

Article

# The Necessity of the Death of God in Nietzsche and Heidegger

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the philosophical perspectives of Nietzsche and Heidegger, tracing their analyses of the death of God and its aftermath. My aim is to clarify the diagnosis of this nihilism and its underlying causes, as well as evaluate the proposed remedies put forth by Nietzsche and Heidegger. Ultimately, I argue that the seemingly ambiguous consequences of the death of God are not only hopeful, but necessary, if human beings are to rise above and transmute a meaningless, resentment-laced existence, however, not by jettisoning Judeo-Christianity and its values, but rather by reinterpreting them.

**Keywords:** nihilism; Heidegger; Nietzsche; continental philosophy

## 1. Introduction

The concept of the death of God, famously announced in Nietzsche's proclamation of the Madman, names, and simultaneously portends, beyond mere atheism, an immanent cultural collapse of the metaphysical foundations of Western culture. For Nietzsche, the death of God means that the "highest values have devalued themselves", indicating a total, albeit yet unbeknownst, breakdown of the values upon which Western culture has long relied [1]. This breakdown, as Nietzsche sees it, marks the onset of nihilism—a state characterized by absolute meaninglessness and the proliferation of resentment-fueled political factions [2]. Nietzsche proposes a plausible antidote to this encroaching nihilism, however not without first understanding the genesis of this foundational value system of Judeo-Christian theism. Our discussion of Nietzsche will therefore follow his "hermeneutics of suspicion", which aims to uncover the hidden ground of Western culture's nihilistic value(s) as rooted in resentment in order to overcome such nihilism, and, in overcoming it, open up creative possibilities from its collapse.

Nietzsche, however, is not alone in contending with the implications of the death of God. Heidegger also offers diagnoses to and remedies for this existential crisis. Phenomenologically, Heidegger illuminates how the death of God prompts a fundamental reassessment of human existence (Dasein) vis-à-vis being itself. For Heidegger, the death of God names the destruction of metaphysics proper, and the reduction of the meaning of being to one meaning, which forces a radical re-inquiry and re-comportment toward the meaning of being itself. Such re-comportment, in turn, places human Dasein into a confrontation with meaning itself, thereby enabling a new possible metanarrative, in place of and at the same time in dialogue with the failed metanarrative of Judeo-Christianity.

This paper explores the philosophical perspectives of Nietzsche and Heidegger, tracing their analyses of the death of God and its aftermath. My aim is to clarify the diagnosis of this nihilism and its underlying causes, as well as evaluate the proposed remedies put forth by Nietzsche and Heidegger. Ultimately, I argue that the seemingly ambiguous consequences of the death of God are not only hopeful, but necessary, if human beings are to rise above and transmute a meaningless, resentment-laced existence, however, not by jettisoning Judeo-Christianity and its values, but rather by reinterpreting them.



**Citation:** Armitage, D. The Necessity of the Death of God in Nietzsche and Heidegger. *Philosophies* **2024**, *9*, 103. <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies9040103>

Academic Editor: Lissa McCullough

Received: 26 April 2024

Revised: 29 June 2024

Accepted: 6 July 2024

Published: 11 July 2024



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## 2. Nietzsche

The death of God, simply put, is the death of *meaning*—the foundational meaning and meta-narrative of Western culture—wrought by the advent of modern science and technology, which rendered not only God, but the metaphysical commitments behind “God” no longer tenable. God, and all of the values stemming from “God” as the supreme value, has been rendered incredible by science, in particular, Darwinian science<sup>1</sup>. Yet God’s death is not only the death of the idea of a supreme being; it is also the death of what was hitherto understood to be morality and morality’s foundations, along with truth, science, and even reason—the cognitive faculty understood to glean truth [3]<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the death of God, the incredibility of the value of God, is also the death of and incredibility of the values of morality, truth, reason, and even science itself—ironically, the very cause of the death of God. The ironic devaluing of these values will require some unpacking.

There remains a perplexing irony to the death of God that, as far as I am aware, Nietzsche is the first and perhaps only one to recognize, namely that the death of God *by modern science* is simultaneously the death of science itself, and thus science’s own death by suicide. For Nietzsche, science is itself a Christian project, insofar as it presupposes the split-world metaphysics of Christianity (“Platonism for the people”) and assumes an underlying or transcendent world of meaning and intelligibility: in short, a world of truth. Nietzsche writes in his *Genealogy*,

anyone who is truthful in that bold and ultimate sense presupposed by faith in science *thereby affirms a world other* than that of life, nature, and history; and insofar as he affirms this “other world”, must he not precisely thereby deny its counterpart, this world, *our world*?...It is still a *metaphysical faith* on which our faith in science rests—even we knowing ones of today, we godless ones and antimetaphysicians, still also take *our* fire from the flame ignited by a faith thousands of years old, that Christian faith that was also Plato’s faith, that God is truth, that truth is divine. . . .But what if just this were to become ever more unbelievable, if nothing else were ever to prove itself divine, only error, blindness, lies –if God himself proved to be our *longest lie*?’ –Here we must pause and reflect a while. Science henceforth stands *in need of* justification (which is not to say that it has one). On this question, just look at the most ancient and the most recent philosophers: in none of them is there any awareness of the extent to which the will to truth itself stands in need of justification; there is a gap here in every philosophy –why is that? Because the ascetic ideal has hitherto *dominated* all of philosophy; because truth was posited as being, as God, as the highest authority; because truth was simply not *allowed* to be a problem. Do we understand this ‘allowed’?—From the moment faith in the god of the ascetic ideal is repudiated, *there is a new problem as well*: that of the *value* of truth. The will to truth stands in need of a critique –here we define our own task –the value of truth must be experimentally *called into question*. . . [5] (Chapter 3 section 24).

Nietzsche’s critique here is aimed at those whom he refers to earlier in the chapter as “pale atheists”, namely those atheistic and naturalistic anti-metaphysicians who proudly purport to be free of the “ascetic ideal” of theism, and yet nevertheless remain unconsciously tethered to it precisely because of their “faith” in the intelligibility of the world, that is, their belief in truth [5] (Chapter 3 section 24). In other words, atheistic modern science is just as theistic as the theism it thought it destroyed precisely because it still believes in itself as science qua *scientia* or the knowledge of the *true* and underlying intelligible structures of the world; this includes logic, mathematics, and the cognitive faculty of reason itself. The common denominator in Nietzsche’s various critiques of “truth” is simply that reason’s “will to truth” itself has been uncovered to be nothing more than the will to power; thus, such a will to truth is a will to deception, to the falsification of the chaotic “reality” of becoming the stable, fixed reality of being. In other words, if human cognition is produced by mechanical processes of natural selection, there remains no difference between human

cognition and mere animal cognition; as a result, the reliability of reason itself to find truth is wholly undermined, and with it, the legitimacy of science itself.

In sum, not only with the death of God can we no longer believe in a fundamental intelligible structure to the world that would yield us truth, scientific truth, upon investigation, but we can no longer rely on our cognitive faculties to uncover such truth. There remains no “truth” or “intelligibility” to uncover. Moreover, the will to such truth is itself propelled by the will to power and the stabilization of chaos. The death of God then brings with it a final reckoning to its very catalyst and cause, science itself, and requires a rethinking of not only the world, but the human being and its “cognitive faculties” as such. This leads Nietzsche to embrace, as his solution to the problem, both a perspectivist “metaphysics” (which is ultimately no meta-physics at all) and a favoring of art over any kind of truth.

Nietzsche summarizes the implications of the death of God for truth elsewhere, for example, when he writes,

[t]ruth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live. The value for life is ultimately decisive. . .the criterion of truth resides in the enhancement of the feeling of power, and thus is concerned not with truth but with power or ‘life’. . .there are many kinds of eyes. . .and consequently there are many kinds of ‘truths,’ and consequently there is no truth [1] (paragraphs 493, 534 and 540).

Perspectivism, the claim that there exist no truths but rather merely perspective “takes” and orderings of will to power, is then the eventuality of the death of God as the death of intelligibility, *scientia*, and reason. For Nietzsche the will to power and its own value creation and value positing lie behind not only truth, reason, and science, but God itself. This leads to the question as to the origin of the value of God itself, and its subsequent value of truth. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche tells us that behind all valuations lies the will to power and the desire for the enhancement of life:

The falseness of a judgment is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgment. . .the question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving, species-preserving. . . and our fundamental tendency is to assert that the falsest judgments . . . are the most indispensable to us that without granting as true the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of unconditional and self-identical, without continual falsification of the world by means of numbers, mankind could not live –that to renounce false judgments would be to renounce life, would be to deny life. To recognize untruth as a condition for life. . . [6] (paragraph 4).

In short, the purpose behind the values of reason, logic, truth, and even God, was the coping with and preservation of human existence vis-à-vis the chaotic flux of becoming. The death of God and thus the subsequent revelation of the fictitious nature of these judgments therefore requires a “revaluation of values”.

However, for Nietzsche, there is something more pernicious behind the meta-narrative of God than merely the preservation of life. That is, the value “God” originated not merely from the will to life and power, but a certain *kind* of will to power, namely the will to power of *ressentiment* that was “denied [its] true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate[d itself] with an imaginary revenge” [5] (paragraph 1, section 10). Nietzsche, as is well-known, labels this resentful will to power in denial, as “slave morality”, which he argues largely evaluates the world in light of its lot in life, namely that of weakness and suffering. Slave morality thus posits another imaginary world (of heaven, hell, metaphysics, intelligibility, etc.) where it can achieve its retroactive revenge. The imagined revenge of slave morality is then not solely directed toward other more powerful and competent human beings, but also against reality itself, as it “truly is”, a chaotic flux. Thus, Nietzsche writes, “what is revenge? the will’s revulsion against time and its “it was” [6] (chapter 2, section 20). In other words, behind slave morality, the ascetic ideal, and ultimately the value of God, lies

both a psychological and metaphysical revenge, a psychological revenge directed at those more powerful, and a metaphysical revenge directed at being qua becoming itself.

Weak human beings then create the values of slave morality out of the posture of resentment toward others and toward reality itself, which brings us to Nietzsche's more scathing critique of the value of God as it presents itself in the *morality* of Western culture. Nietzsche refers to this morality as "compassion" (*Mitleid*) or "equality", and what we would likely call today "social justice", namely the value of mercy and the concern for victims and the oppressed. That is, for Nietzsche, perspectivism ultimately boils down to only two perspectives: the powerful (the "masters") and the weak (the "slaves"). The former evaluate the world in terms of "good" and "bad", the good being themselves and the bad being the weak, the ugly, the less life-advancing; such evaluation proceeds according to the crude Darwinian laws of nature and the preservation of existence. The latter, the slaves, evaluate the world not in terms of "good" and "bad", but in terms of "good" and "evil"; the evil thereby justifying their imagined revenge against the strong and competent. Such morality therefore posits the value of equality, which means quite simply that its main concerns are with empowering the "weak and the ill-constituted", and disempowering the already powerful. We could say that slave morality offers a wholesale critique of "merit" as being unfairly based in oppression and victimization (such would certainly explain Nietzsche's hatred for socialism and left-wing politics)<sup>3</sup>. In a passage titled *On Tarantulas*, from *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche perhaps best summarizes the ethic of social justice as a mere mask for resentment by the weak:

Thus I speak to you in a parable—you who make souls whirl, you preachers of *equality*. To me you are tarantulas, and secretly vengeful. But I shall bring your secrets to light. . . For *that man be delivered from revenge*, that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms. . . The tarantulas, of course, would have it otherwise. "What justice means to us is precisely that the world be filled with the storms of our revenge"—thus they speak to each other. "We shall wreak vengeance and abuse on all whose equals we are not"—thus do the tarantula-hearts vow. "And 'will to equality' shall henceforth be the name for virtue; and against all that has power we want to raise our clamor!" . . . You preachers of equality, the tyrannomania of impotence clamors thus out of you for equality: your most secret ambitions to be tyrants thus shroud themselves in words of virtue. Aggrieved conceit, repressed envy—perhaps the conceit and envy of your fathers—erupt from you as a flame and as the frenzy of revenge. . . Out of every one of their complaints sounds revenge; in their praise there is always a sting, and to be a judge seems bliss to them. . . But thus I counsel you, my friends: Mistrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful. . . Mistrust all who talk much of their justice! . . . And when they call themselves the good and the just, do not forget that they would be pharisees, if only they had—power. . . My friends, I do not want to be mixed up and confused with others. Some preach my doctrine of life and are at the same time preachers of equality and tarantulas. Although they are sitting in their holes, these poisonous spiders, with their backs turned on life, they speak in favor of life, but only because they wish to hurt. They wish to hurt those who now have power. . . For, to *me* justice speaks thus: "Men are not equal." Nor shall they become equal! What would my love of the *Übermensch* be if I spoke otherwise? [7] (chapter 2, paragraph 7).

Heidegger has argued that in this passage Nietzsche's entire philosophy could aptly be summarized, in particular, the sentence that speaks to the deliverance from revenge as a "bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after long storms" [8] (p. 85). Deliverance from revenge, for Heidegger, marks Nietzsche's "true and one and only thought, which he thought even if he did not announce it on every occasion" [8] (p. 85). Heidegger further writes, "For Nietzsche, revenge is the fundamental characteristic of all thought so far. That is to say: revenge marks the manner in which man so far relates himself to what is" [8] (p.97). Heidegger even goes so far as to say the figure of the *Übermensch* is none other than

one who is free from revenge: “The space of freedom from revenge is where Nietzsche sees the Übermensch’s essential nature” [8] (p. 88).

Indeed, it appears that the problem of resentment, as not only resentment towards power, but the will’s revulsion against time (becoming) itself, presents Nietzsche’s polemic against the value of God in its entirety. Nihilism then, as the diagnosis of the death of God, is, for Nietzsche, rooted in a *deeper* nihilism, an even more pejorative sense of nihilism for Nietzsche, namely the resentful “denial of life” and thus denial of what life truly “is”: flux, chaos, eternally recurring and favoring only life. Nietzsche writes of this world,

This my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil”, without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal’ without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself—do you want a *name* for this world? A *solution* for all its riddles? A *light* for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men?—*This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides [1] (paragraph 1067).

It is precisely the denial of this Dionysian world of will to power that gave rise to the valuation of God and its subsequential values truth and social justice. At the root of all value(s) thus far, it seems then, is resentment. Nietzsche’s philosophy, therefore, we concur with Heidegger, is one of overcoming resentment. The death of God therefore not only enables deliverance from revenge as a possibility but proves to be the only path toward enduring such devaluing of the highest value. God, as the meta-physical split world, originated from the vengeful denial of this world in favor of another; the *meta* in metaphysics, the beyond, the transcendent, the underlying finds its source in revenge. This *metaphysical* world has now been rendered incredible by itself—science, and science along with it—something that perhaps only Nietzsche himself understood at the time. However, the morality of metaphysics—social justice—presents perhaps the most difficult obstacle to overcome for the one who seeks to be delivered from revenge, since for Nietzsche, this ethic also finds its source in revenge.

It is rather obvious how accurate Nietzsche’s philosophy has proven to be on this account, namely the radicalization of the social justice ethic in the 20th and 21st century. Indeed, it appears that this ethic remains the last vestige of theistic metaphysics. More problematically, as Nietzsche would say, it remains the least self-evident, for it remains the last absolute truth in Western culture. This ethic of concern for victims is so absolute and so self-evident, it rarely if ever is reasoned to, only reasoned from<sup>4</sup>. It is often the case that the moral battle is fought over who the victim truly is; for example, in the abortion debate, is the victim the mother or the fetus? Or in the modern political landscape, are victims women, minorities, and members of the LGBT community, as the left assumes, or rather are victims the forgotten, blue-collar worker, as the right argues? Even in recent news regarding Israel and Palestine, the debate rages as to who the victims and oppressors truly are. Regardless, it would be an understatement to suggest that our 21st century culture is *obsessed with victims*. (I highlight this not in any way to disagree with the ethic, but rather merely to thematize it.) Our postmodern culture is then not as secular or as relativistic as it might appear at first glance; rather the Judeo-Christian ethic of concern for victims reigns supreme as the absolute value, the last value and remnant of the original meta-narrative and meta-physics of God in Judeo-Christianity.

According to Rene Girard, Nietzsche remains the greatest *theologian* of the past 200 years in that Nietzsche discovered the “anthropological key” to Judeo-Christianity, which is precisely this social justice ethic of concern for victims [9] (p.170). For Girard, Nietzsche understood that this ethic was fundamentally unique to Judeo-Christianity and thus to Western culture; however, Nietzsche absolutely despised it for its lauding of weakness. It is for this reason that Nietzsche labels his own philosophy “Dionysus versus the Crucified”. Nietzsche himself writes in *Ecce Homo*: “Have I been understood?—What

defines me, what sets me apart from the whole rest of humanity is that I *uncovered* Christian morality" [5] (p. 332).

There are several passages in Nietzsche's corpus that support Girard's reading (and Nietzsche's self-reading, in this context). Perhaps most on the nose, from the *Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche writes "The weak and the ill-constituted should die off [sollen zu Grunde gehn]: first principle of *our* philanthropy. And one shall help them to do so. What is more harmful than any vice? –Active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak–Christianity. . . ." [10] (paragraph 2. Translation slightly amended). Rhetoric aside, Nietzsche here explicitly states his disdain for what he views as the essence the Christian ethic, namely compassion for victims. A few paragraphs later, in the *Anti-Christ*, there remain clear echoes with what we might call a Social Darwinism for Nietzsche, in that he critiques this mercy ethic due to its being antithetical to the will to power and life: "Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of opposition to the preservative instincts of strong life" [10] (paragraph 2). And, finally, in one of perhaps his least quoted passages, due to its explicit and radical Social Darwinism, Nietzsche links the mercy ethic to that which preserves what ought to decay, thereby thwarting the law of selection. Nietzsche writes,

Christianity is called the religion of *compassion* [*Mitleid*].—compassion stands in antithesis to the tonic emotions which enhance the energy of the feeling of life: it has a depressive effect. One loses force when one has compassion. The loss of force which life has already sustained through suffering is increased and multiplied even further by compassion. Suffering itself becomes contagious through compassion. . . its morally dangerous character appears in a much clearer light. Compassion on the whole thwarts the law of evolution, which is the law of *selection*. It preserves what is ripe for destruction, it defends life's disinherited and condemned; through the abundance of the ill-constituted of all kinds which it *retains* in life it gives life itself a gloomy and questionable aspect. One has ventured to call compassion a virtue (– in every *noble* morality it counts as weakness –). . . compassion is *practical* nihilism. . . compassion persuades to *nothingness!*...[compassion is] hostile to life. Schopenhauer [therefore] was hostile to life: *therefore* compassion became for him a virtue. . . [10] (paragraph 7. translation amended)

In his notebooks, Nietzsche similarly equates Christianity and its ethic as that which remains opposed to the law of selection, for through it unnaturalness becomes law: "Christianity is the counter-principle to the principle of *selection*. If the degenerate and the sick ("the Christian") is to be accorded the same value as the healthy ("the pagan"). . . then unnaturalness becomes law. . ." [1] (p. 246).

That Nietzsche opposed compassion and social justice, not just on grounds that it stemmed from resentment, but due to its preservation of weakness, is clear; how and why Nietzsche was appropriated by National Socialism perhaps even more. Indeed, for Girard, Nietzscheanism, while not wholly identifiable with the philosophy of Hitlerism, is the only philosophy that can make sense of it, in terms of its radical repudiation of the Judeo-Christian ethic. Nevertheless, it is necessary to highlight Girard's insight, namely that Nietzsche well understood the essence of Christianity as unique and indeed antithetical to the Dionysian, and furthermore, that Nietzsche understood this ethic as peculiar and particular to Western culture and its "God". The question remains then whether the death and replacement of the value of God necessitates simultaneously a replacement of the value of concern for victims. Therefore, any positive possibility opened by the death of God will have to contend with this issue, namely whether it remains possible to separate this ethic from its metaphysical and metanarrative foundation in Judeo-Christian theism. Regardless, and hopefully obvious, the repudiation of this victim ethic proves to be deeply problematic.

There are, to my mind, further problematic elements in Nietzsche's proposed solution to the death of God. Firstly, the perspectivism that he advocates and argues, that ensues from the collapse of the value of truth, science, and reason, appears to be self-referentially

incoherent. That is, if truth itself is “our longest lie” and our cognitive faculties are unreliable coping mechanisms that merely defang chaos by transmuting it to being, how can Nietzsche’s own position, including his diagnosis and cure, be taken as true and be advocated for? Furthermore, with Nietzsche, it is not only truth, but the *value* of truth that is called into question: in other words, why ought truth to be preferred to falsity? Why ought one to seek the truth and tell the truth? Perhaps lying is more life enhancing? Indeed, Nietzsche appears to be saying as much about his own philosophy, namely that it is not “true”, but rather a merely artistic work to be preferred by those with a palate for life rather than anti-life<sup>5</sup>.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s solution entails that with the death of God a possibility opens up for human beings to live free from revenge. But how exactly? How exactly does the death of God lead to such freedom and deliverance from the “long storms” of revenge? Recall that revenge is, according to Nietzsche, “the will’s revulsion against time and its ‘it was’ [es war]”. The resentful will remains chained to time and time’s “it was”. Resentment cannot overcome its tethering to the past. Instead of something like forgiveness, Nietzsche opts for a metaphysical antidote to such resentment, namely the embracing and bearing of the burden of time as the eternal return of the same, where time becomes a circle, and such “it was” is to be transformed into “I will that ‘it was’”. In other words, in positing the eternal return, the will is liberated from its resentful bondage to the past by way of projecting that past as the future possibility of the will, for the will to embrace. In a kind of Stoic manner, the will is permitted to will and want what was since such will reoccur again and again. For Nietzsche then, with the death of God, this possibility not only opens up, but remains the only alternative to the nihilistic decadence of failing to will at all. For Heidegger, however, Nietzsche’s need to liberate the will in precisely this matter, namely to will only its own willing, rather than leading to a liberation from nihilism, entrenches him further into it. It is to Heidegger then that we shall now turn.

### 3. Heidegger

As we saw above, for Nietzsche, atheistic modern science was just as theistic as the theism it sought to overcome, since theism was unconsciously still subscribing to the value of truth, including reason and science itself. Heidegger, in a similar move, as a suspicious hermeneut, argues essentially that Nietzsche’s overcoming of metaphysics is just as *metaphysical* as the metaphysics it sought to overcome. That is, for Heidegger, Nietzsche merely overturns meta-physics by inverting the sensible/super-sensible division and thus becomes the “last metaphysician”, insofar as not only have all metaphysical possibilities and configurations been exhausted with Nietzsche, but they have, more importantly, come to completion and fulfilment [12] (p. 8). It is in and through Nietzsche that, for Heidegger, the underlying understanding of being in metaphysics is revealed to be the will, the will to power, which Heidegger believes has been operating within metaphysics since its inception with Plato<sup>6</sup>. In other words, the metaphysical standards set up by Plato in terms of the criteria for the satisfaction of the truth, of being (a “vision” into the essence of things), can only be satiated by the absolute dominance of things in terms of the will over them<sup>7</sup>. It is for these reasons that Heidegger can say that the essence, or “metaphysics” of modern technology is the framework (*Gestell*). This framework is nothing more than the metaphysics of manipulation and dominance over things (entities), which arose from the originary sense of the being of beings put forth by Plato, namely essence, whatness, *quidditas*, etc. [15] (pp. 324–25, 432). Not only that, but upon meditating on the “essence of essence”, one is inevitably led to consider “what” something is in terms of its utility [15]. In short, for Heidegger, Nietzsche, along with the entire tradition of Platonic *metaphysics*, is nihilistic insofar as metaphysics *reduces the meaning of being to one meaning*. This reductionism of being is, for Heidegger, nihilism. The death of God, thus, as the completion of this nihilistic reductionism, is the revelation of this meaning of reality, of being, via modern science and technology.

Thus, for Heidegger, Nietzsche reduces the meaning of being to a singular meaning, will to power, and thus remains locked within the essence of metaphysics since Plato: reductionism. Rather than considering being as polyvalent, and truth as a kind of disclosure (*aletheia*), Nietzsche splits the world in two again, *metaphysically*, by arguing that will to power is the fundament ground, reality, and causal explanation behind appearances. Even if Nietzsche argues against being, causality, and even reality, his metaphysics for Heidegger still functions according to *metaphysics*. For Heidegger then, as noted above, Nietzsche's philosophy reveals the crisis of meaning in its completion in terms of the death of God, which again, Heidegger believes to be caused by metaphysical reductionism itself. Thus Heidegger, in order to posit his solution, like Nietzsche, seeks to inquire into the essence and origin of metaphysics, and, in doing so, "twist free" of metaphysics altogether. Furthermore, Heidegger, like Nietzsche, sees optimism in this reductionism insofar as the eclipse of meaning within the death of God can open new, non-reductive possibilities. Heidegger refers to this novelty as an "other beginning." [16]. However, this other beginning can only occur if the essence metaphysics as meta-physics is first understood. Then and only then can a crossing to this other beginning commence.

This crossing to this other beginning via the deconstruction of metaphysics, the possibility opened by the death of God, is tantamount to an uncovering of *beyng* (*das Seyn*) as the condition for the possibility of metaphysics. Whereas for Nietzsche metaphysics' condition for possibility was resentment against time, the denial of this world of becoming in favor of being, for Heidegger, metaphysics is conditioned quite literally by that which makes the distinction, or difference, between a being and its essence (its "being") first opening up. Indeed, *beyng* is this difference between a thing and its essence; *beyng* is the *ontological difference*, at least initially, as it is thought through the lens of *metaphysics*. Heidegger writes,

The question of the essence of truth arises from the question of the truth of essence. In the former question essence is understood initially in the sense of whatness (*quidditas*) or material content (*realitas*), whereas truth is understood as a characteristic of knowledge. In the question of the truth of essence, essence is understood verbally; in this word, remaining still within metaphysical presentation, *beyng* is thought as the difference that holds sway between being and beings. Truth signifies illuminating concealment [*lichtendes Bergen*] as the basic characteristic of being. The question of the essence of truth finds its answer in the proposition *the essence of truth is the truth of essence* [15] (translation amended).

There remains much to unpack in this paragraph, for within it, one might argue, lies the entirety of Heideggerian philosophy. Firstly, *beyng* is that space of difference needed to differentiate a being from its being, a thing from its meaning. In other words, *beyng* as a difference is what makes meaning possible, for a thing can only mean something if it is transcended, by the human being (*qua Dasein*), to its meaning. This transcendence to meaning is for Heidegger *metaphysics* proper. Indeed, in Heidegger's now famous essay "What is Metaphysics?" *beyng* is thought of as the difference or literally *the nothing* that makes *metaphysics* *qua meta-ta-phusika* possible [15] (pp. 108–10). *Beyng* is then the difference, the nothing itself, and this nothing in a very real sense *is*<sup>8</sup>. Thus, at the heart of metaphysics, as its condition for possibility, lies the paradox that *nothing is*, that being is identified with nonbeing. It is this understanding of *beyng* that has remained concealed in metaphysics, the metaphysics of ground, that enabled the reduction of the meaning of being to one meaning<sup>9</sup>.

Furthermore, from the same paragraph above, Heidegger speaks of *beyng* as inextricably bound to the essence of truth, which Heidegger argues is the "truth of essence", meaning that truth itself needs to be rethought, not as the correspondence of an idea or word to reality (an understanding that Nietzsche himself remained bound to, despite his attempts at overcoming truth), but rather as the disclosure of meaning. The essence of truth as the truth of essence means simply the disclosure of the meaning of a being, a disclosure of its essence, which at the same time conceals other possible meanings. Thus, the essence

of truth is both the disclosure of meaning as well as meanings' concealment, insofar as any illumination of a being in its meaning is at the same time a concealment of other meanings of such a being, a concealment of other possible ways for it to be meaningful. This understanding of being and of truth enables what we can now refer to as Heidegger's "antireductionist meta-metaphysics".

This meta-metaphysical and anti-reductionist understanding of being as nothing/difference and truth as disclosure/concealing is precisely what has remained hidden and unthought within original metaphysics ("the first Platonic beginning"). Thus, an uncovering of this understanding of being and truth as the condition for the possibility of metaphysics—this deconstruction of metaphysics—is simultaneously, for Heidegger, the overcoming of metaphysics and the passing into an "other beginning". Metaphysics is overcome once its conditions are revealed through its deconstruction, since its conditions are nothing other than being and truth, and since this understanding of being enables a polyvalent notion of the meaning of things. In other words, once being is understood in this way, reductionism can be overcome and the meaning of things, the being or essence of beings, can be said in and comport towards in many ways. Heidegger summarizes this point succinctly in his *Beiträge zur Philosophie*,

*The question, what is metaphysics?, already inquires into what is essential to 'metaphysics' in the sense of gaining an initial footing in crossing to the other beginning. In other words, the question already asks from within this other beginning. What makes visible in its determination of 'metaphysics' is already no longer metaphysics, but, rather its overcoming [17] (pp. 171–72. Translation mine).*

In sum, the other beginning, again, commences when metaphysics is properly understood; as we have seen, this means understanding that being qua the nothing is that which makes it possible. This understanding of being can in turn lead to an anti-reductionist stance toward the meaning of things, thereby overcoming metaphysics.

Yet, for Heidegger, the real problem with metaphysical reductionism and thus the need to cross into an other beginning lies with the *reflected reduction* that occurs to the human being as Dasein. That is, in metaphysical thinking, the meaning of the human being is reduced as well to a singular meaning; insofar as we conceive beings, and the meaning of beings, reductively, that reduction is reflected back upon Dasein, into Dasein's own self-understanding<sup>10</sup>. The human being is reduced to "just" its biology, its psychology, its neuroscience, etc. This proves especially problematic for Heidegger since such reductive thinking about Dasein amounts to an absolute stifling of thought itself; the human being no longer thinks, it merely "calculates". For Heidegger, the human being qua Dasein, is the being that has its being "to be", as a task or issue to be worked out by way of self-interpretation. Indeed, Dasein is the being that self-interprets itself, by the way of various existential projections, and, in turn, interprets the world (the context of the meaning of beings) in light of its own self-interpretation, and vice-versa. Thus, a reduction in the meaning of being on either side of the equation proves to be a thwarting of the essential nature of the human being.

Furthermore, the being (as the nothing or the difference) that makes possible the transcendence from a being to its meaning also exists *within Dasein*, making the self-transcendence of Dasein itself possible. That is, in order for Dasein to be free, the nothing must exist within Dasein so Dasein can differentiate itself from itself and transcend itself, toward future possibilities and thus toward future possible selves. Such transcendence, through being, then enables Dasein's own self-interpretation, and, in turn, Dasein's ability to *think*. Thinking then for Heidegger means the comportment towards beings in the world that transcends to their meaning, in light of our existential projects. Thinking, in other words, is interpreting, in light of our own self-interpretation, and vice-versa. Thus, an eclipse of being, as that which makes such self-transcendence and self-interpretation possible, renders thinking qua interpreting inert.

In his technology essay, Heidegger famously divines, via Hölderlin, that "where the danger is there grows the saving power", meaning that in the very concealment

and forgetting of being in metaphysics, a new paradigm and possibility of meaning can occur [15] (p.340). That is, in and through being's self-concealment and withdrawal, Dasein can be "drawn along into the withdrawal", insofar as it recognizes this "ironic" tendency in being itself to dissemble itself [8] (p.18). For Heidegger, this occurs primarily in and through the beautiful, that is, in being's activity *as* the beautiful. In his Artwork essay, Heidegger phenomenologically discloses the beautiful to be the *claritas* of being, or the self-illumination of illumination itself (the disclosure of disclosure) [15] (pp. 175–181). Being is truth *as* disclosure and illumination, thus in the beautiful, this illumination itself comes "to light", thereby revealing the illuminative and thus polyvalent nature of being, and of meaning, itself. In other words, the beautiful enables reality, through artworks, to be glimpsed as having multiple meanings and interpretations; reality and meaning, in beauty, can be considered as a kind of "text" that encourages itself to be read in many ways. Beauty then can reveal reality to have many meanings, and thus occasion many interpretations, thereby saving the human being from its reductionistic prison within metaphysics by handing its essence, as the being who (self) interprets, back to itself as Dasein.

In sum, in the beautiful, reality—and *not* the human subject—appears as perspectival. In the history of the metaphysical reductionism that led to Nietzscheanism, the meaning of meaning culminated in the perspective of the human subject; in Nietzschean perspectivism, the subject imposed meaning upon the meaningless canvas of becoming. Such was, indeed, "art" properly understood, for Nietzsche, as a kind of conscious lying, thereby overcoming truth and being in one fell swoop. For Heidegger, on the contrary, in art, in the beautiful, being and meaning come to be phenomenologically disclosed as independent of the human perspective; it is rather the perspectival nature of being itself that allows for itself, and Dasein, to be interpreted. This understanding of being is then an absolute reversal of metaphysical reductionism and perspectivism, insofar as meaning itself is saved as it is understood, by Heidegger, to be phenomenologically objective. It is a matter then of "grounding" meaning in being and not in the human subject, but grounding it in such a way that it is not "grounded" at all, at least not in the metaphysically causative or quidditative sense.

Heidegger further tells us that all art is essentially *logos*, thought in its etymological sense from the Greek *legein*, meaning to gather together disparity into unity, or the many into the one [19] (p. 71). Heidegger writes,

Language [Logos] alone brings beings as beings into the open for the first time. . .Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings to their Being *from out of* their Being. Such saying is a projecting of the illumination [*Lichtung*], in which announcement is made of what it is that beings come into the open *as*. Projecting is the release of a throw by which unconcealment infuses itself into beings as such. This projective announcement forthwith becomes a renunciation of all the dim confusion in which a being veils and withdraws itself. Projective saying is poetry: the saying of world and earth, *the saying of the arena of their strife and thus of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods*. Poetry is the saying of the unconcealment of beings [15] (p. 198. Emphasis mine).

Heidegger here identifies all Artwork as poetry and all poetry as a form of *logos*—the gathering together of many into one, which in turn illuminates beings in their meaning. Meaning occurs then in and through *logos*, the word, which, we could say, "orders chaos" insofar as it unifies the disparate. Again, such is not by way of the human subject, as it was for Nietzsche and the metaphysics of modern science and technology; rather meaning and even language itself transcend Dasein and, more importantly, transcend any perspective of will to power.

Furthermore, for Heidegger, this process or "event" of the occurrence of meaning, by way of the beautiful in art, is inextricably wedded to the sacred—"the nearness and remoteness of the gods". That is, to comport oneself to a world that is polyvalent in meaning is at the same time to touch the sacred, mysterious element of being, for being's

polyvalency allows interpretation as such to reemerge as possible, and in turn, for Dasein to be re-released into its own self-interpretation. Heidegger names, at times, this entire process whereby meaning is recovered post-death of God as “the event” of the “passing of the last god.” [15] (p. 285). At other points, indeed, Heidegger simply equates this last god with the overcoming of metaphysics itself: “the last god *is* the overcoming” [15] (p. 289). In other words, when being’s negative, concealed dimension itself is illuminated, when concealment is itself revealed *as* concealment, then and only then, can any space for the sacred emerge. Heidegger believes that as a polyvalent nature of being is recovered, being and Dasein again will recover their (self)interpretability; such interpretability of being and of Dasein amounts to, for Heidegger, a recovery and rediscovery of the sacred. It is this new sense of the sacred, this new God, that will presumably provide a new meta-narrative and orientation to Western culture.

For Heidegger therefore, like Nietzsche, the death of God can be and in fact is an occasion for a greater possibility, in this case, the possibility of meaning, to arise. Just as for Nietzsche, once the truth of metaphysics was revealed to be resentment toward becoming, metaphysics qua resentment could be finally transcended, so also for Heidegger, once the true nature of metaphysics qua reductionism is revealed, it can be transcended in favor of a polyvalent notion of meaning. We see then that for both Heidegger and Nietzsche, the death of God remains a means, even a necessary means, toward something *better* than the previous dominant metaphysics.

Curiously, Heidegger makes no mention of the victim ethic whatsoever and what role it would or could play in this future metanarrative of the last god. Indeed, according to Girard, aside from his Nazism, what Heidegger remains most guilty of is his whitewashing of Nietzsche as the “last metaphysician”, wholly ignoring the “anti-Christ” element of Nietzsche’s thinking in favor of metaphysics [9] (pp. 174–75). Heidegger’s metaphysical reading of Nietzsche has unfortunately become the standard reading, which forces a failure to contend with Nietzsche’s insights regarding social justice and its Judeo-Christian foundation. In turn, musings on the death of God, particularly secular ones, often fail to address or even acknowledge Nietzsche’s claims, and thus ignore what I believe to be the central issue pertaining to God’s death, as this ethic remains the foundation of Western culture. Can a post-theistic society retain this ethic or at least reappropriate it? If it can, how can it do so without returning to its foundations in Judeo-Christian theism?

#### 4. Conclusions

Indeed, the death of God is not without its possible dangers. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger forebode these possibilities. For Nietzsche, with the death of God, as we have seen, comes the death of reason and truth, and in turn the metaphysics of power. It is possible that people will bifurcate politically into resentment-based victim group identities. With the rise of Trumpism, a term I have argued elsewhere includes both the right and the left, we see the rise of victim power, where simply being a victim is itself a point of establishment, and the subsequent attempt to repudiate the concern for victims altogether with the rise of a new kind of fascism [2] (pp. 93–106). Nietzsche’s advocacy for an existence free of resentment and revenge still remains, in my estimation, perhaps the only viable alternative to political radicality on the right and the left. However, for this to occur, one would need to heed Hannah Arendt’s timeless political advice, namely that the entire fragility of the polis of human action is safeguarded solely through human forgiveness [20] (pp. 238–43).

Heidegger’s concern post-death of God remains less “ontic” and more “ontological” than Nietzsche’s; that is, Heidegger worries about the ontological implications of the death of God in terms of reductionism and thus the absolute abolition of human thinking, and in turn, human freedom. If being’s polyvalency remains obscured in favor of the reductionist model of modern science and technology, then Dasein can no longer be the being that has its being “to be”, since being as the nothing that enables human transcendence, transcendence in thinking and transcendence in freedom, remains eclipsed. For Heidegger, then, “only

a god can save us”, meaning that only a new metanarrative, one that illuminates the concealed nature of existence, can supplant the former, failed metaphysical narrative.

There remains a common theme then throughout Nietzsche and Heidegger, namely that with the destruction and collapse of meaning, perhaps even in and through rationality, a new kind of existence can be gleaned, one that is free of revenge and authentic in its comportment toward being. The failure of *reason* to conceptually mediate and solve the riddle of human existence led, for Nietzsche and Heidegger, to its own self-destruction in the death of God; however, without this self-destruction, the solutions they posit would be impossible. For without the death of God, human beings would remain stuck within a resentful, reductionist paradigm. God’s death, it seems, for Nietzsche and Heidegger, is a *necessity*, in terms of a necessary means through which this “other beginning” and “this meta-human” (*Übermensch*) are made possible. The death of God then ought not to be thought in terms of the wake of cessation, but rather beginning, indeed a return to beginnings. This means the beginning of an innocent comportment toward existence free of revenge and resentment, for Nietzsche. For Heidegger, this means an existence enchanted by the sacred, saturated with meaning and possibility, an other beginning, which, is, as we have seen, nothing more than the reappropriation of the first.

However, the question remains as to whether we can return to the ethic of concern for victims, without a return to theism? Nietzscheanism rightly identifies this ethic with Judeo-Christianity and assumes that it is inextricably wedded to resentment and weakness. Nietzsche thus seeks to posit an antidote that rids society of any semblance of this original victim ethic of mercy, in favor of an ethic of life and vitality. Heidegger’s anticipation towards a new meta-narrative makes no mention of Nietzsche’s critique of the Judeo-Christian victim ethic, nor any hopes of retaining it in the new metanarrative of the “last god”. A concern, therefore, is that the death of God wipes away completely this victim ethic, since it wipes away the foundation upon which it was based, namely the human being as a unique and dignified individual, created in God’s image, as well as, and perhaps more importantly, the preference for the weak, the oppressed, and the persecuted, insofar as God, in Jesus, emptied himself and took the place of the victim, thereby deifying the place of the victim. Perhaps the only way to properly “return to the beginning” then is to return to the original value itself, God, albeit purged of any resentment and reductionism. Indeed, such a return was, in many ways, already argued for by Kierkegaard, who sought a return to the original faith of Christianity from its corruption by Christendom. Regardless, any consequence of the death of God that eradicates this essential and unique value—mercy for victims—is, in my estimation, a path toward the utter collapse of Western culture. Therefore, we ought to remain hopeful as well as skeptical toward a positive reimagining of the death of God, hopeful that we can leave behind the reductionistic and resentful past that the value “God” brought with it; however, skepticism and perhaps outright resistance ought to accompany any rethinking of Western culture and its values without the foundational value of concern for victims. The question remains whether this value is at all possible in its justification apart from its originary Judeo-Christian foundation. I believe there simply is no metaphysical justification, and this value must be taken on faith, the very faith that Judeo-Christianity posited as a virtue, the virtue which constitutes any relationship to the transcendent.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- 1 I have presented a more detailed account of the relationship between Nietzsche, Darwin, and the death of God, in [3].
- 2 Ibid. For an detailed treatment of Nietzsche's Darwinian, evolutionary epistemology in relation to objective truth see [4]
- 3 For Nietzsche's critiques of Socialism, see [1].
- 4 For further discussion of the self-evident axiom of concern for victims in the 21st century political landscape and in this context, see [2].
- 5 For a discussion of the synthesis of naturalism and aestheticism see [11].
- 6 Heidegger many times notes unequivocally that "metaphysics is Platonism", e.g., see [13].
- 7 Richard Rorty argues that a significant claim of Heidegger's is that "if you begin with Plato's motives and assumptions you will end up with some form of pragmatism." Such pragmatism includes Nietzschean will to power over nature. See [14].
- 8 "The Nothing . . . reveals itself as belonging to the Being of beings." [15].
- 9 For an in depth discussion of Heidegger's anti-reductionism, see [3].
- 10 That Dasein is likely to interpret itself in light of entities around it, see [18].

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