Heidegger’s later works. The holy in Heidegger’s later works, however, seems to be a drawn-out metaphor for Being-as-such, while the rising-up of the holy seems to be identical to the event of Being-as-such qua a self-opening unconcealment which is then able to be appropriated for human beings to come into their own. It should be clear, then, that to ignore the role and function of Heidegger’s religious notions – such as the holy in both his early and later work – would be a grave error. If one glosses over the holy in Heidegger’s early works, then one is bound to miss the presence of some of his earliest insights that point towards his much later idea of Being-as-such. If one does not subject the notion of the holy in Heidegger’s later works to a more thorough analysis, then one is bound to miss what is perhaps Heidegger’s most concrete discussion of Being-as-such.