

Article

“We Know a New Happiness . . . ” from Heidegger’s Happy Event to Nietzsche’s Hysterical Salvation

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Abstract: This article explores Heidegger’s *Er-eignis* and Nietzsche’s messianism to carve out an understanding of transcendence that allows a connection with happiness in an ontological sense. I will, however, need two more important ‘figures’ from Nietzsche’s work, namely ‘artist’ and ‘woman’—the latter as understood by Derrida. Using a ‘de-Freuding’ of the term ‘hysteria’ into a philosopheme, I can finally connect happiness with the end of metaphysics. First, I prepare for the most suitable philosophical approach. Then, I turn to Heidegger to look for a connection between freedom and authenticity that hides in the unthought. This opens the door to Nietzsche’s most surprising insertion of the theological virtues into the core of philosophical reflection. Then, finally, I introduce the metaphors ‘artist’ and ‘woman’ to arrive at an articulation of hysteria as a philosophical name for a perspective on happiness.

Keywords: happiness; transcendence; Heidegger; Nietzsche; artist; woman; hysteria



Citation: Meganck, Erik. 2023. “We Know a New Happiness . . . ” from Heidegger’s Happy Event to Nietzsche’s Hysterical Salvation. *Religions* 14: 738. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060738>

Academic Editors: Anné Hendrik Verhoef and Joseph Rivera

Received: 5 April 2023

Revised: 27 May 2023

Accepted: 1 June 2023

Published: 2 June 2023



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1. Introduction

First, a short remark on style and method. This is an exploration, not an analysis or archive. It dares to join this ‘other’ thinking that is called: critique of metaphysics. As such, it remains inconclusive and at most tries to offer and open a perspective. It also does not look back, but forward. I do not want to walk back along the thinking paths of Nietzsche and Heidegger, citing extensively from their work. I try to walk further along the paths they opened, entering the ‘spirit’ of their work rather than the ‘letter’. Also, their idiosyncrasies make it difficult to maintain throughout this text an academic rigor that is typical of research articles.

2. Philosophical Premises

Transcendence used to refer to an otherworldly or otherworldly realm. This was supposed to be some supernatural reality where thought could collect the full meaning of this reality that was condemned as obscure and opaque because of, e.g., its ephemeral nature. Modernity slightly changed the orientation of transcendence, while keeping the system intact. The subject had shifted position: from God to human being. Philosophy, the faithful servant, moved from theology to science. From then on, she no longer helped theology explore God’s Creation plans but instead focused on epistemological and ethical warrants, with Descartes and Kant as apostles. Strangely enough, these warrants were also or still called ‘God’.

This meant that God’s days of Glory were over. Philosophy urged Him to become the guardian of what should be held true and good. That turned out to be a mistake: God died. Nietzsche did the honors of the autopsy—brilliantly, by the way. He prophesized a discomfortable future where certainties would die and God became redundant—starting with Laplace’s famous answer to Napoleon.¹ And, indeed, along came Marx and Freud to make things worse. Not only God but also the metaphysics that promoted Him became suspect. Was he not merely an illusionary product of the world, of socio-economical and psycho-affective processes?

Nietzsche drew the unavoidable conclusion and declared the *Hinterwelt* closed. There is no supernatural instance behind, under, or above reality that takes care of the orchestration—or if there is, philosophy has no access.² There is only world, and everything substantial beyond this, however impressive, is an arbitrary construct that sounds suspiciously hollow when you tap it with the hammer of philosophy.

Heidegger took up these ideas and accepted the emptiness and inaccessibility of the supernatural outerworld. There is world, and this is the event of meaning. Being suggests that things have meaning when they belong to a world. Beings have no absolute and eternal meaning ‘in themselves’. World is the givenness of ‘it makes sense’. It is not ‘the’ present but ‘a’ present. Nothing ultimate or necessary or absolute about it. Worlds just ‘happen’, and we ‘happen’ to be thrown into one—double contingency or eventuality; ek-sistence is an ‘eventure’.³ Outside this world is . . . nothing. Since then, transcendence no longer refers to a realm at all but rather to an event, to wit: reaching, thinking beyond metaphysics, beyond the world—in other words: exploring nothing. Nothing transcends the world and, therefore, that is where we have to go and find being. We cannot find being among beings, as a being. We can only find being as forgotten by technology, as what means nothing to that thought whose reach is precisely beings, i.e., modern metaphysics, or better: science. Heidegger articulated this movement as *Er-eignis* of *Sein* and *Dasein*, the event of the mutual rapprochement or drawn-togetherness of being and thinking (humans).

This means that there is no transcendent entity or force that organizes the world. There is no scheme or dynamics, such as, e.g., dialectics, that directs history. If the world is ‘what makes sense’, i.e., the gift of signification, then this sense is offered ex nihilo. We should be grateful instead of worried by this and be a bit more postmodern in the Nietzschean sense of over-human. We are not to mourn over a lost *Hinterwelt*, on the contrary. As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it “There is no sense of sense. That is worthy of adoration”.⁴ A very outspoken ‘hint’ of happiness appears here. Does not what we adore make us happy?

And is this not precisely what philosophy has forgotten since Plato and what Heidegger tries to bring to our attention again, namely, that we ought to be grateful for the gift of sense? Plato is called a philosopher because he was amazed by what we are wont to consider as evident, the mere fact that there is such a thing as sense, that we can at least try to understand reality and think and talk about it. When people discuss football at the bar, they usually do not think about the wonder of being able to transfer meaning from one mind to others, however problematic. But philosophers do. Some get stuck in logic and communication models; others are free and celebrate their amazement, despite the experience that thought is never as clean as those logicians want it to look.

If this is so, then thinking and reading and talking and writing (about nothing) should make us happy and spread happiness among others. This is no longer about academic philosophy, as Nancy taught us; dancing, painting, composing, etc., can also be ways of thinking. Were not most great Renaissance painters and sculptors and poets also original theologians? To exist authentically, not tying yourself up in everyday *Verfallenheit*, chained to a wall watching shadows, is this not the life worth living according to Socrates? And could happiness not be precisely experiencing your own life as ‘a life worth living’?

But then, what is meant by this thoughtful authenticity? Often, you will find here an excursion on *Verfallenheit* in *Sein und Zeit*—or if you prefer the later Heidegger, his thoughts on *Er-eignis*. I prefer and therefore will refer to the latter ‘period’ here. Let us embark on an exploration of the way Heidegger treats freedom in order to see how we could translate this into a possible Heideggerian exploration of happiness—above all because Heidegger does not elaborate extensively on happiness himself. Happiness seems to be ontologically ‘implied’ rather than ontically (e.g., psychologically) explained. Yet the relation between freedom and happiness has always been a baseline in philosophy.

3. Heidegger: Freedom and Authenticity

Just as Heidegger sets truth apart from epistemology, he takes freedom out of psychology and ethics.⁵ He is not concerned with freedom of choice, not with the choice

between coffee and tea, or even between good and evil. Like truth, true freedom belongs to ontological difference, that is: to being as an event rather than as a fixed structure that determines freedom—insofar as that is not a contradiction.

Freedom can be opposed to alienation. If freedom belongs to the essence of man and thus to thinking, then taking away that essence constitutes an attack on freedom. For Heidegger, alienation is due to the forgetting of being. Metaphysics is the history of alienation in that it denies man his own destiny. To even see that, we need to think beyond metaphysics. But there is no thought beyond metaphysics. That is why Heidegger goes in search of the unthought *within* metaphysics. So, how can we think the unthought? How can we liberate thought?

Heidegger himself, who liked to retreat to his cabin on Todtnauberg in the Black Forest, uses the image of a *Holzweg* as a metaphor for thought. This almost untranslatable word refers to overgrown paths in the forest along which wood is dragged out of the forest. They are the effect of that dragging; they do not lead from A to B, according to a plan. They are not roads that were built with the purpose of transporting chopped trees. They suddenly stop in the middle of the forest. There are many of these, winding through every forest. They are often deceptively similar to each other and cannot serve as specific landmarks. In German, *auf dem Holzweg* means lost track. In any case, it refers to the opposite of a well-trodden path, the beaten track, the ‘road most traveled’.

Holzweg refers to what Heidegger means by the unthought. This is not some well-defined content that lies waiting somewhere to be divulged but has not yet become articulated in the prevailing philosophical systems. The unthought is not, as with Hegel, something that still has to be appropriated in order to obtain a fuller picture, a more complete explanation. The unthought is what thinking has forgotten, albeit not in a psychological sense. It is not about trying to remember a shopping list and then forgetting the milk. It is about a complex of not wanting to think, not being able to think, and not being allowed to think. Derrida called it the ‘unheard-of’. This has a double connotation—and Derrida always liked that. It means both that which is not heard and also that which is deemed inappropriate. It is about what ‘cannot be’ and is therefore ‘unheard-of’ in an epistemological as well as in an ethical sense.

Even if science shows us a sterile, mechanical, senseless world, everyone still accepts that this is the ‘true’ world. It is simply thought of this way, period; it constitutes rationalist evidence, an article of faith, the scientific creed. This thought results from a long history of research, a process of systematic purification and elimination of so-called primitive elements. The possibility that science is only one discourse—or language game—among others, that it is simply the way in which things in a certain consistency—which is called the world—appear to us, remains unthought. Technoscience is then no longer an objective reality but the way in which being and thinking belong to each other in time. Not only does this remain unthought within science, but it is also considered unheard-of to dare suggest this. After all, it makes no sense since it is about nothing—that is, about being. Current thought then behaves exactly like a ‘fashion’, a temporal validity that rejects what does not ‘fit’.⁶

Only from the unthought can another thought sprout. More precisely, the contemplation of the unthought makes it possible for another way of thinking to come into view. Since Heidegger believes that metaphysics has exhausted its possibilities, another way of thinking must present itself. This becomes exciting since it follows from the inherent nature of any other way of thinking that it cannot be included within or derived from current thought. Metaphysics cannot think beyond itself without going ‘under deconstruction’. Levinas and Derrida will teach us more about this ‘other’ as the place where metaphysics wants to break free from itself. This detachment is supposed to facilitate the appearance of that other way of thinking.

The question remains, of course, how we are then to receive a thought that does not (yet) belong to our philosophical archive. If another way of thinking comes into view, it cannot be a ‘full view’. Here, Heidegger uses the word ‘wink’. This ‘other’ thinking,

not translatable into ours, will arrive in a form analogous to a wink. What does a wink mean? It has no content, it only ‘points’. It points at something that is about to happen, an opportunity, an opening, and a promise. What event awaits us? Well, here, Heidegger indulges once again in clever wordplay. An event in German is called *Er-eignis*. But Heidegger reads a second meaning into it: the mutual appropriation, namely of being and thinking: *Er-eignis*. Thinking and being were separated from each other—into logic and physics. When thinking leaves behind all rigidity of the metaphysical system and starts contemplating the event, this counts as essential liberation, as liberation from metaphysics’ determination of mankind, alienated and amputated from being.

Being lasts; worlds do not last, not even God. Did not Nietzsche teach us that gods also decompose? Dead gods decay, just like everything else in this world. But being is also always arriving, and a new world announces itself. In *Er-eignis*, a wink will become visible. Therefore, we, as thinking beings, must be vigilant, for the event approaches like a thief in the night (1Thes5:2; Mt24:43).

Propositions will not make us happy, nor will theories, models, or proof. At most, they make us glad. Happiness is not a matter of ‘content’ since then it could be measured using psychological, scientific devices—no philosophy required.

Happiness remained unthought. Is there a way we can connect being as ‘happening of world’ on the one hand and happiness on the other? Is there an ontological sense to happiness? What could it mean that happiness happens instead of being an existential category, a human predicate?

4. Nietzsche and Theological Virtues

In 1886, Nietzsche decided to publish a second edition of *The Gay Science* and write a preface. This preface turns out to be remarkably relevant here (Nietzsche 2001).

The title of this article comes from this preface. I will select and then comment on the significant passages. It turns out that something remarkable surreptitiously emerges in this text. We actually stumble upon the three theological virtues as articulated by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (1Cor13:13).

Gratitude flows forth incessantly, as if that which was most unexpected had just happened—the gratitude of a convalescent—for *recovery* was what was most unexpected. ‘Gay Science’: this signifies the saturnalia of a mind that has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure—patiently, severely, coldly, without yielding, but also without hope—and is now all of a sudden attacked by **hope**, by hope for health, by the *intoxication* of recovery (Nietzsche 2001, p. 3).

Metaphysics is without hope, is hopeless—which is something else than despair.⁷ Technology, as an ontology, does not thrive on hope but on control, planning, and management. It reduces the world to its availability, as sociologist Hartmut Rosa explains, echoing Heidegger (Rosa 2020). It leaves no room for hope. Hope can only have the unexpected, ‘ac-cidens’ or what befalls, as its object—otherwise, it would be an expectation, demand, desire. But in technoscience, accidents will happen when and where things go wrong and go against plan.⁸ Recovery was not expected, the patient did not even realize s/he was ill. But when recovery befalls or arrives, it is experienced as an attack by the virus of hope—a hope for health, beyond a terrible, long pressure of a sickening, suffocating, powerless, and sterile thought.

This entire book is really nothing but an amusement after long privation and powerlessness, the jubilation of returning strength, of a reawakened **faith** in a tomorrow and a day after tomorrow, of a sudden sense and anticipation of a future, of impending adventures, of reopened seas, of goals that are permitted and believed in again (Nietzsche 2001, p. 3).

This faith is not a matter of establishing facts. It looks forward to tomorrow and even the day after. The future is of course not the outcome of any extrapolation but is born out of anticipation, itself the answer to the sense of impending adventure. This is of the order

of a promise. The future is what lies open; otherwise, setting up goals would, nor could, be permitted. And to believe in these goals is, again, not a matter of management.

When the seas are reopened, we are permitted to sail out to discover and explore what hitherto remained hidden—such as the eternal recurrence of the same, the will to power, overman, and of course the death of God. Since we have absolutely no idea how this will work out, the adventure will remain impending for a while. No one knows when we will arrive, tomorrow or the day after since we have no knowledge about if and where we will dock or land. But this does not paralyze us, like metaphysics does, on the contrary.

Those reopened seas remind me of the imagery in the famous §125 of that same book, where the madman announces the death of God. It also reminds me of the Flood in *Exodus*. (Gn6:5-9:17) The closing of the waters above and the waters below was not an act of God, but of a humanity that has turned away from God, that has killed God. By undoing his work of Creation, humanity allowed the waters or seas to close. Then, we are continually falling backward, sideward, forward, in all directions. Then, there is no up or down and we are straying as though through an infinite nothing. These are the metaphors in §125. They evoke a hopelessness that befits metaphysics. But these seas are now reopened. There is now room for faith and belief.

Before expanding on these, I draw your attention to Nietzsche's sense of gratitude, which is to me an overtly religious posture. It resonates with grace since gratitude presupposes gratuity. The recovery about which Nietzsche talks is not something earned or deserved. One does not even hope for recovery; hope is its intoxication.

The **trust** in life is gone: life itself has become a problem. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one sullen. Even **love** of life is still possible—only one loves differently. It is like the love for a woman who gives us doubts... (Nietzsche 2001, p. 7)

Life itself used to be the most precious gift from God. One could trust life because God would never burden his favorite creation with something devilish. But modernity is where and when philosophy leaves theology and turns to science. It is modern philosophy and not empirical data that pushed Darwin, against his will, forward as the one who from then on explained reality. Evolution took the place of natural law. Life becomes a problem that requires a technoscientific solution. The meaning of life becomes a biological instead of a theological matter. To understand life in modern fashion, we need to study it as the mechanics of reproduction and maintenance. Trust in this divine gift made a place for another way of appreciating and affirming life. We are not condemned to a sterile, detached, cold relation to life that only makes us sullen.

Instead of loving life as we love God, who lovingly gives us life as was usual before modernity, we love life as we would love a woman who enchants, betrays, and beguiles us. Life, thought, art, the world, history, etc., all become wild, unpredictable, without certainty, mysterious, and hysterical. I will need to elaborate on this further down.

Hope, trust and faith, and love manifest themselves in these passages I cited. They do not, however, refer to the second coming of Christ, to the end of times when all will be revealed and our petty efforts to understand the meaning of life will prove fruitless. They refer to another coming, another arrival, namely, of the messianic figure of overman. This is not a superhuman being (Superman or a nazi or something) but rather an epoch beyond History.

The philosopher with the hammer has diagnosed metaphysics as fruitless. He did not 'destroy' metaphysics but used his hammer like a physician would do to test our reflexes. Nietzsche tapped the great concepts and systems of metaphysics and could only establish that they are hollow. They used to offer firmness and certainty, but this turns out to be an illusion. There is no longer a subject that safeguards the true nature of an object; this dichotomy has faded away. When certainty leaves, hope and trust come in. Life is no longer a matter of facts but an event, an 'eventure'. We can either shy away from this and try to hide behind hollow illusions or we can hold our heads up and take the world as it

happens. Those who can, should love life. So, there remains indeed only hope, trust, and love, and of these three, the love of life is most dignified.

Nietzsche then concludes: “We know a new happiness . . . ” (Nietzsche 2001, p. 7).

This happiness Nietzsche announces is a matter of knowledge. It is out of the question that this would be any knowledge in the modern scientific sense. To begin with, happiness is not a fact that can be measured or established. It is not a feeling that can be known psychologically. “Wir kennen ein neues Glück”. The German verb ‘wissen’ is actually about knowledge of facts, whereas the verb ‘kennen’ refers more to a form of getting acquainted. This knowledge refers to an experience that changes or has changed us. It should be understood in the same sense as, e.g., “We have known hunger” or “We know pain” and the like.

The ellipsis opens on transcendence. It whispers (or bellows?) in the register of Heidegger’s wink. We have no inkling as to the cause or nature of this happiness. If it is a new happiness, it is either another happiness than before or there was no happiness before. Nietzsche would presumably choose the latter option. He did not consider nihilism, the western condition, a source of happiness, on the contrary. What will make humanity happy, is the escape from the dynamics of metaphysics, the persistent unmasking of one Supreme Being in the name of yet another. Nietzsche unmasks the system of unmasking and can therefore forsake the need to provide another. God is dead, the dynasty of Supreme Beings is over. We, who no longer mourn the loss of certainty, are free and thus happy.

Happiness is not the effect of novelty as such; what is ‘new’ is not the cause of happiness. We are not happy *because* something new arrives. This would, again, still be completely and typically modern. The modern obsession with ‘new’, the identification of ‘new’ and ‘better’, has to do with the rejection of tradition as suspect and dangerous since it thrives on primitive religion and oppression. Modernity, at least in its Enlightened version, is the scene of revolution from the first one in 1789 to the last one in May 1968. From then on, revolution became a parody, to manifest itself in art. Whenever a leaflet of an exhibition in contemporary art promises me to show work that has never been ‘created’ before, and I go to this museum to watch that work, I immediately see many valid reasons why it never was shown before . . . Novelty has become an end in itself; ‘novum’ for the sake of nothing else than ‘novum’.

Happiness is new in the sense of resurrection as promise—though, I doubt if Nietzsche would indeed use this very word. It tells of a disease that has worn out the patient—namely, Western culture—for a very long time and that unexpectedly lost its nihilistic, annihilating power that turned out to be hostile to life itself. By enduring the illness, the patient has overcome it. This is what Heidegger later on called *Verwindung*. This must not be read in a dialectical or indeed any (epistemo)logical register.

The ‘novum’ can always be derived from actuality, as a treatment that has not been tried out before. This has nothing to do with happiness, it is rather a sign or symptom of a growing despair. Indeed, the more treatments that have failed, the more those new treatments will be started up just for the sake of the exercise. Resurrection, on the other hand, is never a logical consequence of any actuality. A resurrection is an event that shakes up actuality in a way that we can only consider impossible in that we could never foresee (calculate) this event. It is not impossible in the sense that it has used up and exhausted all possible strategies; this impossibility points at what lies beyond our wildest dreams of the possible.

What takes us, our culture, beyond the novelties that only made things worse, is a promise of something ‘better’, a world that is healed and healing. How do we know for sure? We do not. The quest for certainty belongs to the illness. We only have hope, trust, and resurrected love of life.

Does all this prove philosophers such as Gianni Vattimo wrong?⁹ He indeed identified transcendence as the main illness of Western culture. Weak thought considers transcendence violent because of its arbitrary nature. The installation of what Derrida calls transcendent signified is the work of metaphysics; they are not really original, eternal, absolute,

etc. But we really need to understand transcendence in another way. Vattimo's criticism of transcendence as the founding feature of metaphysics fails to do this. This is why he is not the Nietzschean Heideggerian he claims to be. Transcendence is no longer a location, such as this other or outer world; that world has indeed been declared inaccessible to philosophy by Nietzsche. It is what human existence reaches out for in the world without belonging to the world as a 'mere' thing. Resurrection happens in the world without being understood by any theory, model, or discourse of this world. Any theological, philosophical, political, scientific, ... interpretation can only be a sterile reduction that unavoidably misses its essential sense. I could refer to Heidegger's ontological difference, but perhaps it is better to remind the reader of an interesting quote from Jean-Luc Nancy: "Christianity designates nothing other, essentially [...], than the demand to open in this world an alterity or an unconditional alienation" (Nancy 2008, p. 8).

On the ground of this aforementioned identification of transcendence and violence, Vattimo considers his weak thought 'better' because it is friendlier. But Jean Baudrillard notes that "And so we now experience both the 'improvement' of human rights and the recrudescence of their violation" (Baudrillard 2000, p. 24). Furthermore, deep inside Vattimo's weak thought hides a very violent metaphysical core where he surreptitiously exempts his notion of *caritas* from interpretation, thereby promoting it to an unnegotiable principle or norm. When Nietzsche promises us happiness, then this 'better' world will have to mean something other than 'friendly'.

I need to return to this imagery of the beguiling woman. How can we be happy with a woman we want to trust as life itself but who turns out not to be trustworthy? It seems as if we should love life as we would love a woman that seduces us but does not promise us to be and remain true. Unless, of course, her truth reveals something about the truth of 'man', about normative truth itself.

Nietzsche (and Heidegger) wanted us to leave the ambition of fullness, the illusion of total explanation, behind. Concepts that turn out to be hollow illusions are figments of imagination, in fact: metaphors. Does the truth about truth hide inside the metaphorical work of the conceptual? The truth about truth lies in its unmasking. But we should never promote the truth about the truth as the 'new truth'. This is the modern program all over again. As I said, this program of systematically unmasking needs to be unmasked so that nothing can come in its place.

What happens with truth, Nietzsche gathers under the image of 'woman'. Nietzsche was always supposed to be a frustrated misogynist, but Derrida explains in *Spurs* why this is fundamentally wrong (Derrida 1979). The figure of a woman as a metaphor for metaphysics as (or under) deconstruction, for the dislocation of male truth, is anything but pejorative. Woman is to man what Dionysos is to Apollo—remember that Nietzsche identified himself with Dionysos. This woman is not to be understood in a biological or psychological register.

Of course, Nietzsche does not propagate the kind of feminism that wants to reverse the sexual economy by replacing the male position with the female one and vice versa. That would be just one more unmasking revolution. This is about contamination, perversion, weakening, and dislocation. The hand that taps the big concepts is a woman's hand. Give the male a hammer, and he immediately starts to smash systems.

Nietzsche saw the artist, together with the saint and the philosopher, as the figure that could 'intervene' in history (Nietzsche 1997, §5). An artist is the *locus* of the self-articulation of reality (world, nature, life, ...). In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud writes: "In one way the neuroses show a striking and far-reaching correspondence with the great social productions of art, religion and philosophy, while again they seem like distortions of them. We may say that hysteria is a caricature of an artistic creation, a compulsion neurosis a caricature of a religion, and a paranoid delusion a caricature of a philosophic system" (Freud 1919, p. 122).

What happens when we 'de-caricaturize' these diagnostics and distort them further into philosophemes? What happens when we 'rid' them of their psychodiagnostic connotation? We could translate them from Freud's materialistic physiological context into

‘postmodern’ discourse. When we take ritualism out of compulsion neurosis, we obtain enthusiasm, involvement, and inter-esse. When we take a Hegelian absoluteness out of a paranoiac delusion, we obtain hermeneutics, not facts but interpretations—which is itself an interpretation: (Nietzsche 2017, §481) philosophy as hermeneutics. When we take sexual frustration out of hysteria, we obtain dislocation, disruption, destabilization, and intoxication. We can read these terms in a philosophical register.

Perhaps this hysterical caricature could help us find a connection between the messianic function of art and the deconstructive work of woman. Note that psychoanalysis never really ‘understood’ hysteria and even hardly uses the term anymore. This allows me to ‘re-use’ it in a philosophical register without fear of contradicting psychoanalysis. It is a ‘free’ metaphor. I would introduce hysteria in philosophy as the scene where the subject (male, who *knows*, spirit, owner of the object) is ‘emasculated’ by the object (woman, ignorant, earthy, property, or project of the subject).¹⁰ What could it mean when woman, as a female artist maybe, castrates Logos? Castration can never be an epistemological relation, a conceptually transparent operation of woman on man, as two entities that ex post interact with each other, contingently. They cannot be seen through the lens of rational relations; they belong to the register of difference. They cannot be understood apart from each other, like Dionysos and Apollo, like Romanticism and Enlightenment, or like deconstruction and metaphysics. The first ‘pole’ has always been suppressed; the suppression itself has always been suppressed. But now, this dynamic manifests itself.

“What is deconstruction? Nothing! What is it not? Well, everything!” (Derrida 2007, p. 6). Thus wrote Derrida in a letter to a Japanese friend. Woman *an Sich* means nothing; she does not exist in metaphysics. She appears in myths and tales where she takes revenge as a ghost, demon, or fairy.¹¹ She exists in a nothingness from where she invades and distorts everything. Woman spooks. When the suppression escapes its own suppression, then the distortion, as well as the suppressed, reveal themselves as a ghost or specter, rather like symptoms do according to psychoanalysis.¹²

Metaphysics as the male desire for unity, transparency, logical consistency, and system is distorted. Metaphysics is unable to think this distortion through and discards it as what needs to be remedied or simply ignored. When female desire consists of this distortion, and when culture tends to avoid or reverse this distortion and to ‘domesticate’ female desire, then probably only culture-*as*-crisis—not just culture *in* crisis—is able to liberate this distortion.¹³ This liberating event shows two sides of ‘crisis’: on the one hand, male systematicity erodes; on the other hand, its distortion can be taken up as an opportunity. The female thus heralds a promise while the male demands its content and warrant in vain.

Now, do we—i.e., all human beings, not gender specific—desire the female? Do we desire the distorted male? Do we desire *as* female? But then again, *was will das Weib?* This question is unjustified since it still presupposes two entities in an epistemological (scientific?) relation. This still remains ‘infected’ by male supremacy, since these relations, such as, e.g., opposition, belong to the male desire for clarity and logic. The opposition is therefore the result of a suppression of woman. Opposition hides the ‘threat’ of distortion.

In the hysteric distortion, the female ‘revenge’, the truth about truth becomes visible. ‘Official’ truth is the result of male preference and of the suppression of the ‘other’. The truth about the truth is this suppression as the source and part of the metaphysical system. Therefore, woman becomes at the same time a name—amongst others—of every kind of oppression and exclusion, and a profound critique of the system of objectivity. Inasmuch as metaphysics is the effect of a male preference, its objectivity is denounced as arbitrary.

Woman’s beguiling is perhaps what philosophers of ‘re-enchantment’ want to thematize today. It refers to what Rosa calls ‘uncontrollability’, where the world withdraws and resists male control. This is not sociology but pure (Heideggerian) ontology. Hysteria might well be the most ‘accurate’ philosophical metaphor to ‘describe’ the world or human thought as marked by artist and woman as (it is preparing for) mutation.

How can these metaphors be made more fruitful? The uterus is the place where new happiness is conceived in a non-metaphysical way. The theological ‘garden-model’, where

the man plants his seed in a woman and harvests nine months later, has long since been left behind. It was a model designed to domesticate fertility. Hysteria is a name of the ultimate resistance against this or, for that matter, any domestication. Perhaps we should accept hysteria as the promise that transcends what is ending endlessly—with this ending itself being a transcending—and will hopefully lead us beyond the world-as-crisis. It could be an image that makes us familiar with the notion of an advent.

Freedom from metaphysics'—i.e., male—epistemological compulsion as openness towards the event or rather: *ad-vent* (Heidegger); thought itself becoming this openness, along the lines of hope and faith, apart from any theist structure or system (Nietzsche). This will be an ontologically happy event as long as thought is allowed to be hysterical in a philosophical sense, to be *like* a woman-artist: fruitful in its vigilant distortion and creative receptivity towards the 'other', and thereby free from—but not without, that would again be an oppositional operation—too rigid a priori (traditional, epistemological, academic, . . .) prescriptions that are presented as exclusive and evident.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

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

Notes

- ¹ Pierre-Simon Laplace was invited by the court to dedicate his scientific masterpiece on celestial mechanics to Napoleon himself. The emperor was told that there was no mention of God in this study. Pressed for an explanation, Laplace famously replied "I had no need for that hypothesis". When Napoleon, amused, related this anecdote to Joseph-Louis Lagrange, another great mathematician, the latter exclaimed "But God is the greatest hypothesis imaginable! You can prove almost anything with it".
- ² Nietzsche cannot rule that out. If there are indeed no facts, only interpretations because the instance that decides on truth claims has vanished, is dead, and also this is an interpretation, then the possibility of an outerworld is maintained. He cannot get away with "The non-existence of the outerworld is a fact, and this is final". But this possibility can only be considered outside the reach of philosophy, of thought. Perhaps in Anselm's excess? This excess has the same form as the paradox that something can be considered outside of philosophy, so thought beyond thought. In his *Proslogion*, Anselm states that God is the greatest thing that can be thought of and, at the same time, greater than what can be thought. The first God is the Supreme Being from metaphysics; the second one is the God of excess that is thought of as beyond thought.
- ³ To think is to lead your existence beyond mere thingness and reach out or stand out—ek-sist—towards being as the event of the world instead of as *a* being—see *Er-eignis*.
- ⁴ This is the title of the second chapter of his *Adoration. The Deconstruction of Christianity II* (Nancy 2013, vol. 2).
- ⁵ This part leans heavily on part of the chapter on Heidegger in Meganck (2023, pp. 105–20).
- ⁶ This is the cheapest accusation that science formulates to whoever brings up the unthought and unheard-of, namely that it is nothing more than a fleeting fancy of philosophy, a ripple in the otherwise pure surface of metaphysics. It is, however, precisely this unrippled surface that remains a persistent illusion. It needs to be stressed here that my discourse does not argue in favor of any form of opposition between science and philosophy (or theology, or art). It does criticize, however, the modern philosophical contention that science is the exclusive *locus* of truth.
- ⁷ I elaborate on this and the following in Meganck (2016).
- ⁸ Cfr. the recent earthquake in Turkey/Syria.
- ⁹ The following is treated *in extenso* in Meganck (2015).
- ¹⁰ Freud testified that he felt 'castrated' by his patient Dora. He could not trap her inside a logically consistent explanation. See Judy Gammelgaard (2017, p. 206 *et passim*).
- ¹¹ In *Sleeping Beauty*, the male king invites twelve fairies and puts twelve golden plates on the table. There are, however, thirteen fairies. It is the thirteenth fairy that will predict the death of his daughter, a death sentence that was commuted to a hundred years' sleep by the twelfth fairy. What is revealed here is the ignorance of the male (king) about female matters. He counts in rational sun (golden plate) cycles of twelve months, whereas the female year counts thirteen cycles of 28 days. The thirteenth fairy tells him that he does not deserve a daughter as long as he denies female reality.

- 12 Derrida wittingly refers to the opening sentence of *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels: “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism”. This specter needs to be ‘exorcized’—suppressed, marginalized. But it keeps reappearing; it *resists* its own suppression. See Jacques Derrida (2012, p. 46).
- 13 In ancient Greece, society was supposed to confine and control what they called the ‘wandering uterus’. ‘Hysteria’ comes from the Greek word for uterus.

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