

# Beyond Autonomy in Eighteenth-Century British and German Aesthetics

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## Chapter 12

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### Hölderlin's Higher Enlightenment

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Södertörns högskola

# 12 Hölderlin's Higher Enlightenment

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## Introduction

The purpose of the chapter is to analyze Friedrich Hölderlin's emphasis on the importance of aesthetic comportment for reconceiving the relationship between human beings and their surroundings, and for enabling what he calls a "higher enlightenment."<sup>1</sup> Hölderlin shares the romantic critique of the mechanistic conception of nature and life, and argues that human beings have to achieve a higher connection than the mechanical one between themselves and their surroundings. In order to establish this, the bond between human beings and their environment needs aesthetic representation. Poetry is able to particularize and concretize that which in discursive knowledge remains abstract and removed from life. A necessary feature of a higher enlightenment is, according to Hölderlin, the salutary remembrance that human creations, such as art and society, are not completely autonomous but ultimately dependent on nature. As this chapter shows, for Hölderlin, an authentic poem is not a closed autonomous work of art but rather an open unity that remembers its dependence on nature and thus can be said to reflect on its own aesthetic heteronomy.<sup>2</sup>

That a privileging of aesthetic experience does not by necessity involve the approval of the establishment of independent spheres of value is clear from the writings of Hölderlin. For him, aesthetic experience is central for mediating between the modern human subject and its surroundings, be they social or natural. Hölderlin belonged to the first generation of post-Kantians, and like his peers, he found Kant's critical philosophy and especially the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to be immensely important (see his letter to Hegel on July 10, 1794, EL 29/MA 2:541).<sup>3</sup> In the third *Critique*, Kant attempted to mediate between objective nature and subjective freedom, that is, between the domains which his two previous *Critiques* had severed. The link between them was to be achieved through the concept of nature's purposiveness: in other words, the human ability (through reflective judgment) to regard nature as meaningful. This meaningfulness comes forth in both aesthetic and teleological judgments. However, despite his reconciliatory efforts, the

purposiveness of nature remains, for Kant, a subjective and heuristic concept.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the dualism between nature and freedom continues to reverberate in the third *Critique*, at least according to Kant's critics. Like other post-Kantians, Hölderlin considers Kant's union between nature and freedom to be merely symbolic. But, also like many of his peers, Hölderlin holds on to the Kantian conception of aesthetic experience and art as crucial mediating instances between nature and humanity.<sup>5</sup>

Already in the early fragments "There is a natural state. . ." (1794) and "On the Concept of Punishment" (early 1795), Hölderlin struggles with the Kantian opposition between nature and freedom, attempting to find a connection between the receptivity (passivity) of nature and the spontaneity (activity) of freedom.<sup>6</sup> In his most famous and influential fragment, "Being Judgement Possibility" (written in the first half of 1795, also known as "Judgment and Being"), Hölderlin argues that the opposition between the judging subject (mind) and the judged object (nature) that occurs in the act of making judgments shows the need for a unity beyond this division (EL 231–232/MA 2:49–50).<sup>7</sup> In a letter to Schiller in September 1795, Hölderlin states that "the union of subject and object . . . though possible aesthetically, in an act of intellectual intuition, is theoretically possible only through endless approximation [*eine unendliche Annäherung*]" (EL 62/MA 2:595). During the second half of 1795, he was working on what was to become the penultimate version of the novel *Hyperion*. The preface to this version claims that "[t]he blessed unity, Being, in the unique sense of the word, is lost to us . . . We have been dislocated from nature," and "[w]e would have no presentiment [*Abndung*] of this infinite peace, of this Being . . . if [it] was not present [*vorhanden*] (to us). It is present—as beauty" (MA 1:558).<sup>8</sup> Hölderlin's position could, at first glance, be interpreted as proclaiming the loss of an original unity with(in) nature in modernity (along Schillerian lines), a unity which can be regained in aesthetic experience. However, Hölderlin was not satisfied with this version of *Hyperion*, and the conception of nature in the final version of the novel (published in two parts in 1797 and 1799) is more complex; interestingly, the novel itself narrates this shift in the comprehension of beauty and nature, as we will see below. Hölderlin's more developed conception thus emphasizes the temporal structure of the aesthetic experience itself, which allows us to perceive unity not so much regained as *created* through the dynamic interconnections of the particulars gathered in the aesthetic whole.<sup>9</sup>

But it is indeed through art and aesthetics that this unity can be created and experienced. In a letter to Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer on February 24, 1796, Hölderlin speaks of his plan to write a series of letters which he aims to call "New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man," showing that he thinks it is necessary to move beyond Schiller's "old" effort, published the year before. In these new letters, Hölderlin plans to explain why "an aesthetic sense [*ästhetischen Sinn*]" is necessary

in order to overcome “the conflict between the subject and the object, between our selves and the world, and between reason and revelation” (EL 68/MA 2:614–615). What exists of these aesthetic letters is probably what goes by the name “Fragment of Philosophical Letters.”<sup>10</sup> This piece can also be seen as antedating crucial concepts from the fragment known as “The Oldest Programme for a System of German Idealism” ascribed to Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin, if you accept the dating of the latter piece to 1797 (see EL 377n18, and EL 390n1). In any case, there are many resemblances between the two fragments: for example, the critique of the mechanistic conception of nature and the emphasis on the unifying power of aesthetic ideas.

### Fragment of Philosophical Letters

In “Fragment of Philosophical Letters,” Hölderlin refers to the natural human drive to overcome need (*Nothdurft*) and live “a higher human life” in which there is a “more than mechanical *connection*, a higher *fate* between [man] and his world” (EL 235/MA 2:53). In order to be able to do this, we need to “*represent* [vorstellen]” the bond, the connection, between ourselves and the world (EL 235/MA 2:53). Only in this way can we reach what Hölderlin calls “the higher enlightenment” (EL 237/MA 2:55). Man “has to form [*machen*] an idea or an image [*Bild*] of his fate, which, strictly speaking, can neither really be thought, nor is available to the senses” (EL 235/MA 2:53). For Hölderlin, neither theoretical knowledge nor mere sense perception is capable of bringing about the “higher connection” in which man “feels himself and his world . . . as being united [*vereiniget fühlen*]” (EL 235/MA 2:53). He also emphasizes the prerequisite of remembrance and gratefulness—I will return to these concepts later—in achieving a higher connection beyond the abstract and one-sided mechanical relationship between self and world.

The problem with mere thought, that is to say, discursive knowledge (cognition through concepts), is that it can only repeat the necessary connection; it only deals with universal laws which can be proven *without* particular examples.<sup>11</sup> What is more than necessary connections cannot be reached by thought alone; thought cannot “exhaust” the “more infinite, more than necessary relations in life” (EL 236/MA 2:54). Mere sense perception has the opposite problem: it is limited to the particular, without connection to the universal. Admittedly the relationship between the particular and the universal is a very old problem in philosophy. Often, philosophy has looked to works of art and aesthetic experience for guidance beyond the conundrum of how to relate particular and universal in a manner that acknowledges both of them, not one at the expense of the other; in short, works of art are often seen as exemplary in creating a unity or a whole which simultaneously allows the incorporated particulars to shine forth in their particularity, in their

non-exchangeability and concreteness, while they are simultaneously related to each other in a meaningful way.

That Hölderlin, being a poet as well as a philosopher (and occasionally feeling torn between these occupations),<sup>12</sup> looks to art and specifically to poetry for guidance is not surprising, but in his efforts to elaborate on (especially) philosophy's need of poetry, he is also part of a long tradition in aesthetics (I will address this need in further detail toward the end of this chapter). In the "Fragment," Hölderlin characterizes the higher connection as religious, but this characteristic turns on the relationships involved being "considered not so much in themselves, as with regard to the *spirit* that governs the sphere in which those relationships take place" (EL 237/MA 2:55). This is the spirit of poetic unity. Hölderlin distinguishes religious relationships as incorporating "the personality, the independence, the reciprocal limitation [*Beschränkung*], the negative" which characterizes intellectual relationships as well as "the intimate connection, the implication of the one in the other, the inseparability in their parts, which characterize the parts of a physical relationship" (EL 238/MA 2:56). Poetic unity is able to combine these two poles—the intellectual (universal) and the physical (particular) or, if you prefer, the spiritual (ideal) and the material (real)—in a way that allows them to uphold a dynamic relationship, and that is why Hölderlin claims that "all religion would in its essence [*Wesen*] be poetic" (EL 239/MA 2:57). His insistence on the necessity of combining these poles, without either one gaining the upper hand, can be fruitfully compared to Plato's emphasis, in *Phaedrus*, on the importance of including both the procedure of *di-airesis* (division) and that of *synagoge* (bringing together) in thinking. Hölderlin himself leads us to this dialogue: already in 1794, in a letter to his friend Christian Ludwig Neuffer, he announces that he is planning an essay on aesthetic ideas, which is to "be considered a commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*" (EL 34/MA 2:551). In *Phaedrus*, Socrates says:

Now I myself, Phaedrus, am a lover of these processes of division and bringing together, as aids to speech and thought. And if I think any other man is able to see a unity that by nature is simultaneously a manifold, him I follow after and "walk in his footsteps as if he were a god."<sup>13</sup>

Given that Socrates is paraphrasing a recurring expression in Homer's *Odyssey*, when he admits that he would follow the person who is able to see such a unity and *walk in his footsteps as if he were a god*, this is an (indirect) admittance of the guiding light of poetic language.<sup>14</sup> For Hölderlin, however, it was the *Iliad* that constituted the preeminent poetic model, especially the formation of the character of Achilles, whom Hölderlin regards as "the most perfectly achieved and the most transient blossom of the heroic world" (EL 249/MA 2:64).<sup>15</sup> That perfection

and transience should not be thought of as mutually exclusive is a recurrent theme both in Hölderlin's theoretical writings and in his poetry, and below, I will expand on the ability of the poetic work of art to achieve a model unity that also allows for the ethical significance of transience.

Theoretical knowledge is, for Hölderlin, characterized by the one-sided privileging of the element of division and abstraction. In order to know nature as measurable and determinate, scientific language must be stripped of anything reminiscent of life and worldliness; the word must become an abstract sign able to master its frozen content and renounce its bonds with the material world, that is, its sensuous sonority and its affinity with nature. "[W]ith our iron concepts we believe ourselves to be more enlightened than the ancients," Hölderlin comments in "Fragment" (EL 237/MA 2:55). Scientific knowing generally operates by dissection; looking for the most basic constituents of reality, it risks treating living unities as machinelike, killing the object of study, either literally or symbolically, by separating it from the greater surroundings in which it partakes (this is also Shaftesbury's worry; see Chapter 2 of this volume). Kant's description, in the First *Critique*, of the totality of external nature as the sum total of appearances—that is to say, as a mere aggregate—is in line with this mechanistic conception.<sup>16</sup> In the second *Critique*, the freedom of reason is described as "independence from everything empirical and so from nature generally."<sup>17</sup> As mentioned, Kant himself found this strict division untenable, and, apart from the general notion of nature's purposiveness, the conception of aesthetic ideas is an effort to mediate between the previously severed realms. Through production of aesthetic ideas—a production which can be regarded as ultimately stemming from nature's productivity or purposiveness since genius is defined as a "natural gift" by Kant<sup>18</sup>—sensuous particularity is joined with the sphere of universal ideas.<sup>19</sup> "The Oldest Programme for a System of German Idealism" takes this further and claims that "the philosopher must possess as much aesthetic power as the poet," and "aesthetic sense" is necessary for thinking properly (EL 342).<sup>20</sup> The capability of art and aesthetic sense to produce meaningful unities which do not suppress particularity becomes exemplary for experience as such, just as it is portrayed in Hölderlin's "Fragment" (and in Plato's *Phaedrus*). This is the case because aesthetic production, the creation of aesthetic ideas or images, is a unique kind of forming or making—*poiesis*—which is mimetic in the sense that it is not merely fiction but imitative—imitative not by being a mere copy of something already existing but in the manner of relating to reality (to the world and to nature) by emphasizing those aspects that are cut away from ordinary conceptual representation: the sensuous and concrete or, in other words, the qualitative aspects. This kind of creation can be regarded as structurally similar to (or even related to) natural production because

aesthetic or poetic unity seems to have emerged out of the qualitative interconnectedness between the incorporated parts, rather than being determined from outside by a preformed concept (like the conceptual synthesis in thinking qua discursivity). This is one of the reasons for the long-standing analogy between the organism and the work of art in the history of aesthetics.<sup>21</sup> I want to stress that this analogy need not be interpreted as directly concerning the “autotelic self-organization” of the organism and the work of art<sup>22</sup> but, rather, can be viewed as an example that Hölderlin allows us to recognize: a way of acknowledging art’s (and other human creations’) dependence on nature. In a letter to his half-brother Karl Gok on June 4, 1799, Hölderlin points out that man should “not think himself the lord and master of nature” but should

in all his arts and activity [preserve] a modesty and piety towards its [that is, nature’s] spirit—the same spirit he carries within him and has all about him and which gives him material and energy. For human art and activity, however much it has already achieved and can achieve, cannot produce life, cannot itself create the raw material it transforms and works on; it can develop creative energy, but the energy itself is eternal and not the work of human hands.

(EL 137/MA 2:770)<sup>23</sup>

An important counter-voice to Kant’s more moderate recognition of the importance of aesthetics was that of Herder, and the latter’s insistence on the need for poetry in order to overcome the traditional opposition between sensation and cognition is also echoed in Hölderlin’s own efforts.<sup>24</sup> In Herder’s “On Image, Poetry, and Fable” (1787), we find arguments similar to those that Hölderlin expressed in his “Fragment” regarding the creation of poetic images:

Our inner poetic sense is able to bind together the manifold features of the sensation so faithfully and accurately that in its artificial world [*Kunstwelt*] we feel once more the whole living world, for it is precisely the minor details—which the frigid understanding [*der kalte Verstand*] might not have noticed and which the even more frigid vulgar understanding omits as superfluous—that are the truest lineaments of the peculiar feeling and that precisely because of this truth, therefore, possess the most decided efficacy. The so-called redundancy of Homer’s similes is the very thing that brings them to life in the first place; he sets them in motion, and so the living creature must of necessity stir its limbs. If these limbs were severed, the lifeless trunk could neither stand nor walk.<sup>25</sup>

The creation of an artificial world is, for Herder, a prerequisite for experiencing the world as a living one—the understanding is not capable

of caring for the details which enable such an experience; poetic sense is necessary in order to reach truth. Like Hölderlin, in the letter cited above, Herder is careful to point out that, even though this artificial world bears the mark of human creativity, it is ultimately dependent on nature:

In real and absolute terms, the human being can neither poeticize nor invent, for otherwise in doing so he would become the creator of another world [*der Schöpfer einer neuen Welt*]. What he can do is conjoin images and ideas, designate them with the stamp of *analogy*, thus leaving his own mark on them. This he can and may do. For everything that we call image [*Bild*] in Nature becomes such only through the reception and operation of his perceiving, separating, composing, and designating soul.<sup>26</sup>

Poetic creation is thus not a matter of *ex nihilo* creation for Herder<sup>27</sup> but always takes place in relation to the natural world, which also shapes human beings—neither one is static and finished; both continually impact one another. Aesthetic sense is indispensable in distinguishing the infinite relations—the inexhaustible bonds between particulars, all “the minor details” that Herder speaks of—which allow for a more inclusive unity than “the frigid understanding” (Herder) or the “iron concepts” (Hölderlin) are able to achieve. Universal, abstract rules are insufficient for achieving a truly ethical relationship between the human being and the surrounding world because they risk neglecting the sensuous uniqueness of the individual or particular we are facing. Hölderlin argues in the “Fragment” that ethics becomes “arrogant morality” when abstracted from life (EL 237/MA 2:55). In his critique of the merely mechanic connection between human beings and their world, and his attempt to counteract disenchantment and the separation of the true, the good, and the beautiful, he emphasizes the ethical import of art and aesthetic experience.

Another problematic aspect of philosophical generality is the tendency to privilege that which is seen as stable, eternal, and unchanging over the transient and fleeting manifold of particularities. Traditional conceptions of beauty conceive of it as on par with this stability: an eternal idea beyond its mere sensuous and particular manifestations. Hölderlin questions this conception of beauty in his epistolary novel *Hyperion*. Here, the main character, at the beginning of his “eccentric path [*exzentrische Bahn*],”<sup>28</sup> regards beautiful nature as eternal and unchanging, in contrast to the shifting lives of humans: “Yes, only forget that there are men, O famished, beleaguered, infinitely troubled heart! and return to the place from which you came, to the arms of Nature, the changeless, the quiet, the beautiful.”<sup>29</sup> But when Diotima (Hyperion’s teacher and

beloved, just as her namesake was Socrates' teacher) dies, Hyperion realizes that "all the transformations of pure Nature are part of her beauty too."<sup>30</sup> Thus, his journey moves opposite the way in which Plato, in the *Symposium*, explains our journey from experiencing material beauty to finally reaching the idea, or form, of beauty which surpasses the transient manifestations of beauty in life.<sup>31</sup> Hyperion instead moves from the abstract idea of beauty as eternal and unchanging to the experiential insight that transience and death are also part of life and nature's beauty, rather than their strict opposites. After all, life only appears in mortal, physical, finite beings—organisms. That is to say, the opposite (or what is seen as the opposite) is needed for life to become manifest, to appear *as life*. Our mortality, our finitude, is what connects us to organic life, as well as to the inorganic, into which we will ultimately decompose since, as living beings, we are also composed of inorganic matter. We can find similar arguments in Hölderlin's aphorisms from around 1799, when he writes of "[t]he deep feeling of mortality, of change, of one's temporal limitations" that has to be acknowledged in order for one to exercise all of one's powers and be able to grasp the whole or the unity of life (EL 242/MA 2:60). But it is through the novel's unifying representation—in this case, a narrative of a particular individual's non-goal oriented (eccentric) journey<sup>32</sup>—that this is truly turned into a *felt* experience, something which mere (goal-oriented) discursivity cannot achieve.

## Nature and Art

This brings me to a consideration of something I have not yet properly reflected on: if poetry (broadly construed) has this ability that discursivity lacks, why does Hölderlin feel a need to dwell on this in his theoretical writings? Why a need of poetology, of theory, if poetry alone is able to overcome, as I quoted in the beginning of the chapter, "the conflict between the subject and the object, between our selves and the world, between reason and revelation"? This may be generalized as the question of the need of aesthetics: why do we need it when we have art?

Hannah Vandegrift Eldridge reads the tension between Hölderlin's theoretical texts and his poetry as a specifically modern tension. She highlights the apparent paradox between what Hölderlin claims in his reflections on poetry—that poetic language is able to reveal something that discursive language cannot—asking, if that is true, why bother with theory? Why attempt to explain something with discursive language if only to argue that it cannot be achieved except in poetry? Vandegrift Eldridge takes "the paradox . . . as a symptom of anxiety about the political, moral, and aesthetic problem of finding a modern world to be a home for finite human subjectivity."<sup>33</sup> It is thus a matter of disenchantment in modernity: the usual ties (family and religion) lose their ability to provide

meaning for the worldly human subject. Placing Hölderlin's worries "in the post-Kantian landscape" with its concern for how the human mind relates to the external world, Vandegrift Eldridge argues that Hölderlin recognizes "the desire for infinite knowledge and at the same time the impossibility of that knowledge."<sup>34</sup>

While I am very sympathetic to Vandegrift Eldridge's effort to shed light on the paradox in Hölderlin's theoretical reflections, her interpretation focuses entirely on the subjective and intersubjective side: in other words, on the experience of the alienation characteristic of human life in modern society that she persuasively argues comes forth in Hölderlin's poetry. However, the estranged relationship between the individual and society—as well as between individuals themselves in modern society—cannot be properly conceived without reflecting on the human being's alienation from nature. To put this crudely, if nature is increasingly regarded as devoid of intrinsic value and completely exhaustible by the quantitative methods of natural science, and these methods, in turn, become decisive for what is considered progress in the dominant spheres of human activity (politics, economy, and science), then the feeling of cosmic meaninglessness and that of individual meaninglessness in modern society are two sides of the same coin. Not only does Hölderlin raise serious concern regarding the alienation from nature in his theoretical writings and his letters,<sup>35</sup> but what is so remarkable about Hölderlin's achievement is that, in his literary works, he actually manages to give voice to non-human nature. I have argued for reading *Hyperion* in this way, that is, as allowing transient nature to matter (to be considered beautiful), but in Hölderlin's poetry, this is achieved in a perhaps even more sophisticated manner.

In the ode "Nature and Art or Saturn and Jupiter" ("Natur und Kunst oder Saturn und Jupiter"), written around 1800, Hölderlin offers a dialectical presentation of the established opposition between *physis* (nature) and *techne* (art). Nature corresponds to the mythological Saturn (whom the Romans identified with the Greek Titan Chronos), and art corresponds to the mythological Jupiter (the equivalent of the Greek Olympian Zeus in Roman mythology), referred to as "Saturn's son" in the poem. According to the myth, Zeus overpowered his father and enclosed him together with the other Titans in Tartaros (the underworld). Through Hölderlin's rendering of the relationship between nature and art in a mythical fashion, we understand that this relationship is not a question of strict opposition but of kinship. It is through the recognition of humankind and her art as dependent on nature, not set above nature, even in our attempt to dominate it, that the poem's critique of the mastery over nature is achieved. As Theodor W. Adorno has pointed out, the poem is able to express that, through violence against nature, we unconsciously repeat the cruelty from which we were looking to wrest

ourselves.<sup>36</sup> In order to rise above this condition and become what the idea of culture and art promises—"the higher enlightenment," of which Hölderlin speaks—we need to remember what we thought could simply be left behind, the same way Jupiter/Zeus needs to pay tribute to his precondition:

So down with you! Or cease to withhold your thanks!  
And if you'll stay, defer to the older god  
And grant him that above all others,  
Gods and great mortals, the singer name him!<sup>37</sup>

This remembrance is not about *returning*; nature is not a First to which we can return but an Other that we must acknowledge in order to reach proper consciousness, to know who we really are. As Gerhard Kurz has pointed out, "thanks" ("Dank") here is the name for art's relationship with its origin; "thanks" is the consciousness of art, the expression of its thankfulness for its origin in nature.<sup>38</sup> But this origin is not something we can go back to; it only shows itself in remembrance. According to Hölderlin, art *is* this remembrance of nature. It is not an autonomous creation from nothing; in order to come into its own, it has to remember its condition of possibility: nature.

The "thanks" ("Dank") can also be described as Nature's relationship to itself.<sup>39</sup> This is evident from the opening stanza of "What Is Mine" ("Mein Eigentum," 1799), in which the lyrical I wanders in a ripe autumnal garden:

The autumn day rests now in fullness,  
The clear grapes are pressed, and the orchard is red  
With fruit, though many lovely  
Blossoms have fallen to Earth in thanks.<sup>40</sup>

In the poem, the blossoms that have fallen to the ground are interpreted as a thanks to the earth, a gift to the earth from that which has emerged from it. It seems clear that this thankfulness should be regarded as a model for human behavior toward the rest of nature for, in the third stanza, we read, "for the fruits didn't / Grow by human hands alone."<sup>41</sup> This dependence on nature is what art, or poetry in Hölderlin's case, acknowledges. The earth's "abundance [*Reichtum*]," not human labor, is the ultimate basis for the riches.<sup>42</sup> The lyrical I reflects on poetry's role and hopes that his "song [*Gesang*]" will be a safe place, a "garden" with trees that shelter it from storms and heat in the same manner that the trees in the orchard protect the workers: a poetic mimesis of nature which acknowledges nature's priority.<sup>43</sup> The work of the poet can make the "blossoms" "ever-young" through the poem's remembrance, which

is a commemoration on an elevated plane but one that never forgets mortality as its precondition:

O heavenly powers! You kindly bless  
 What belongs to each mortal;  
 O bless what I own too, lest Fate  
 Cut down my dreaming life too soon.<sup>44</sup>

Art allows human beings to acknowledge themselves as part of nature through remembrance and gratefulness; this is what enables “the higher enlightenment,” which Hölderlin writes about in the “Fragment” (EL 237/MA 2:55). He also emphasizes receptivity (*Rezeptivität/ Empfänglichkeit*) and openness in our approach to nature. In the essay “When the poet is once in command of the spirit. . .” (1800), he writes about the importance of the spirit being “RECEPTIVE [*receptiv*]” in order to create authentic poetry (EL 284/MA 2:85).<sup>45</sup> In the same essay, he characterizes poetic unity as an “INFINITE UNITY” (EL 286/MA 2:87). Thus, what poetry aims at is the creation of an open unity: not a closed and self-contained work of art but a work that remembers its dependence on nature.

The thanks can also travel upward, so to speak. This is the case in the poem “The Shelter at Hardt” (“Der Winkel von Hahrdt,” published 1805),<sup>46</sup> which reads, in Nick Hoff’s translation:

The forest slopes down,  
 And the leaves turned inward  
 Hang like buds, below  
 A ground blooms up toward them,  
 Not at all speechless.  
 For Ulrich walked  
 There; a great destiny  
 Often ponders over his footprint,  
 Ready, on the site that remains.<sup>47</sup>

The shelter of which Hölderlin writes is composed of two large blocks of sandstone leaning against each other where Duke Ulrich of Württemberg was said to be hiding from his enemies (he was exiled by Emperor Charles V in 1519). “Not at all speechless” is how Hoff translates Hölderlin’s “Nicht gar unmündig,” capturing the spirit well: reaching maturity (*Mündigkeit*) implies that you speak for yourself, with your own mouth (*Mund*). “The Shelter at Hardt” is an implicit critique of the notion of nature as the backdrop to human affairs; it is a subtle objection to the image of nature as a wordless inferior that must be left behind in order for humans to become civilized. In the poem, the blooming ground below the trees is instead presented as eloquent, as expressive, offering an alternative to the conventional Enlightenment opposition of a self-determining

and autonomous humankind versus a dependent and heteronomous nature.<sup>48</sup> For Hölderlin, such a notion of nature is not enlightened enough. The ground below the trees is expressive because it is ready and waiting to be interpreted as a sign of a historical event: “For Ulrich walked / There.” But it is also expressive because the natural shelter constitutes the very ground, the concrete condition of possibility, for this event. This expression is made possible through Hölderlin’s use of parataxis, that is to say, his non-hierarchical way of placing the linguistic elements alongside each other; this, in contrast to the procedure of reasoning, discursive language, and its syntactic periodicity, which, by using subordinate clauses, creates a closed and causally structured unity. Instead, Hölderlin’s poem negates the subordinating, nature-dominating logic of discursive language, by refusing a hierarchical arrangement: we thus encounter a strange sentence construction in the first part of the poem (up to and including the “Not at all speechless”/“Nicht gar unmündig”). But this strangeness does not turn the poem into merely a different kind of closed unity, say, the lyrical-subjective expression of an autonomous work of art. Instead, we experience the sudden appearance of the name Ulrich, and furthermore, the introduction of Ulrich is formulated in a more conversational tone that also breaks with the previous convoluted sentence structure: “For Ulrich walked / There” (“Da nemlich ist Ulrich / Gegangen”). It is a *caesura* of sorts, creating space for reflection and remembrance. (Not a caesura by the letter but by the spirit.)<sup>49</sup> Through this kind of poetic remembrance, the ground shines forth (“blooms up”) and becomes eloquent; we are presented with living, beautiful, transient nature, staking its claim on us, reading this as a meaningful unification of sensuous multiplicity. By acknowledging the poem’s dependence on natural beauty, expressing its gratefulness toward it, the poem gives nature its voice back.

The poem also appears as a whole seemingly brought forward through the interconnectedness between the parts which stand in a mimetic and reciprocal relationship to one another, both on the level of content and that of form: “the leaves turned inward / Hang like buds [*Knospen ähnlich*]”; the ground, in its turn, “blooms up” to meet the bud-resembling leaves. The convoluted sentence structure in the first part of the poem may, in turn, be interpreted as imitating the inward-turned leaves, a mimesis of the language of nature. This kind of open unity—allowing for the breaking open of apparent seamlessness *and* the mimetic interconnection between the particulars—cannot be achieved in ordinary discursive language. However, philosophy, as discursivity *par excellence*, can let itself be guided by art and by poetry, and through philosophy’s reflection on and acknowledgment of its dependence on art—which is what I think Hölderlin achieves in his poetological essays, which strain discursivity to the utmost, becoming almost incomprehensible in their efforts to follow poetry’s guiding light<sup>50</sup>—it may achieve an echo (or a second reflection, if you will) of art’s acknowledgment of its dependence on nature and, in this way, endeavor to reach beyond its limits, breaking through its apparent self-sufficiency.

## Conclusion

If we take Hölderlin's achievement as a model, we are able to see that the relationship between philosophy and poetry need not be one of warfare, as appears in Plato's *Republic*. Hölderlin is part of a long-standing effort to elaborate on philosophy's need for poetry—which, as mentioned, Plato himself concedes in other dialogues, such as *Phaedrus*—in order to remain in contact with what thinking depends upon and what it should acknowledge: transient material nature.

The need for unification, or reconciliation, between subject and object—or, less epistemologically phrased, between the human being and nature, the self and the world—does not, for Hölderlin, involve returning to some claimed original state; it is not a backwards movement and is attainable only through poetic re-presentation and creation. Poetry is able to create an image, a unified whole, which does not suppress the manifold particulars it gathers but instead seems to grow out of the intimate and non-exhaustible connections between the particulars themselves.

Thus, the poetic work does not turn its unity into an infinite which stands over and above the finite, making the finite particulars exchangeable and ultimately meaningless. Instead, it allows the finite and transient particulars to become eloquent through these connections, providing a model for a different kind of unity, an open unity, in which the living, finite, and sensuous manifold is allowed to matter.

## Notes

- 1 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, trans. and ed. Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth (London: Penguin, 2009), 237; *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Vol. 2, ed. Michael Knaupp (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 1992), 55. These editions are henceforth referred to in the main text as EL and MA. For the most part, I cite from the MA, which sits somewhere between Friedrich Beißner's *Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe* (with its emphasis on coherence and separation of "reading texts" from critical apparatus) and D. E. Sattler's *Frankfurter Ausgabe* (with its presentation of variants, fragments, and drafts, together with commentary). However, since I take issue with the MA rendering of one of the poems (see note 47 below), for convenience sake, I cite all poetry from the *Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*.
- 2 For another version of the heteronomy of the work of art, see Chapter 10 of this volume.
- 3 For further discussion, see Violetta Waibel, "Kant, Fichte, Schelling," in *Hölderlin-Handbuch*, ed. Johann Kreuzer (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), 90–94.
- 4 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 247 (§65) [Akademie-Ausgabe 5:375], where Kant describes the concept of the organism, qua "natural end," as a regulative, not a constitutive concept.

- 5 This is also emphasized by Andrew Bowie in *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, 2nd ed. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 16.
- 6 See also Johann Kreuzer, "Einleitung," in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Theoretische Schriften*, ed. Johann Kreuzer (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), xii–xiii.
- 7 Knaupp uses the editorial title "Seyn, Urtheil, Modalität."
- 8 My translation. In the preceding passage, Hölderlin claims, in similar phrasing to that in the letter to Schiller, that knowledge and action can merely reach an endless approximation of this unity.
- 9 Hannah Vandegrift Eldridge also points to the importance of the temporal quality of aesthetic experience for Hölderlin; see her *Lyric Orientations: Hölderlin, Rilke, and the Poetics of Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2015), e.g. 56.
- 10 Friedrich Beißner treats the fragmentary essay as a later piece (though he admits that dating it is difficult) and calls it "Über Religion"; see Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe* (henceforth: StA), Vol. 4.1, ed. Beißner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1961), 416. Wolfram Groddeck and D. E. Sattler date it to 1796/97; see Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: Frankfurter Ausgabe* (henceforth: FHA), Vol. 14, ed. Groddeck and Sattler (Frankfurt am Main: Roter Stern, 1979), 11–12. Knaupp hypothetically dates it to early 1796; see MA 3:389.
- 11 If we remain within the Kantian framework, which is the framework that Hölderlin is struggling with. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1998), 205 [A 68/B 93], where Kant defines knowledge in the human understanding as cognition through concepts and thus "not intuitive but discursive."
- 12 In the letter to Niethammer quoted above, Hölderlin speaks of philosophy as "a tyrant" and claims that he "suffer[s] its rule rather than submitting to it voluntarily" (EL 68/ MA 2:614).
- 13 Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *Plato I: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler, Loeb Classical Library 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 266b (trans. modified). Regarding "And if I think any other man is able to see a unity that by nature is simultaneously a manifold" (*Ἐάν τί τινα ἄλλον ἡγήσῃμαι δυνατόν εἰς ἓν καὶ ἐπὶ πολλὰ πεφυκός ὄρᾱν*), I have followed the French translator Léon Robin; see Platon, *Phèdre* in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 4.3, trans. Robin (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1970), 73 ("En outre, si je crois voir chez quelqu'un d'autre une aptitude à porter ses regards dans la direction d'une unité et qui soit l'unité naturelle d'une multiplicité"), and the Swedish translator Jan Stolpe; see Platon, *Faidros* in *Skrifter*, Vol. 2, trans. Stolpe (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2001), 359 ("Och om jag anser att någon kan se en enhet som av naturen samtidigt är en mångfald"; see also 500n77). Both Robin and Stolpe stick to the manuscripts' *πεφυκός* instead of, like Fowler, following Aldus Manutius, and several later editors, in changing it to *πεφυκόθ'*.
- 14 The phrase in Homer is *μετ' ἰχθνια βαῖνε θεοῖο* (he followed in the footsteps of the goddess); see Homer, *Odyssey*, Vol. 1, trans. A. T. Murray, rev. George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library 104 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), book 2, line 406 (here Telemachus follows Pallas Athene); book 3, line 30 (Telemachus follows Pallas Athene again); book 5, line 193 (Odysseus follows Calypso); book 7, line 38 (Odysseus follows Pallas Athene). It should of course be stressed that Homer refers to goddesses on these occasions (even though "theos" is a masculine noun). Plato has: *μετ'*

- ἴχνιον ὥστε θεοῖο (I walk/follow in his footsteps [singular] *as if he were* (a) god).
- 15 Reflection on characters in Homer was also decisive for Hölderlin's idea of tone as a basic feature of the poem; see Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth, "Introduction," in *Essays and Letters*, xxxviii–xli.
- 16 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 466 [A418–419/B446].
- 17 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 217 [AA 5:97].
- 18 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 186 (§46) [AA 5:307].
- 19 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 192 (§49) [AA 5:314].
- 20 The Stuttgart edition offers the "Systemprogramm" as an appendix with the editorial title "Entwurf (Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus)," StA 4.1:297–299 (quotations are from 298).
- 21 Indeed, as Malcolm Heath claims, Aristotle's famous likening of a well-composed plot to "a single whole animal [ζῷον ἐν ὅλῳ]," which can be seen as a starting point for this "organic analogy," actually bears resemblances to Plato's earlier claim about discourse/text (*logos*), which he states (through Socrates), in *Phaedrus* 264c,
- must be organised, like a living being [ζῷον], with a body of its own, as it were, so as not to be headless and footless, but to have a middle and members, composed in fitting relation to each other and the whole [τῷ ὅλῳ].
- See Malcolm Heath, *Ancient Philosophical Poetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 84. For Aristotle's comparison, see Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. and ed. by Stephen Halliwell, in Aristotle, "Poetics," Longinus, "On the Sublime," "Demetrius," "On Style," Loeb Classical Library 199 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1459a20.
- 22 Amanda Jo Goldstein, "Epigenesis by Experience: Romantic Empiricism and Non-Kantian Biology," *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 40, no. 13 (2018). doi:10.1007/s40656-017-0168-8.
- 23 In "On the Standpoint from which we should consider the Antiquity" (written around the same time as the letter), Hölderlin also warns against the possibility of a human being's natural creative drive going astray and the importance of knowing from "*whence it came*" in order for this drive not to lose its way (EL 246/MA 2:63).
- 24 On the general influence of Herder on Hölderlin, see Ulrich Gaier, "Rousseau, Schiller, Herder, Heine," in *Hölderlin-Handbuch*, 82–89 (for Herder).
- 25 Johann Gottfried Herder, "On Image, Poetry, and Fable," in Herder, *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. Gregory Moore (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 362; "Über Bild, Dichtung und Fabel," in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke*, Vol. 4: *Schriften zu Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst und Altertum 1774–1787*, ed. Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994), 641.
- 26 Herder, "On Image, Poetry, and Fable," 365; "Über Bild, Dichtung und Fabel," 645.
- 27 Amanda Jo Goldstein, "Irritable Figures: Herder's Poetic Empiricism," in *The Relevance of Romanticism*, ed. Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 284.
- 28 Hölderlin, *Hyperion: Vorletzte Fassung*, MA 1:558.

- 29 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, trans. Willard A. Trask, adapted by David Schwarz, in *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, ed. Eric L. Santner (New York: Continuum, 1990), 3/MA 1:614.
- 30 Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 84/MA 1:706. See also Stefan Büttner, "Natur—Ein Grundwort Hölderlins," *Hölderlin Jahrbuch* 26 (1988–1989): 232.
- 31 Plato, *Symposium*, in *Plato III: Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 211b–e.
- 32 An eccentric (ex-centric) path being "a path with neither a center nor a fixed destination," as Dieter Henrich points out in "Hegel and Hölderlin," trans. Taylor Carman, in *The Course of Remembrance and other Essays on Hölderlin*, ed. Eckart Förster (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 124.
- 33 Vandegrift Eldridge, *Lyric Orientations*, 50–51. See also her "Poetology as Symptom in Friedrich Hölderlin," *The German Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (2013): 444–463 for a similar argument.
- 34 Vandegrift Eldridge, *Lyric Orientations*, 51.
- 35 On this topic, see Alison Stone, "Hölderlin and Human–Nature Relations," in *Human–Environment Relations: Transformative Values in Theory and Practice*, ed. Emily Brady and Pauline Phemister (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 55–67.
- 36 Theodor W. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 140–141; "Parataxis: Zur späten Lyrik Hölderlins," in *Noten zur Literatur*, Vol. 11 of *Gesammelte Schriften* (henceforth GS 11), ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 482. My interpretation of this poem, as well as that of "Der Winkel von Hahrdt" below, is influenced by Adorno's reading. I discuss Adorno's reading of Hölderlin further in Flodin, "'The eloquence of something that has no language': Adorno on Hölderlin's Late Poetry," *Adorno Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 1–28, <http://adornostudies.org/ojs/index.php/as/article/view/21>.
- 37 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger, 4th ed. (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2013), 223; <https://www.carcenet.co.uk/cgi-bin/indexer?product=9780856463600>; Hölderlin, StA 2.1: 37: "Herab denn! oder schäme des Danks dich nicht! / Und willst du bleiben, diene dem Älteren, / Und gönn' es ihm, daß ihn vor Allen, / Göttern und Menschen, der Sänger nenne!" See also Adorno, "Parataxis," 140–141/GS 11:482.
- 38 Gerhard Kurz, *Mittelbarkeit und Vereinigung: zum Verhältnis von Poesie, Reflexion und Revolution bei Hölderlin* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1975), 125.
- 39 See also Kreuzer, "Einleitung," xvii.
- 40 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, trans. Nick Hoff (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 69; StA 1.1:306: "In seiner Fülle ruhet der Herbsttag nun, / Geläutert ist die Traub und der Hain ist roth / Vom Obst, wenn schon der holden Blüten / Manche der Erde zum Danke fielen."
- 41 Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 69; StA 1.1:306: "denn es wuchs durch / Hände der Menschen allein die Frucht nicht."
- 42 Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 69; StA 1.1:306.
- 43 Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 71; StA 1.1:307.
- 44 Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 71; StA 1.1:307: "Ihr seegnet gütig über den Sterblichen / Ihr Himmelskräfte! jedem sein Eigentum, / O seegnet meines auch und daß zu / Frühe die Parze den Traum nicht ende."

- 45 Christoph Jamme has also pointed to the importance of receptivity as a guiding principle for Hölderlin, see Jamme, “‘Entwilderung der Natur’: Zu den Begründungsformen einer Kulturgeschichte der Natur bei Schiller, Hölderlin und Novalis,” in *Evolution des Geistes: Jena um 1800*, ed. Friedrich Strack (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 590.
- 46 The poem was published as part of a group of poems called “Nightsongs.”
- 47 Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 183; StA 2.1:116:

Hinunter sinket der Wald, / Und Knospen ähnlich, hängen / Einwärts die Blätter, denen / Blüht unten auf ein Grund, / Nicht gar unmündig. / Da nemlich ist Ulrich / Gegangen; oft sinnt, über den Fußtritt, / Ein groß Schiksaal / Bereit, an übrigem Orte.

- Hoff also relies on Beißner’s edition here, which ends the line “Nicht gar unmündig” with a period. I believe Beißner is right in concluding that it is the ground that is “Nicht gar unmündig,” which is the reason he gives for adding the period missing in the first published version (see StA 2.2:662). Both the Munich edition (see MA 2:446) and the Frankfurt one (see FHA 8:758) omit the period. See also Hoff’s comment in Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 250.
- 48 The conventional view of nature is conveyed in Kant’s first *Critique*, in which human sensibility and understanding stipulate laws for how natural objects are to be comprehended. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 236 [A 114]; 241–243 [A 125–128]; 262–263 [B 163–164]; 320 [A 216/B 263]. Despite the outspoken attempt to reconcile the spheres of nature and freedom, the conventional view of nature resurfaces in Kant’s discussion of the dynamic sublime in the third *Critique*, which pits human reason against nature; see Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 140–148 (§27–28) [AA 5:257–264].
- 49 For Hölderlin’s own reflections on the caesura as a break (“a counter-rhythmic interruption”) which not only makes possible the presentation of successive “ideas [Vorstellungen]” but also makes “the idea itself” present, see “Notes on the *Oedipus*,” EL 318/MA 2:310, and see also “Notes on the *Antigone*,” EL 325–326/MA 2:369–370.
- 50 I am thinking especially of the previously quoted “When the poet is once in command of the spirit. . .,” in which the simultaneous breaking open of the seemingly continuous unity *and* the sensuous-mimetic interconnection between parts, achieved by poetry at its highest capacity, is described in winding sentences which stretch over several pages.

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