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## Article

# The Unity and Fragmentation of Being: Hölderlin's Metaphysics of Life

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**Abstract:** Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) is widely known as a poet and sometimes described as a poet's poet (Heidegger). However, more recent interpretations, undertaken by Dieter Henrich, Michael Franz and others, have shown that he was a genuine philosopher as well, who had an original conception of the relation between art, poetry and metaphysics, with neo-Platonic and theological roots. This paper reconstructs Hölderlin's ideas and their relation to those of Kant and Fichte. Hölderlin emerges, on the interpretation offered here, as a metaphysician of life, a poet of the biosphere and as such most relevant to our present-day predicament.

**Keywords:** Hölderlin; poetry; metaphysics; Earth; Kant; Fichte; Schelling; Michael Franz; Dieter Henrich; reason; freedom; beauty; aesthetics; Hyperion; Hegel; German idealism; logic; subject and predicate; Plato; Platonism; neo-Platonism; climate change; environment; intellectual intuition

## 1. Kant on the Fragmentation of Human Reason

After many years of silence and reflection, Immanuel Kant published the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781 (Kant [1781] 1787). As he explained in the second preface, published in 1787, the book aims to initiate a 'Copernican revolution' in metaphysics. Instead of explaining our reason and experience as answering to how the world itself is and evolves, we must explain the world of experience as a result of the structure and activity of our reason. This seems to be very much in line with Enlightenment optimism, indeed a form of Prometheanism: human reason is not a passive receptacle of what is out there, but is active and autonomous, and has world-making powers. In fact, however, Kant's revolution is more ambivalent. It is in one sense a demolition of human reason, of her highest aspirations. As Kant wrote in the first preface of the *Critique*.

Die menschliche Vernunft hat das besondere Schicksal in einer Gattung ihrer Erkenntnisse: daß sie durch Fragen belästigt wird, die sie nicht abweisen kann, denn sie sind ihr durch die Natur der Vernunft selbst aufgegeben, die sie aber auch nicht beantworten kann, denn sie übersteigen alles Vermögen der menschlichen Vernunft. (Avii)

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.

It is tempting to pass over these first lines of the *Critique*. However, this would be a mistake. They capture the deeper story of the book, the attitude with which it was written. For those of a more poetic or religious mindset, who cannot resist reason's promise to attain the absolute, these lines express a radical cognitive pessimism, implying a tragic, almost unbearable verdict: our reason will be forever condemned to ask a certain type of questions, while being too limited to ever answer them. These are the questions of



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metaphysics, the greatest questions of all: Is there a God? Do we have an immortal soul? Do we have free will? Is the world as a whole finite or infinite? Knowledge about these things is unattainable, Kant believes and will set out to argue in detail in the book. Genuine knowledge must involve intuition and the intellect (B76, B146). Intuition is the cognitive capacity to have an object given to me directly, without conceptual mediation. To have knowledge about God, my will, the soul and the world as a whole, my relevant intuitions would have to be non-sensory, because God, the will, the soul and the world are not objects of the senses. So, my intuition would have to be a priori, a faculty of the pure intellect. It would have to be intellectual intuition, and since it would not rely on the senses, intellectual intuition would be certain.

However, humans do not possess intellectual intuition, Kant argues (B71f., B148f., B307). Only God does (and maybe angel-like creatures). As Kant already wrote in his dissertation of 1770 (*De mundi sensibilis*), ‘An intuition of the intellectual domain is not possible for humans [...]. For our intuition is passive, and hence only possible insofar as something affects our senses, in contrast to the divine intuition’ (§10, Ak 2:396)<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, as Kant explains in the first *Critique*, our intuition is sensorial and separate from our intellect. Neither the senses by themselves nor the intellect by itself can achieve genuine knowledge. Only in combination can the senses and the intellect achieve knowledge; but because our senses give us a limited perspective on things, the only knowledge we can have is knowledge of appearances, of how things appear to us, not noumenal knowledge, not knowledge of how things are in themselves. Since the pure intellect is not capable, by itself, of intuition, when the intellect is deprived of sensory input, it constructs ‘bloße Gedankenformen’ (B148), futile, fantastic aberrations—empty illusions of pure reason, metaphysics in the bad sense of the word.<sup>2</sup> The *Critique of Pure Reason* is thus a work stressing the insurmountable division within human reason, the abyss between what it is driven to want to know and what it can know.<sup>3</sup> No theory, scientific or metaphysical, will ever give us knowledge of things-in-themselves. Subject and (noumenal) object will always be separated.<sup>4</sup>

Kant’s insistence on the limitation and fragmentation of human reason did not stop here. He maintained similar divisions in his practical philosophy and his theory of judgment. We can only know ourselves as objects of nature, i.e., as causally determined objects. However, rational agency requires us to think of ourselves as free agents, and also as immortal, for without these two assumptions, given the contingency and wretchedness of this world, we cannot make sense of having moral responsibility for our actions, nor aim for moral perfection. This points to an insurmountable division between our limited physical and psychological constitution and the infinite demands of rationality and morality. In addition, Kant argues in the *Critique of Judgment*, our scientific take on the universe provides us only with causal laws, laws about objects considered as mere chunks of matter, irrespective of whether they are alive or dead. However, our aesthetic and teleological judgements tell us that there is beauty and purpose in the world—again an insurmountable division, between what is scientifically knowable and what our reason desires to see in the world.

## 2. Fichte’s Attempt at Reunification

As they called for moderation and humility, Kant’s arguments for the multiple divisions within human reason were difficult to accept by the younger generation of German philosophers. The need for a philosophy of unification emerged even before Kant’s death, at the end of the 18th century. Fichte was among the first to attempt a metaphysical system overcoming Kant’s divisions. (Reinhold was another such figure). Like Kant, Fichte did not think that human reason can be unified from a purely theoretical point of view.

However, Fichte believed that it can be unified in the realm of the practical, of action. In the *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge* (*Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*), published in 1794/5, he presented the most fundamental principle of metaphysics. This principle is  $I = I$  (Ego = Ego). From the principle  $I = I$ , Fichte claimed to be able to derive, in combination with two further principles, every possible claim about the unity of reality, i.e., every metaphysical claim.<sup>5</sup>

What is now this ' $I = I$ '? It is not simply a purely theoretical proposition, an identity statement expressing a truth. Rather, it is a judgment, and as such an act. Everything starts with an action (judging). Since the essence of the  $I$  is to be self-conscious, the  $I$  judges itself to be  $I$ , 'posits' itself. Ontologically, for Fichte, this is the most fundamental act, and it is an act of identity or union. As Fichte puts it,

[Das Ich] ist zugleich das Handelnde, und das Product der Handlung; das Thätige, und das, was durch die Thätigkeit hervorgebracht wird; Handlung und That sind Eins und ebendasselbe; und daher ist das: *Ich bin*, Ausdruck einer Thathandlung; aber auch der einzig-möglichen (Fichte [1794] 1988, p. 16).

[The  $I$ ] is at once the agent and the product of the action; what is active and what is produced by the activity; action and deed are one and the same; and therefore the: *I am* is the expression of a deed-action, but also of the uniquely possible one.

However, the  $I = I$  is also epistemologically the most fundamental act. Since the  $I$  is at once agent and product of the action, there is no difference between what the  $I$  is and what the  $I$  recognises. In  $I = I$ , the  $I$  is given to itself without any mediation—and thus without any employment of the senses. This is just what Kant described as intellectual intuition: non-sensory, immediate, absolutely certain knowledge. Indeed, Fichte describes the fundamental act  $I = I$  as intellectual intuition, as the act offering the highest evidence. It is immediately evident, not simply as a mere knowable fact, but as and because it is an act, and therefore neither in need nor capable of any demonstration, because it is 'the immediate consciousness that I act and how I act', 'the only secure standpoint of philosophy' ('das unmittelbare Bewußtsein, daß ich handle, und was ich handle'; 'der einzige feste Standpunkt für alle Philosophie') (Fichte [1797] 1845, pp. 463, 466).

Since agent and product are identical in the deed-action, there is no insurmountable division between subject and object any longer, neither ontologically nor epistemologically. Kant's idea of a thing-in-itself, an object entirely separated from the subject, is absurd, for something can be an object only with respect to a subject. Hence, there is nothing outside of the  $I$ . Fichte thus rejects Kant's claim that the realm of things-in-themselves is inaccessible to us. The  $I$  is absolute; with it, everything starts. Historically, this is the first formulation of absolute idealism.

However, we need to be careful: subject and object are reconciled only in the absolute  $I$  (Ego), the  $I$  which does not exist in space and time. In other words, subject and object are reconciled in God, but they are not reconciled in the empirical  $I$ , in you or me, which Fichte calls 'the empirical consciousness' (Fichte [1794] 1988, p. 12ff). Even if the deed-action is absolutely free, it does not follow that the individual subject is absolutely free. Man's struggle for freedom evolves on a path from the deed-action 'to the infinite and supra-sensory' ('zum Unendlichen und Übersinnlichen'; (Fichte [1797] 1845, p. 468). It is the process of the reconciliation of the absolute  $I$  and the empirical  $I$ , in other words: God and man. Nevertheless, this struggle is a never-ending process, an infinite progress or striving<sup>6</sup>, which is rather similar to what Kant had also assumed and expressed through his postulate of the immortality of the soul.

### 3. Hölderlin

#### 3.1. Hölderlin's Response to Fichte

In taking the self-conscious, self-judging I as the foundation of metaphysics, Fichte overcame Kant's divisions by giving primacy to practical philosophy over theoretical philosophy. However, the Kantian–Fichtean idea of an infinite progress as a form of overcoming our fragmentations left some in the younger generation wanting. (And we should not underestimate the promise of ultimate salvation the French Revolution represented for these young men). Among the students following Fichte's lectures in Jena in 1794–1795 was a young man, Friedrich Hölderlin, who was particularly, and painfully, aware of the dilemmas of humanity, the tension between the infinite demands of reason and morality, and our finitude. As he explained in a letter at the time, humanity's goal is to reach 'the utmost highest morality':

'Weil aber dieses Ziel auf Erden unmöglich, weil es in keiner Zeit erreicht werden kann; weil wir uns nur in einem unendlichen Fortschritte ihm nähern können, so ist der Glaube an eine *unendliche* Fortdauer nothwendig, weil der *unendliche* Fortschritt im Guten unwidersprechliche Forderung unseres Gesezes ist, diese unendliche Fortdauer ist aber nicht denkbar ohne den Glauben an einen Herrn der Natur, dessen Wille dasselbe will, was das Sittengesetz in uns gebietet [. . .]. Und so gründet sich auf das heilige Gesez in uns der vernünftige Glaube an Gott und Unsterblichkeit [. . .]' (Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 577).<sup>7</sup>

'But since this goal is impossible on Earth, since it cannot be reached in a finite time; since we can only approach it through infinite progress, faith in an *infinite* duration is necessary, because *infinite* progress towards the good is the unquestionable demand of our law. But this infinite existence is impossible without faith in a lord of nature, whose will wants the same as what the moral law prescribes to us [. . .]. And thus the rational faith in God and immortality is grounded upon the sacred law in us [. . .]'.

To those in the Anglophone world interested in classical German literature, Hölderlin is known today as the author of the novel *Hyperion*, of monumental odes and elegies, of the incomplete play *Empedocles*, of translations from Pindar and Sophocles. To those interested in so-called continental philosophy, he is known most likely through Heidegger's later work, who devoted numerous lectures and essays to Hölderlin's poetic work. Heidegger attempted to understand Hölderlin from the perspective of his, Heidegger's, own philosophy of Being, presenting him as a poet's poet, a poet of the darkness of our times, mourning the flight of the gods and offering us some prophetic insights of better times to come. Nevertheless, only more recent work, by German scholars such as Dieter Henrich, Manfred Frank and Michael Franz, has demonstrated that Hölderlin was also a genuine thinker, whose ideas were expressed both in his poetic work and in theoretical writings neglected so far (Henrich 1997; Frank 1997; Franz 2012). What is more, these philosophical ideas emerged in response to the problem of division and unity of human reason posed by Kant and Fichte, offering a unique account of the relation between metaphysics, art and poetry.

I return to Hölderlin's encounter with Fichte in 1794–1795. Initially, in November 1794, Hölderlin's enthusiasm about Fichte could not be greater. He described Fichte as 'the soul of Jena', a man of a depth and energy of the mind never encountered before (letter to Neuffer, Nov. 1794) (Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 553). Hölderlin was hopeful that Fichte could overcome Kant's divisions, but very soon, in January 1795, in a letter to Hegel, Hölderlin already put his finger on the most critical issue in Fichte's metaphysics.<sup>8</sup> We saw that Fichte claimed that the I is absolute, because every object presupposes, apparently, a subject to begin with. However, Fichte does not seem to have considered that the reverse is also necessary, that a subject is inconceivable without a pre-given object. Hölderlin writes the following:

‘[...] sein absolutes Ich (=Spinozas Substanz) enthält alle Realität; es ist alles, u. außer ihm ist nichts; es giebt also für dieses abs. Ich kein Object, denn sonst wäre nicht alle Realität in ihm; ein Bewußtsein ohne Object ist aber nicht denkbar, und wenn ich selbst dieses Object bin, so bin ich als solches notwendig beschränkt, sollte es auch nur in der Zeit seyn, also nicht absolut; also ist in dem absoluten Ich kein Bewußtsein denkbar, als absolutes Ich hab ich kein Bewußtsein, und insofern ich kein Bewußtsein habe, insofern bin ich (für mich) nichts, also das absolute Ich ist (für mich) Nichts’ (Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 568f.).

‘[...] his absolute I (= Spinoza’s substance) contains all reality; it is everything, and beyond it there is nothing; there is then no object for this absolute I, for otherwise not all of reality would be in him; but a consciousness without an object is inconceivable, for if I myself am this object, then I am necessarily limited, be it even as existing in time, and hence not absolute; it follows that no consciousness is conceivable in the absolute I, that, as an absolute I, I don’t have any consciousness, and since I have no consciousness, I am (for myself) nothing; therefore, the absolute I is (for me) nothing’.

Two aspects of this passage are noteworthy. First, it serves as a persuasive refutation of Fichte’s metaphysics of the absolute I. Second, the passage points to Hölderlin’s own metaphysical ideas, soon to be developed by him.

Concerning the first point, we notice that Hölderlin’s argument is a *reductio ad absurdum* of Fichte’s metaphysics. (As a side note, it is also a refutation of Spinoza). The argument contains a somewhat implicit premise: consciousness is intentional, i.e., necessarily requires an object of which I am conscious. This implies that I must be distinct from the object of which I am conscious. With this made explicit, the argument can be now rephrased by means of three premises:

1. The absolute I is conscious.
2. Everything that is conscious is conscious of something other than itself.
3. The absolute I contains everything there is.

Conclusion 1: 1, 2 and 3 are inconsistent

Conclusion 2: There is no absolute I.

This argument suggests that at least up to this point, Hölderlin rejects metaphysical claims in a way reminiscent of Kant’s ‘Transcendental Dialectic’, for it sounds as if Hölderlin is suggesting that the concept of an absolute I is a mere concoction of pure reason, without having any knowable reality (‘objective reality’ in Kant’s terms). Kant had argued in this manner in the ‘Paralogisms of Pure Reason’, and Kant had also shown that we cannot obtain any knowledge about God understood as an all-encompassing reality, an *omnitude realitatis* (B599ff.). In Kant’s view, God (or the concept of God) is at best the idea of an all-encompassing reality, a transcendental idea or ideal—a concept we need in order to make sense of human reason as a whole. More prosaically put, God is just a regulative concept.<sup>9</sup> Fichte, then, had abused the concepts of the ‘I’ (the soul) and of God, and fused them together illicitly.<sup>10</sup>

However, upon reflection, we may think that Hölderlin is not quite as Kantian as this may seem. For he only rejects Fichte’s attempt to establish a metaphysical system, but not the very possibility of such a system. The passage quoted above points in fact to Hölderlin’s own metaphysical ideas. It suggests that there must be something prior to the subject, that for the subject, for consciousness to be possible, something else must already be there. In the metaphysical order of things, the subject cannot be the first to come. Does the object come first? No. The object cannot be the first to come either, because, if Fichte was right, an object cannot be conceived without a subject either. So, subject and object are necessarily linked to each other, and none is prior to the other. Rather, something must come prior to



subject *and* object, a ‘third’ thing, or rather, something more primordial, something which makes both subject and object possible.

Why so? Why cannot subject and object be co-primordial, as a first principle which happens to be two-fold? There are two answers to this in Hölderlin’s early writings. I will call the first ‘existentialist’, the second ‘logical–metaphysical’.

### 3.2. *The Existentialist Answer*

The existentialist answer concerns the place in which Hölderlin locates the subject–object division. Remember Fichte’s distinction between the empirical and the non-empirical level, between the absolute and the empirical I. This distinction is of little concern to Hölderlin. He is, in a sense, more down to Earth than Fichte. His focus is the empirical I, the finite, living, suffering human being.<sup>11</sup> He locates the subject–object division at the level of actual human existence. The human subject necessarily needs an external object, from which it is divided. This is because the human subject is characterised by two conflicting impulses. First, the striving for boundless activity, for the obtaining, in theory and practice, of every possible object. (To quote the British band Queen: ‘I want it all’). Second, the human subject has inscribed into it the very limitation of this activity—and this limitation just is what an object is. For if there were no external object with which our boundless activity would clash, there could not be any consciousness (cf. his argument against Fichte above). Consequently, two tendencies make up our essence: the tendency to overcome all resistance (Fichte’s infinite progress), but also the tendency to limit, to individuate ourselves, caused by the resistance of external objects (see Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 578).

What all this means is that the division between me, the subject, and them, the objects, is necessary for me to be exactly the creature that I am. Therefore, the strife between the two tendencies makes us into what we are, make up our human dignity. Hölderlin expresses this insight in a more poetic language in a preliminary version of his novel *Hyperion*, written at the beginning of 1795:

‘Nun fühlen wir die Schranken unsers Wesens, und die gehemmte Kraft sträubt sich ungeduldig gegen ihre Fesseln und der Geist sehnt sich zum ungetrübten Äther zurück. Doch ist in uns auch wieder etwas, das die Fesseln gerne trägt; denn würde der Geist von keinem Widerstande beschränkt, wir fühlten uns und andre nicht.

Sich aber nicht zu fühlen, ist der Tod. Die Armut der Endlichkeit ist unzertrennlich in uns vereinigt mit dem Überflusse der Göttlichkeit’ (Hölderlin 1992, vol. I, p. 525f.).

‘We feel the limits of our own nature, and our constrained power rebels impatiently against its fetters, and the spirit longs to return to the unclouded ether. But there is also something in us, which willingly bears the fetters; for if the spirit were not bounded by some resistance, we would not feel ourselves and others.

But this is death: not to feel oneself. The poverty of finiteness is inseparably united with the abundance of the divinity’.

It is clear then why the subject–object division cannot be metaphysically primordial: it is a mere division at the empirical, contingent, fallen level of human existence and the physical world. There is nothing particularly superior, meta-physical, about this empirical level. In fact, we need to explain how human existence and the physical world could have emerged at all. In asking this question, Hölderlin is still in line with Kant, for whom such a question was certainly intelligible. However, in giving a positive answer to this question, he transgresses what Kant took to be within the powers of human reason. Hölderlin resorts to this end to a philosophical tradition much preceding Kant, as we shall see.

The existentialist argument is purely negative: it only tells us that the *empirical* subject–object division cannot provide us with something metaphysically primordial. What can? Of course, Hölderlin’s works are full of references to the divine, the gods, Christ, and so on.

Indeed, in the passage just quoted, Hölderlin speaks about something superior, ‘divinity’, from whose ‘free flight our spirit has abated and sunk towards earth from the ether’ (‘sich aus dem freien Fluge verlor, und sich erdwärts neigte vom Äther’; I:525). This religious talk might not impress those with a secular mindset today. However, Hölderlin also offers a rational argument as to why there must be something preceding the subject–object division. This is the argument which I would like to call ‘logical–metaphysical’.

### 3.3. The Logical–Metaphysical Answer

The argument can be stated thus: To think of *two*, one must be able to think of *one* first. If there are two things, they must be connected, and that connection is what will provide unity and make two possible. Hence, we must start with *one*.

We find a version of this argument in the short text “Being, Judgment, Modality” (“Sein, Urteil, Modalität”), possibly written in spring 1795.<sup>12</sup> Hölderlin writes in the first section:

‘[1] *Seyn* -, drückt die Verbindung des Subjects und Objects aus’ (Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 49).

‘[1] *Being*—expresses the joining of subject and object’.

Before I offer an interpretation of this statement, I would like to note that there is a fundamental unclarity about it, which Hölderlin inherits from the tradition. Terms such as ‘subject’ and ‘object’ can be taken in different senses, especially a grammatical, a logical and a metaphysical or ontological sense. We can speak of the subject and object (or predicate) of a sentence. In ‘Trump is a felon’, the subject, or more precisely the subject-term, is the name ‘Trump’ and the object-term or predicate is ‘a felon’, both terms being joined or connected by the copula ‘is’, which is a *word* and verb. Logicians, at least in the Aristotelian tradition, also speak of a copula, although it is less clear what that is if it is not a word. Nevertheless, if we take ‘subject’ and ‘object’ in the metaphysical or ontological sense, then the subject of the sentence ‘Trump is a felon’ is not the name ‘Trump’, but the actual man, Trump, and the object is not the object-term or predicate ‘a felon’, but, presumably, the concept felon. The question may now arise as to what the copula or connection between Trump and the concept felon is. However, this is a wrongheaded question, based on the assumption that there is a parallel structure between the sentence ‘Trump is a felon’ and what this sentence expresses or describes (a proposition, a (possible) fact, etc.; there is no agreement on this). However, this assumption is unwarranted. Just because there is, at the grammatical level, a copula, a word connecting the subject and predicate in the sentence ‘Trump is a felon’, it does not mean that there must be a corresponding copula or connection at the ontological level. The copula is not the name of a relation between the subject and the object (real entities in the world), whether concerning true or false judgments, but just a word that connects certain terms in certain sentences with one another. The relation between Trump and the concept felon is rather one of subsumption, of an object falling under a concept, which is not at all a connecting or joining of Trump with that concept.<sup>13</sup> To speak of an object falling under a concept, as in this example, just means that Trump *is* a felon, that ‘felon’ is a term that describes him correctly.

In short, Hölderlin commits a fundamental fallacy here, that of projecting features of our language onto the metaphysical structure of the world.<sup>14</sup> It follows that there is no such thing as *the* unity or division between subject and object (predicate). Nevertheless, I shall not press this point too much. I will first try to reconstruct Hölderlin’s train of thought, inchoate as it may appear to be, and then show how we can give his talk about unity and division a charitable and coherent reading devoid of any problematic logical–metaphysical baggage.

How are we then to understand Hölderlin’s statement above, especially the term ‘Being’ occurring in it? We know since Aristotle that ‘Being’ is predicated in many senses. ‘Being’ may mean identity, as in ‘Zorro is Don Diego’, or existence, as in ‘God is’, or the



copula in a judgment, as in 'Ilham Aliyev is wicked'. Which of these senses is Hölderlin's? Identity must be excluded, since Hölderlin says so in the third paragraph of the first section, in which he expands upon his argument against Fichte. Consciousness, he suggests, presupposes the distinction between subject and object, and even self-consciousness presupposes this, namely as the distinction between the I as subject and the I as object. Consequently, Being is not identity, not even the identity of 'I = I', and it is therefore not self-consciousness either. (This brings *Bewußtseinsphilosophie* to an end almost before it can take off.). Being is also not existence, for it makes even less sense to say that existence expresses the joining of subject and object.

What remains is the copula. Indeed, this is what Being seems to amount to here. However, the copula is merely a logical term, while subject and object are epistemological and metaphysical terms. In traditional Aristotelian logic, the copula is the connecting element between the subject-term and the predicate-term in a judgment, for instance in 'All men are mortal'. Without a copula, there could not be a judgment, and we could not distinguish between subject and predicate. Hence, the copula is, in a way, the ground of possibility of all judgments, of the connection and distinction between subject and predicate. No copula, no judgment, no subject and predicate.

This is all mere logic. What Hölderlin now does is to sublimate the copula, i.e., he elevates it from the sphere of logic to the sphere of metaphysics. Being is an 'ontological copula', as it were: it is that which makes the connection between subject and object possible. This also means that Being is what makes the division or separation between subject and object possible. This is exactly what Hölderlin argues in the section on judgment:

'[2] *Urtheil*. ist im höchsten und strengsten Sinn die ursprüngliche Trennung des in der intellectualen Anschauung innigst vereinigten Objects und Subjects, diejenige Trennung, wodurch erst Object und Subject möglich wird, die Ur=Theilung. Im Begriffe der Theilung liegt schon der Begriff der gegenseitigen Beziehung des Objects und Subjects aufeinander, und die nothwendige Voraussetzung eines Ganzen wovon Object und Subject die Theile sind. «Ich bin Ich» ist das passendste Beispiel zu diesem Begriffe der Ur=theilung, als *Theoretischer Urtheilung*, denn in der praktischen Urtheilung setzt es sich dem *Nichtich*, nicht *sich selbst* entgegen' (Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 50).

'[2] *Judgment*. is in the highest and strictest sense the original separation of subject and object most intimately united in intellectual intuition, the very separation which first makes object and subject possible, the Ur=Theilung [the original division/judging]. The concept of Theilung [division] entails already the concept of the reciprocal relation of object and subject to one another, and the necessary presupposition of a whole of which object and subject are the parts. «I am I» is the most appropriate example for this concept of Ur=theilung, as *theoretical Urtheilung*, for in practical Urtheilung it posits itself as opposed to the *Non-I*, not to *itself*'.

Judgment, then, comes after Being, itself a unity. Division enters the stage only with judgment. Hence, Being itself is not divided. It precedes any division. This is exactly what Hölderlin writes:

'Wo Subject und Object schlechthin, nicht nur zum Theil vereinigt ist, mithin so vereinigt, daß gar keine Theilung vorgenommen werden kan, ohne das Wesen desjenigen, was getrennt werden soll, zu verletzen, da und sonst nirgends kann von einem *Seyn schlechthin* die Rede seyn, wie es bei der intellectualen Anschauung der Fall ist' (Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 49).

'Where subject and object are absolutely, not just partially, united, hence so united that no division can be undertaken without damaging/injuring the essence of the thing that is to be separated, in such a case and not otherwise can we talk of a *Being simpliciter*, as is the case with intellectual intuition'.

Henrich understands this passage as saying that Being is undifferentiated, because it is ‘inaccessible to any separation’ (Henrich 2003, p. 293). It is true that Being is not separated, rather united, but is Being not differentiated? In some sense, it must be differentiated, if not in the sense of separation or division. However, in what other sense can subject and object be differentiated, if not by separation or division? If it is inaccessible to any separation, then how can judgement introduce separation after all? Admittedly, this is obscure.

### 3.4. Life and Freedom

At this stage, it is helpful to look more closely at the German original. We have the following:

‘Wo Subject und Object schlechthin, [...] vereinigt ist, [...] so daß gar keine Theilung vorgenommen werden kan, ohne das Wesen desjenigen, was getrennt werden soll, zu verletzen’.

Various translators render ‘verlezen’ as ‘to damage’ or ‘to violate’.<sup>15</sup> A more literal translation is ‘to injure’ or ‘to harm’. This is crucial, for it indicates that the union between subject and object is a *living* union. This is of course true: to divide up a living organism is to injure, to harm it. Does Hölderlin mean by ‘Being’ simply ‘life’? Michael Franz has made this crucial suggestion, pointing to several pieces of evidence in Hölderlin’s writings, especially in the novel *Hyperion*, completed early in 1797 (Franz 2011, p. 229, 2012, p. 151f.). Here are some relevant passages:

‘[...] was wär auch diese Welt, wenn sie nicht wär ein Einklang freier Wesen? wenn nicht aus eignem frohem Triebe die Lebendigen von Anbeginn in ihr zusammenwirkten in Ein vollstimmig Leben, wie hölzern wäre sie, wie kalt? welch herzlos Machwerk wäre sie? So wär es hier im höchsten Sinne wahr, erwidert ich, daß ohne Freiheit alles tot ist’ (Hölderlin 1992, vol. I, p. 742f.).

‘[...] what would this world be if it were not a unison of free beings? If not through one’s own joyful urge the living acted together in One full-voiced life in this world from the beginning, how rough, how cold would the world be? What a heartless concoction would it be. It would be absolutely true, I answered, that without freedom everything would be dead here.

‘Was lebt, ist unvertilgbar, bleibt in seiner tiefsten Knechtsform frei, bleibt Eins und wenn du es scheidest bis auf den Grund, bleibt unverwundet und wenn du bis ins Mark es zerschlägst und sein Wesen entfliegt dir siegend unter den Händen’. (Hölderlin 1992, vol. I, p. 743)

‘What lives is indestructible, and remains free even in its most enslaved state, remains One, and if you divide/cut it down to its deepest ground, it remains unharmed, and if you smash it down to its core/marrow, its being will escape your hands in triumph.

‘[...] im Bunde der Natur ist Treue kein Traum. Wir trennen uns nur, um inniger einig zu seyn, göttlicherfriedlich mit allem, mit uns. Wir sterben, um zu leben.

Ich werde sein; ich frage nicht, was ich werde. Zu sein, zu leben, das ist genug, das ist die Ehre der Götter; und darum ist sich alles gleich, was nur ein Leben ist, in der göttlichen Welt, und es gibt in ihr nicht Herren und Knechte. Es leben umeinander die Naturen, wie Liebende; sie haben alles gemein, Geist, Freude und ewige Jugend’ (Hölderlin 1992, vol. I, 749f.).

‘[...] in the union of nature loyalty is no deception. We come apart only to be more closely united, in godly peace with everything, with ourselves. We die, to live.

I will be; I won’t ask, what I will become. To be, to live, this is enough, this is the honour of the gods; and thus all that is alive is equal, in the divine world, and there are no masters and servants in it. They live together, all things, like lovers; they have all in common, spirit, joy and eternal youth’.

To be = to live: clearly, Being is here tantamount to life; but also: We die, to live. This is not just the biological life of each of us, rather something more encompassing. Life with a capital letter, as it were, nature. This life is characterized by freedom, equality and fraternity, the main terms of the French Revolution. However, it is a life that is also characterized by a sacred element and appears to be indestructible, as nature is, on Hölderlin's understanding of it, and as such, it is something we have come apart from.<sup>16</sup>

All this may be a bit much for our secular sensitivities. We are witnessing here a mystical veneration of nature combined with a religious apotheosis of the prospects of salvation offered by the French Revolution, filtered through the metaphysics of Kant and Fichte. However, even this description is incomplete. We need some more elements to get closer to the core of Hölderlin's metaphysical thinking.

### 3.5. Neo-Platonism and Beauty

As Dieter Henrich was the first to point out, in 1966, Hölderlin's terminology of 'unification and separation' has much older roots (Henrich 1997, p. 76). They reach back to Plato's doctrine of principles, and the reformulation of this doctrine by neo-Platonists such as Celsus, Numenius, Proclus and Plotinus. More recently, the Platonist roots of Hölderlin, but also of Hegel and Schelling, have been investigated in greater detail by Michael Franz, Jens Halfwassen and others (Cf. Halfwassen 1999, 2004, 2019; Franz 1996, 2012). These researchers have also shown that it is problematic to try to understand German Idealism without the rich theological tradition to which Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel were exposed in their seminary in Tübingen, where they studied together and made friends.<sup>17</sup>

As I will now show, it is only with this neo-Platonic and theological tradition in mind that we can make sense of Hölderlin's central concerns, art and poetry, and can view them in their true relation to his metaphysics, indeed as the culmination of the latter.

I have mentioned the two fundamental human tendencies Hölderlin assumes: the tendency to overcome all resistance and the tendency to limit oneself. The tendency to overcome all resistance is the tendency to have it all. This is just the Platonic principle of union, the one (μόνος). The tendency to limit oneself contrasts with this, and is the Platonic principle of separation or individuation, called by Plato 'indeterminate duality' (ἀόριστος δύαξ). These principles, union and separation, are in a continuous strife with each other, in human existence. If things ended here, we would be merely returning to Kant's fragmentations or hoping for Fichte's hopeless infinite progress. With Kant and Fichte, against the previous metaphysicians, Hölderlin believed that ultimate reconciliation is not to be obtained by theory alone. With Kant, against Fichte, Hölderlin believed that ultimate reconciliation is not to be obtained by action either (because Fichte's concept of the absolute I is a mere figment of our reason). Thus, reconciliation is not available through two of the three Kantian faculties, cognition and the will. He makes this very clear in the preface to the penultimate version of *Hyperion* (see below).

Unlike Kant, however, Hölderlin aimed for real reconciliation, for union and perfection here and now, and thus Kant's postulate of immortality was of secondary importance to him. This is why he was dissatisfied with Schiller's *On Grace and Dignity* (1793), which had stopped short of overcoming 'die Kantische Gränzlinie'—the Kantian demarcation or limit.<sup>18</sup> As he explained in a letter to Schiller in September 1795, the Kantian–Fichtean prospect of the union of subject and object 'in infinite approximation' would be like squaring the circle. By contrast, Hölderlin claims, '[ist] die Vereinigung des Subjects und Objects in einem absoluten—Ich oder wie man es nennen will—zwar ästhetisch, in der intellectualen Anschauung, theoretisch aber nur durch eine unendliche Annäherung möglich [...], wie die Annäherung des Quadrats zum Zirkel' ('the union of subject and object is possible in an absolute—I or whatever one wants to call it—in an aesthetic sense, in intellectual intuition,

while in a theoretical sense only through infinite approximation, like the approximation of the square to the circle' (Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 595).<sup>19</sup>

Hölderlin, then, believes that the endless conflict between the principles of union and separation can be actually put to rest, albeit only in *aesthetic* experience, through intellectual intuition. What intellectual intuition gives us is precisely the missing *third* element, the union of union and separation. This higher union, a combination of union and separation, is something Plato himself had considered, e.g., in the *Timaeus*, where the human soul partakes in the world-soul by going through the stages unity–dissociation–higher mediation/union (cf. Plato 1929, p. 29eff.). This triadic scheme was more explicitly developed by the neo-Platonists, by Proclus, Porphyrius, Plotinus.<sup>20</sup> According to Plotinus, the final stage of the triadic scheme is reached by 'that man who becomes godlike and entirely beautiful, so that he can see God and beauty' (Plotinus 1973, p. 143). The aesthetic category of beauty is thus of metaphysical importance for Plotinus, as it is for Hölderlin.

Here is how Hölderlin introduces beauty in the preface to the penultimate version of *Hyperion*:

'Die seelige Einheit, das Seyn, im einzigen Sinne des Worts, ist für uns verloren und wir mußten es verlieren, wenn wir es erstreben, erringen sollten. Wir reißen uns los vom friedlichen  $\text{Εν και Παν}$  der Welt, um es herzustellen, durch uns Selbst. Wir sind zerfallen mit der Natur [...]. Jenen ewigen Widerstreit zwischen unserem Selbst und der Welt zu endigen, den Frieden alles Friedens, der höher ist, denn alle Vernunft, den wiederzubringen, uns mit der Natur zu vereinigen zu Einem unendlichen Ganzen, das ist das Ziel all' unseres Strebens [...]. Aber weder unser Wissen noch unser Handeln gelangt in irgend einer Periode des Daseyns dahin, wo aller Widerstreit aufhört, wo Alles Eins ist; die bestimmte Linie vereinigt sich mit der unbestimmten nur in unendlicher Annäherung. Wir hätten auch keine Ahnung von jenem unendlichen Frieden, von jenem Seyn, im einzigen Sinne des Worts, wir strebten gar nicht, die Natur mit uns zu vereinigen, wir dächten und wir handelten nicht, es wäre überhaupt gar nichts, (für uns) wir wären selbst nichts, (für uns) wenn nicht dennoch jene unendliche Vereinigung, jenes Seyn, im einzigen Sinne des Worts vorhanden wäre. Es ist vorhanden—als Schönheit; es wartet, um mit Hyperion zu reden, ein neues Reich auf uns, wo die Schönheit Königin ist' (Hölderlin 1992, vol. I, p. 558f.).

'The blissful union, Being, in the only sense of the word, is lost to us, and we had to lose it, if we wanted to aim for it, obtain it. We tear ourselves away from the peaceful  $\text{Εν και Παν}$  of the world, in order to rebuild it, through ourselves. We have come apart from nature [...] To end this eternal strife between our Self and the world, [to bring back] the peace of all peace, which is higher than all reason, and unite ourselves with nature in an infinite one, this is the aim of all our striving [...]. But neither our knowledge nor our actions ever reaches in time the point where all strife ends, where All is One. The determinate line joins the indeterminate one only in infinite approximation. [...]. We would not have any inkling of that infinite peace, of that Being, in the only sense of the word, we would not aim to unite with nature, we would not think or act, indeed, nothing would exist, we would be nothing (to ourselves),—were it not the case that that infinite union, that Being, in the only sense of the word, were given. It is given—as beauty; there awaits us, to speak with Hyperion, a new realm, where beauty is the queen'.

Like the neo-Platonists, especially Plotinus, Hölderlin also has a triadic scheme which points to or even ends in beauty. First, we have union, Being, that which is undivided within itself. For Hölderlin, this is Life with a capital letter or Nature. Then, we have separation, judgment, which introduces the subject–object distinction. In human existence union and separation struggle against each other. Neither wins. A third stage is necessary to reconcile this struggle, but this third stage cannot be the first stage, Being. For Hölderlin, our fall from Being is irreversible. We cannot return to it. Everything we think or do, in

theory or practice, will involve a judgment (an act). Judgment brings in division, but Being is undivided. Hence, no judgment can make us reach Being (Frank 1995, p. 63). The third stage must therefore be something else, not a judgment, but aesthetic intellectual intuition. In aesthetic intellectual intuition, we grasp Being again, it would appear, without returning to it. The third stage, of higher union, is therefore a new stage, not a return to the first stage. Schematically, this is not 1-2-1, but 1-2-3, i.e., 1-2-(1+2).<sup>21</sup> Hölderlin describes this stage as  $\epsilon\nu\ \delta\iota\alpha\phi\epsilon\rho\omicron\nu\ \epsilon\alpha\upsilon\tau\omega$ , ‘the One differentiated within itself’, which occurs in a fragment by Heraclitus and in Plato’s Symposium, and is a concept of great importance in Hegel’s work and arguably taken over from Hölderlin.<sup>22</sup> Hölderlin describes the One differentiated within itself also as the essence of beauty.<sup>23</sup> Another word for it would be love. More precisely, as in Hölderlin’s (Platonic) conception, love is the desire for beauty, the transition from 2 to 3, and 3 is the fulfillment of love.

As Franz, and before him Henrich, have emphasized, it is important that we do not misunderstand what the aesthetic approach means for Hölderlin. It is not simply that he was arguing that beauty is an ideal of perfection, a topic one may, but does not have to investigate in philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Rather, aesthetics belongs for Hölderlin to the ‘cacumina rerum’, ‘the highest of things’ (cf. letter to his brother in March 1796; Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 617). Aesthetics thus understood must be investigated, for it is only in it and through it that beauty can be reached, and through it the absolute—actually reached, not just in approximation or symbolically. Thus, the philosophical concept of beauty he operated with belongs to the ontological foundations of the world, as Franz has argued (Franz 2012, p. 95f.). The key concept here is that of the ‘eccentric orbit/course/path’ (‘exzentrische Bahn’), a simile which occurs in *Hyperion* and also in preliminary fragments of the novel (see Hölderlin 1992, vol. I, 489ff, 557ff.). The eccentric orbit, which the protagonist Hyperion follows in the novel in an exemplary way, ‘von der Kindheit zur Vollendung’ (‘from childhood to perfection’), is an irreversible course between two states, the first a state of highest simplicity or unity (‘höchste Einfalt’), the second a state of perfection (Hölderlin 1992, vol. I, p. 558). Nevertheless, in fact, there are, as just seen, three states: simplicity/unity, perfection, and the eccentric path connecting the two.<sup>25</sup>

For Hölderlin, this triadic scheme is dynamic, applicable to the development of every individual, and also to the history of the whole species. It is also an eschatological scheme, for it gives us a prospect of salvation from our current predicament. According to the penultimate preface, the triadic scheme starts with a ‘sacred unity’. We are now in the intermediary state of the eccentric path, which is a state of dissociation (‘Entzweiung’), of ‘the rift between our self and the world’. It is also a state in which we strive to overcome this rift by reaching the third state, a new harmony beyond all ‘harmful’ opposition, beauty.

It is crucial to understand the structure of the final stage. In it, we have the repetition of 1 and 2: 2 is easy to repeat, since it involves just another act or judgment available in realm 2 anyway, but 1 cannot be repeated. How else can we access it? One option suggests itself if we remember the Platonic background of Hölderlin’s thought, specifically the doctrine of anamnesis. While 1 cannot be repeated, we must suppose that we do *know*, however faintly, something of 1, including that we have been in 1. Without such knowledge of 1, Hölderlin’s argument does not get off the ground, but to know about something that occurred in the past is either to have historical knowledge or to have personal knowledge of the past, in other words to have *memory*. If 1 were accessed by means of historical knowledge, 1 would be just a past stage of this world, and knowledge about it would be propositional, expressed by means of judgments, as all historical knowledge is (inferred from documents, artifacts, geological and paleontological evidence, etc.). Such knowledge, having a strong conceptual element, could not be a form of intellectual intuition. The only other option is that our knowledge of 1 is a form of personal memory. However, here, too,



we must be careful. Much of our personal memory also has a conceptual element, as it can be expressed in standard judgments (e.g., ‘I wrote a few sonnets in my youth’). Are there any personal memories which are not conceptual in this sense and which therefore could be characterised as forms of or based on intellectual intuition? If the answer is affirmative, then we could say that art and poetry reconcile us with ourselves in beauty by establishing a commemorative relation to our origin, which for Hölderlin is divine.<sup>26</sup> I will now explore this proposal.

#### 4. An Objection and Resolution: Hölderlin’s Planetary Dimension

The claim to be considered is the following: intellectual intuition is available through memory, it is not open to discursive thought and its subject matter is something divine. To be sure, the reference to divinity will sound obscure or nonsensical to those who take pride that we live in more secular times, and the overall claim will not be accepted by Kantians anyway. Kant does not connect intellectual intuition to memory, does not take it to have any sensory element, does not think that its subject matter is necessarily divine and denies that humans are capable of it. Hölderlin takes the opposite view on all these substantive points, but the Kantian protest does not have to concern us here. Those are significant enough differences between the two thinkers to warrant the conclusion that Hölderlin has a different notion, even concept, of intellectual intuition from Kant, even if Hölderlin may well be inclined to deny this. (What a thinker may officially tell us about a notion can, on occasion, be less significant than how he employs it).

To see what sense can be made of Hölderlin’s notion of intellectual intuition, let us consider the following passage from *Hyperion*:

‘Mein ganzes Wesen verstummt und lauscht, wenn die zarte Welle der Luft mir um die Brust spielt. Verloren ins weite Blau, blick ich oft hinauf an den Aether und hinein ins heilige Meer, und mir ist, als öffnet’ ein verwandter Geist mir die Arme, als löste der Schmerz der Einsamkeit sich auf ins Leben der Gottheit.

Eines zu sein mit Allem, das ist Leben der Gottheit, das ist der Himmel des Menschen.

Eines zu sein mit Allem, was lebt, in seliger Selbstvergessenheit wiederzukehren ins All der Natur, das ist der Gipfel der Gedanken und Freuden, das ist die heilige Bergeshöhe, der Ort der ewigen Ruhe, wo der Mittag seine Schwüle und der Donner seine Stimme verliert und das kochende Meer der Woge des Kornfelds gleicht.

Eines zu sein mit Allem, was lebt! Mit diesem Worte legt die Tugend den zürnenden Harnisch, der Geist des Menschen den Zepter weg, und alle Gedanken schwinden vor dem Bilde der ewigeinigen Welt, wie die Regeln des ringenden Künstlers vor seiner Urania, und das ehernen Schicksals entsagt der Herrschaft, und aus dem Bunde der Wesen schwindet der Tod, und Unzertrennlichkeit und ewige Jugend beseligt, verschönert die Welt’ (Hölderlin 1992, vol. I, p. 614f.).

‘My whole being falls silent and listens when the delicate swell of the breeze plays over my breast. Often, lost in the wide blue, I look up into the ether and down into the sacred sea, and I feel as if a kindred spirit were opening its arms to me, as if the pain of solitude were dissolved in the life of the Divinity.

To be one with all—this is the life divine, this is man’s heaven.

To be one with all that lives, to return in blessed self-forgetfulness into the All of Nature—this is the pinnacle of thoughts and joys, this the sacred mountain peak, the place of eternal rest, where the noonday loses its oppressive heat and the thunder its voice and the boiling sea is as the heaving field of grain.

To be one with all that lives! At those words Virtue puts off her wrathful armor, the mind of man lays its scepter down, and all thoughts vanish before the image of the world in its eternal oneness, even as the striving artist’s rules vanish before his Urania, and iron



Fate renounces her dominion, and Death vanishes from the confederacy of beings, and indivisibility and eternal youth bless and beautify the world'. (Translation by Willard Trask, in (Hölderlin 1990, p. 3f.)).

'To be one with all that lives', 'to return in blessed self-forgetfulness into the All of Nature': several elements pertaining to Hölderlin's notion of intellectual intuition are present here, memory, reconciliation, beauty, nature, life, love, the divine. Moreover, there is nothing particularly haughty or obscure about intellectual intuition thus understood. To desire to return in self-forgetfulness to nature—this is surely something most humans desire and often experience, even in more secular times such as ours. Even the non-discursive element of intellectual intuition is to some extent present here, as the motive of self-forgetfulness suggests, which expresses a nostalgia for a childlike existence, presumably impossible to entertain unless one *has been* oneself a child, has been in a state of being now lost. This connects to the element of personal memory mentioned above. Note, however, Hölderlin's intellectual intuition is not fully non-discursive, unlike Kantian intellectual intuition. The reason is clear: Hölderlinian intellectual intuition is mediated by poetry or art, both of which presuppose a conceptual structure, which is shaped, among other things, by Kantian ideas of reason (making Kant the inescapable *maître penseur*, despite everything). This makes intellectual intuition, as Hölderlin employs the term, a rather hybrid notion.<sup>27</sup>

My proposal is therefore to take nature or life itself to be the object of Hölderlinian intellectual intuition. Intellectual intuition offers a contemplation of and unification with nature or life through a poetically or aesthetically mediated recollection and echo of our own childhood.

There is textual evidence for this interpretation. For example, Hölderlin explains in an essay fragment (written no earlier than 1800) that the tragic poem is rooted in an intellectual intuition 'which cannot be anything other than that unity with everything that lives' ('welche keine andere sein kann, als jene Einigkeit mit allem, was lebt'), an intuition which can be grasped by the spirit ('Geist') and comes 'from the impossibility of an absolute separation and individuation' ('aus der Unmöglichkeit einer absoluten Trennung und Vereinzelung'; (Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 104)).

In conclusion, it seems to me that the contemplation of nature and life, whether directly or through art (and even through science)<sup>28</sup>, is a strong contender for what Hölderlin means by 'intellectual intuition'. Moreover, this understanding of intellectual intuition is superior to Kant's. The direct or aesthetic contemplation of a tree in a forest or a bee in a flowerpot is not simply an individual 'empirical perception' based on the 'synthesis of sense data' that adds to our knowledge about the 'external world'.<sup>29</sup> Instead, this one tree and this one bee connect us at once to nature as a whole, remind us of the whole of the biosphere, allow us to re-connect with everything that lives and make us aware that we are and are not separated from it, the *εν διαφερον εαυτω*, the identity of the identity and the nonidentity. Indeed, today more than ever, as our disturbed relation to nature and the Earth has reached an unprecedented, threatening level, it is precisely this that offers us a new opportunity to reconnect with nature. In becoming aware of the fact that the tree or bee are threatened beings because they are part of a threatened whole, we become acutely aware that they are both a symbol for nature *and* part of nature; that they are a symbol for nature *because* they are part of nature; and that they are part of nature *as* a symbol of it.

Closely related here is also an issue to which Henrich has drawn attention in his discussion of Hölderlin's "Judgment and Being": the relation between love and freedom. As Henrich sees it, while there is no way to achieve full reunification with our origin, he interprets Hölderlin as proposing three ways in which we can connect to the original state:

'(1) the practical process of building a rational world (this is what Fichte had in mind, and this alone); (2) the recollection of the origin and subsequent history, by which

recollection a transcendence of all present finite objects is attempted; and (3) the surrender of the mind to the ‘beautiful objects’ in the world’ (Henrich 2003, p. 293)

These three ways of reconnection correspond to three kinds of literature, epic, dramatic and lyric poetry, as Hölderlin argues in the aforementioned essay fragment (II:102ff.). In view of the enduring mess in which our species finds itself, the prospects of building a rational world, the dream of the Enlightenment (and especially of Fichte), are slim and always have been. The other two ways are more promising, but of course, as the first is unavailable, they remain partial contributions. Even so, they are not nothing. The second, commemorative way was already mentioned above. Interestingly, it is intimately connected to the third way, that of aesthetic contemplation. We can easily see this from the fact that to contemplate a bee in a flowerpot, to perceive it as part of nature and as a symbol of nature in the threefold way I suggested above is to be *reminded* of the biosphere to which the bee, mankind and everything else that lives, belong. It is here that love and freedom enter the stage. For, as Henrich writes,

‘[The beautiful objects] are the only objects to which the mind can surrender itself without losing its freedom and its internal infinity. Hölderlin calls the way in which this surrender can take place ‘love,’ an attitude for which Fichte could never account. Hölderlin believes that the possibility of interpreting love is one of the main accomplishments of his new system—love as a manifestation and realization of freedom. Freedom can legitimately surrender to the beautiful’ (Henrich 2003, p. 293f.).

This provides for an important contrasting point to Kant’s account of aesthetic experience in his *Critique of Judgment*, where the focal points of analysis are the sublime and the beautiful. However, the sublime in nature arises through a feeling of awe, of the unattainability of (infinite) nature, coupled with a sense of the *privation* of freedom (Ak 5:268f.), while the beautiful, despite having the symbolic dimension mentioned above, is the symbol of moral goodness only (Ak 5:353).<sup>30</sup> The specific place the contemplation of the bee or the flower has in allowing us to connect, through love, and remain free, with our lost origin, is missing in Kant’s account. It is precisely this perception of the microscopic, of life around us, of that which can be injured and harmed (the ‘verlezen’ motif), which, I would like to propose, Hölderlin’s notion of ‘intellectual intuition’ aims at, opaque as it is. To quote Henrich again,

‘[...] it is the nature of humanity not to be dominated by the greatest (i.e., humans possess practical freedom), but also to be captivated by the smallest (by the flower and the beautiful song). Put another way, humanity must experience both the lack of domination by the greatest and the presence of captivation by the smallest in order to be humane’. (Henrich 2003, p. 294)

Henrich’s formulation of the matter strikes me as too optimistic. What we have is the *ability* to not be dominated by the greatest, but it does not follow that it is not in our nature to be dominated. Subordination to a mighty ruler, to the satraps of all ages, seems to be the default position in human society. We witness this in our time. Practical freedom is something that needs to be exercised and earned, time and again. The lack of domination is not simply a matter of experience, but of action, even struggle. Still, Henrich is correct to see a link between practical freedom and the perception of life’s beauty and order around us, between freedom and the βιο-λόγος.

In conclusion, I believe that we can recover Hölderlin as the planetary poet of life and the biosphere. As such, his speculative thought about nature and beauty does have a metaphysical, even ‘divine’ or sacred dimension, because the biosphere is of infinite value to us, and it has a very important ecological dimension, which I can only sketch here. Maybe a solution out of the self-destructive state mankind has driven itself into lies indeed in the idea that ‘man dwells poetically on Earth’ (‘Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch

wohnet/Der Mensch auf dieser Erde'; "In lieblicher Bläue", vol. I, p. 908), or rather, that man ought to dwell poetically on Earth.<sup>31</sup>

The dialectic of Hölderlin's triadic scheme proves its relevance here. While we have become detached from Earth, have become aliens on our own home planet, the detachment is not complete. We remain close enough to our origin to know about it and to be reminded of it through the 'intellectual intuition' of the beauty of the tree or a bee. This intuition in turn the ground for the possibility of the kind of poetry of unification, love and freedom Hölderlin reflected on and created. This poetry unveils and reinforces the connection with our terrestrial origins, which has a commemorative aspect. Let me end with an example of what I have in mind, a poem from Hölderlin's last period (Hölderlin 1992, vol. I, p. 930):

### Der Frühling

Wenn neu das Licht der Erde sich gezeiget,  
Von Frühlingsregen glänzt das grüne Thal und munter  
Der Blüten Weiß am hellen Strom hinunter,  
Nachdem ein heitrer Tag zu Menschen sich geneiget.  
Die Sichtbarkeit gewinnt von hellen Unterschieden,  
Der Frühlingshimmel weilt mit seinem Frieden,  
Daß ungestört der Mensch des Jahres Reiz betrachtet,  
Und auf Vollkommenheit des Lebens achtet.

### Spring

When new the light of Earth shows itself,  
After spring's rain shines the green valley, and merrily  
The blooms' whiteness at the bright stream,  
After a serene day offered itself to the humans.  
Visibility grows through bright differences,  
The spring sky lingers with its peace,  
So that the human being views the year's charm,  
And respects/pays attention to/cares for life's perfection.<sup>32</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See (Kant 1992) for the English translation.

<sup>2</sup> This Kantian insight was rediscovered by Wittgenstein in his later work. He, too, pointed out, based on somewhat different arguments, that philosophers have the tendency to construct castles in the air, figments of their unchecked grammatical imagination. The advice of both philosophers went unheeded. The result is that today, metaphysics is considered, again, a serious discipline. It has a Leibnizian underpinning in terms of possible worlds and is based on the naïve assumption that we can discover de re necessities by taking the symbols of modal logic to be terms referring to the essence of things. Both claims have been refuted by Kant and Wittgenstein, implicitly or explicitly, and neither Kant's nor Wittgenstein's refutations of metaphysics thus understood have been refuted, but merely ignored. I speak of metaphysics (of life) in a more loose, poetical sense, as will transpire below.

<sup>3</sup> An anonymous reviewer objects that 'Kant's unity of apperception ensures a subjective coherence across faculties, and what is divided is not reason itself but the relation between experience and metaphysical ideas'. This is problematic. As Kant puts it, not only in the opening lines of the *Critique*, but especially also in the "Dialectic", it is the structure of reason itself which raises certain questions and tells us they are unanswerable. However, as the questions remain intelligible, because they rest on the ideas of reason, they also remain tempting. The unity of apperception does not resolve this conflict either. The unity of apperception is neither intuitive nor conceptual (B130ff.), as it is that which unites sensory intuitions and concepts in their combination in judgment. What is it then? Either it is *both* intuitive and conceptual, which would at least allow us to make sense of the idea that

it is unifying two disparate things. However, then, it would be itself hybrid, fragmented. Or it is a *third* mysterious something, of which we can have no knowledge (as Kant does not allow for intellectual intuition), a mere postulate that apparently satisfies our desire for completion, when in fact, it only expresses this desire, leaving it wanting for more. No wonder that the German idealists fastened on this notion and made it the starting point of new metaphysical theories (or phantasies).

I have explored some of these issues in (Kanterian 2016).

The three principles combined gave him the general categories of reality, negation and limitation, from which everything else could be derived, including, eventually, nature itself. Every concept is thus unified under, because derived from, the principle of  $I = I$ . See (Fichte [1794] 1988, p. 12ff.).

In the practical part III of the *Foundations*, Fichte conceives of the I not as a deed-action, but as a striving, indeed a striving for the impossible, the ‘completed infinite’ (*vollendete Unendlichkeit*). Cf. (Fichte [1794] 1988, p. 187).

Unless otherwise indicated, the English translations of Hölderlin are mine.

Hölderlin seems to have had some doubts about Fichte even before Jena. See (Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 569).

It seems strange to speak of God as an idea, as opposed to the idea of God, especially as this would grant, trivially, existence to God (as the existence of the idea of God is not disputed here). However, the ambiguity, or incoherence, is really Kant’s. Ideas are concepts without objective reality, and an ideal is an individual entity determined by an idea. A wise man is such an ideal, determined by the idea of wisdom (and not to be found in experience). God, then, would be another such ideal. However, as Kant says that every ideal is an idea, which is determined as an individual entity by the idea, we seem to be moving around in a circle. Cf. B596f., also B371ff.

Against this, an anonymous reviewer writes, ‘The claim that Hölderlin refutes Fichte by showing the absolute I to be ‘nothing’ (for me) overlooks Fichte’s distinction between the absolute I as a transcendental principle and the empirical I as its manifestation. Fichte could counter that the absolute I’s self-positing does not require an external object in the same way empirical consciousness does, as it is an act of pure spontaneity’. However, an act of pure spontaneity is still an act, whether understood as a deed or event, and so it requires time. Moreover, as we cannot make sense of deeds or events without ascribing them to agents, which must have bodies, it requires space as well. Hence, Hölderlin’s reasoning remains valid. What is the absolute I anyway? Why do we refer to it as an ‘I’, as opposed to a ‘You’ or ‘He/She’, and not by means of any other random expression? The absolute I is surely just a metaphysical sublimation of our ordinary first-person pronoun and of the fact that we can refer to and talk about ourselves, which in turn requires the possibility of reference to other agents and the world. See (Strawson 1993, Part I).

I leave aside here the fact that the early Hölderlin is more enthusiastic about Fichte’s infinite striving of the I than the later Hölderlin is, who begins to view this titanic striving as a danger. See below.

Hölderlin’s text was discovered in 1931 and published as “Urteil und Sein” (“Judgment and Being”) in 1961 by Friedrich Beißner. It is a philosophical jewel. At the time of its writing, it was the most advanced reflection on the possibility of absolute idealism, and in fact, it already points beyond idealism. The text brings together metaphysical, epistemological and logical considerations, as they emerged in Kant, Fichte and other contemporaries (such as the young Schelling). The text is divided into three parts, “Being”, “Judgement” and “Reality and possibility”, i.e., modality. It suffices to focus on “Being” and “Judgment”. (The part about modality is more difficult to make sense of and would require discussion of Kant’s Analytic and Dialectic). For commentaries, see e.g., (Henrich 1965/1966, 1992; Franz 1986/1987, 2011, pp. 228–232). For a recent challenge to Henrich’s influential interpretation, see Josifović 2018. While Josifović makes some valid points against Henrich, his claim that Hölderlin did not reject Fichte in 1795 seems incorrect to me, as is especially his contention that Hölderlin identifies Being with some original I (distinct from self-consciousness) as the content of intellectual intuition (Josifović 2018, p. 329). The text does not warrant these claims, especially not the claim that the I is the content of Hölderlinian intellectual intuition. Josifović simply declares, without argument, that this claim is an external ‘presupposition’ (‘Vorwissen’). Moreover, ‘content’ is surely just another word for ‘object’, in which case Josifović’s interpretation self-destructs, as what he calls intellectual intuition cannot be that intellectual after all, if it has an *object*. As my interpretation below suggests, Being is life for Hölderlin, and life is not an original I of any kind, especially not a Fichtean one.

See (Kanterian 2012), following Frege.

As said, Hölderlin is not the only one to commit this fallacy. Hegel is another example. He writes, ‘Vereinigung und Seyn sind gleichbedeutend; in jedem Satz drückt, das Bindewort: ist, die Vereinigung des Subjekts und Prädikats aus—ein Seyn’ (‘Joining and being mean the same; in each sentence the conjunction: is, expresses the joining of the subject and the predicate—a being’; (Hegel 2020, p. 10)). The fallacy is particularly evident in this statement of the matter, because Hegel draws the ultimate and clearly false conclusion: if the copula ‘is’ is expressing the joining of the subject and the predicate (at an ontological level), then ‘is’ must be a conjunction. However, verbs are not conjunctions. These are simply different grammatical categories.

See Pfau’s translation in (Hölderlin 1988, p. 37), also Mariña’s in (Hölderlin 2018).

And, of course, in the understanding of much of the tradition. The realisation that nature too is vulnerable, not least to our own unconscionable destruction of it, only began to emerge in the later part of the 19th century. I have explored this in my paper “Heidegger and the Earth Myth” (MS) (see Kanterian n.d).

- For a documentation of these years, see the documents collected in (Franz 2004).
- Letter to Neuffer, October 1794; (Hölderlin 1992, vol. II, p. 551).
- For Hölderlin's various geometrical analogies, see (Franz 2012, p. 95ff.).
- See (Franz 2012, p. 103f.) for more details. Hayden-Roy suggests some additional possible sources of Hölderlin's chiliastic model, in particular Kant's essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" and Herder's "The Oldest Document of the Human Race". She also argues, very plausibly, 'Offensichtlich liegt diesem Modell eine säkularisierte Auffassung der biblischen Heilsgeschichte (Paradies–Sündenfall–Wiederherstellung des Gottesreiches) zugrunde [...] Den unmittelbaren Impuls, ein neues Zeitmodell zu entwickeln, gab [Hölderlin] ohne Zweifel die Französische Revolution. Erst angesichts dieses historischen Ereignisses entstand bei ihm das Bedürfnis, die Zeit in einem "freie[n] kommende[n] Jahrhundert" auf Erden anstatt im jenseitigen Himmelreich kulminieren zu lassen' ('Obviously this model is based on a secularized view of the biblical history of salvation (paradise - fall - restoration of the kingdom of God) [...] The immediate impulse to develop a new model of time was undoubtedly given to [Hölderlin] by the French Revolution. It was only in view of this historical event that he felt the need to let time culminate in a "free coming century" on earth instead of in the kingdom of heaven beyond'; (Hayden-Roy 2007, p. 63f.).
- See (Franz 2012, p. 150ff.). His discussion of the differences between Schelling and Hölderlin seem to me to be of great importance, but I need to leave this topic for some other occasion.
- As Franz (2012, p. 153f.) points out, Hegel picked up the notion of 'the one differentiated in itself', first in the guise of 'the connection of the connection and the non-connection' ('die Verbindung der Verbindung und der Nichtverbindung'; see "Systemfragment von 1800", (Hegel 1978, p. 520)), and then, in the *Differenzschrift*, by characterizing the absolute as 'the identity of the identity and the nonidentity' (Hegel 1986, p. 96), a notion that will make up the foundation of his mature system.
- (Hölderlin 1992, vol. I, p. 685). The passage in the *Symposium* is in 187a (Plato 1925, p. 127). See also (Hippocrates/Heracleitus 1931, p. 484, frg. XLV).
- This interpretation was proposed by Dilthey in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (Dilthey 1906). See (Franz 2012, p. 95).
- On the eccentric path, see Franz (2012, p. 95ff.).
- On this commemorative aspect in Hölderlin, in relation to Heidegger's (selective) interpretation of him and to Paul Celan's somewhat different poetics that denies us having access to the sacred, see (Kanterian 2022). See also (Bambach 2013) for discussion.
- Or maybe even an incoherent one, as one anonymous reviewer points out. There are two lines of defence here. First, no other notion of intellectual intuition, not even Kant's, is coherent. Second, the verdict of incoherence must not overlook that some incoherent terms are more fruitful and important than others. The phrase 'hölzernes Eisen' ('wooden iron') is not coherent, but not particularly interesting. Whereas 'intellectual intuition' is quite different, given its intellectual history and the fact that important aspects of our cognition are forged into it.
- For an example, see (Sala 2020).
- Against this misconception of our experience, promoted by Kant, see (Hacker 2012).
- It is of course true, as an anonymous reviewer points out, that Kant conceives of the experience of the sublime as a process that ultimately makes us assert our freedom in terms of our independence from the realm of nature ('unsere Unabhängigkeit gegen die Natureinflüsse', Ak 5:269). Note, however, the agonistic, almost sado-masochistic terms in which Kant frames this struggle ('die Vernunft der Sinnlichkeit Gewalt anthun muß', 'Gefühl der Beraubung der Freiheit der Einbildungskraft durch sie selbst', 'Verwunderung, die an Schreck gränzt, das Grausen und der heilige Schauer'), only to then conclude, in a typical Kantian move of self-soothing, that it is all not that dramatic ('nicht wirkliche Furcht') and merely a reflection of the faculty of aesthetic judgment in its relation to reason, so really just a purely subjective storm in a teacup. This is not just a profoundly ambivalent and unstable position, but it fails to account for the possibility of the (aesthetic!) experience of real horror caused by natural events, such as tsunamis or life-threatening asteroid impacts, and also by manmade cataclysmic events, e.g., Hiroshima, inconceivable as these may have been in Kant's time. It is precisely this Promethean understanding of freedom which the later Hölderlin (see next footnote) takes issue with. The idea that we are independent of *Natureinflüsse* and can take refuge to a mere faculty of ours ('reason') strikes me as particularly illusory in our age, indeed has led to the predicament of our age. Faced with the possibility of manmade climate catastrophe, I do not see how any subjectivist Kantian reflection of this sort can assert our autonomy against *die Natureinflüsse*, nor how it can even dissuade us from feeling genuine, and not just make-believe, fear about the future.
- I cannot discuss here the crucial notion of the Earth, as treated by Hölderlin. Hölderlin became increasingly aware of the dangers posed to the Earth by the Promethean or 'Titanic' tendencies of history and especially of the Enlightenment. As Franz (2007, p. 116) so insightfully puts it, 'Das "Titanische" wird nun als "Gefahr" erkannt, weil die Titanen, solange sie unangebunden sind, insbesondere auch Feinde der "Erde" sind, deren "Gaaben" sie rauben in ihrem Drang, den Himmel zu erobern. Das zerstörerische Wesen der "Titanenfürsten" läßt sich eben auch als ein "Hinwegstreben" von dieser Erde beschreiben. Die Titanen sind "die Vertreter [...] des Ungebundenen schlechthin", aber sie sind in einem philosophischen Sinn eben auch diejenigen, deren Emblem für die "einseitige" Überbetonung der menschlichen "Selbstthätigkeit" steht' ('The "Titanic" is now recognized as a "danger" because as long as the Titans are untethered, they are enemies of the "Earth", whose "gifts" they steal in their urge to conquer the sky. The destructive nature of the "Titan Princes" can also be described as a "striving away" from this earth. The



Titans are “the representatives [...] of the unbound par excellence,” but in a philosophical sense they are also the ones whose emblem stands for the “one-sided” overemphasis on human “self-activity”). See also (Hayden-Roy 2007).

<sup>32</sup> This essay is dedicated to the memory of Michael Franz (1947–2023). His friendship and writings have been invaluable to me. The ideas developed in this essay owe much to his lifelong engagement with Hölderlin. I would also like to thank Ian Cooper, Priscilla Hayden-Roy, Hans Maes and the audience of a talk on Hölderlin I gave at Canterbury, UK, in the happier pre-Brexit, pre-Trump days of the year 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Note: All references to Kant’s works are to Kant’s *Gesammelte Werke*, published by the Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1900ff., specified by ‘Ak’, followed by volume and page number. The only exceptions are references to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, cited by the A or B edition, as is the standard in the literature.

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