A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE PROFANE:
HEIDEGGER, BLUMENBERG AND THE STRUCTURE
OF THE CHTHONIC
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1. Introduction

The category of the sacred has been a familiar theme in phenomenology since Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, which attempted to extract the original religious experience of the *numinosum* as *mysterium tremendum* from all subsequent "rationalization of religion."* Yet Otto's analysis of the *numinosum* as simultaneously "daunting and fascinating" did not shed much light on the difference between the sacred and its opposite, the profane. It was Martin Eidelberg, in several works on the history of archaic religious narrative, ritual, and art, who made prominent the ubiquity of the sacred-profane contrast throughout world mythologies. But still, while an almost limitless variety of expressions for the sacred have been the subject of many phenomenological and anthropological studies, different senses of the profane and their connections have been much less widely studied, though they are as important in our symbolic history. As an archetype for all that is "unmeaning" in Heidegger's sense, the "profane" is not simply the absence of meaning. Rather, the profane has a positive archetypal meaning that remains one irreducible pole of the religious experience of Being which later existentialists, following Otto's inspiration, tried to recapture.

The main goal of this essay is to fill this gap by interpreting the profane through its close connections with a series of anti-stylit ideologies that — following Claude Levi-Strauss, Eidelberg, and other mythographers — I classify together under the heading "chthonic." As I will show, these chthonic figures for the profane, which are found in mythic and legendary narratives the world over, divide up into several complex associations of moral motifs. In the view of Claude Levi-Strauss, folkloric, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings the modern folkloric, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Socratic writings to modern archaic mythology, ancient art, folklore, and pre-Scriptive paradigms. These motifs manifest themselves in art and existential philosophy, and their *prima facie* connections with mythological motifs of the profane, will help illuminate the enduring significance of archetypal analysis for understanding contemporary themes — a relevance perhaps too rarely appreciated by philosophers today. Understanding the profane means much more than simply reviewing some interesting curiosities of our cultural history: it may give us a vantage point for critical evaluation of contemporary issues. For example, the symbol of the 'earth', of which recent 'ecofeminist' literature has made so much, can have either sacred or profane connotations, depending on whether it is construed as a reproductive 'home and origin' or as a dark chthonic density or tomb. Similarly, I hope to show that an analysis of the profane in terms of the chthonic provides at least one plausible context for interpreting concepts such as fertility, appropriation, and technology, which are so central to contemporary continental philosophy.

Finally, although this goal lies beyond the scope of this preliminary essay, a phenomenology of the chthonic may ultimately help clarify the crucial distinction between the profane as a religious category and evil as an ethical category — a division that is often blurred because artists and philosophers revert to chthonic figures that evoke profanity in interpreting ethical concepts, as if evil always has to take a profane form. This conflation is dangerous because it also motivates the convenient inference: if some idea or practice seems unnatural to our aesthetic sensibility, and we can associate its qualities with some motif of the archetypally profane, then on this basis we can portray it as evil. Failures of this sort can only be recognized if the profane and the morally unjust or vitriolic are clearly differentiated."

2. The Profane as Impurity: Ricœur

This crucial distinction has of course been made before, but in an insufficiently primordial fashion. For example, in his famous study of evil, Paul Ricoeur begins by distinguishing evil in the moral sense from profanity as "defilement" or "ritual impurity." As Ricœur recognizes, the system of faults that "stain" one in this sense "abounds in minute prescriptions in domains that for us are ethically neutral," and does not always condemn as profane actions that are evil by Greek and Semitic ethical codes. He suggests that this evinces "a stage in which evil and misfortune have not been dissociated, in which the ethical order of doing ill has not been distinguished from the cosmic-biological order of suffering: sickness, death, failure."

There are two problems with this approach. First, it assumes that historically, the apprehension of profanity in phenomena such as misfortune, illness, deformity, or any force destructive of human existence, derives from viewing all natural evils or their signs as moral evils attributable to some supernatural agent, or from confusing harms with wrongs. This implies an error theory of the profane. But a more charitable and positive alternative is available: the profane may simply precede the various ethical senses of evil altogether. On this hypothesis, once the ethical contrast between good and evil was conceived (however unclearly), there would inevitably be a long period in which its expression was intertwined with the prior contrast between the sacred and profane (e.g. in the karmic notion that misfortune connotes a moral fault in past lives). As Ricœur himself notes, in the
Hebrew tradition, "the experience of sin itself, the profound originality of which in comparison with the experience of death in our age advances us toward a further understanding of the origin of sin in the human psyche," as it has been expressed in the study of psychology. However, in the context of his hypothesis, we can see that the concept of sin is related to the human experience of being born into a state of original sin, a concept that has been central to many religious and philosophical traditions. In the context of his hypothesis, it is clear that the concept of sin is not merely a theological concept, but is also a psychological and social construct, shaped by the human experience of being born into a state of original sin.
Comedy. It is also an integral part of Christian tradition, through the apocryphal "Gospel of Nicodemus" which tells of Christ's "harrowing of hell." Descent episodes also play a crucial role in myths relating to regeneration/seasonal cycles, such as the myth of Persephone in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Hermes is sent by Zeus to retrieve Persephone from Erebos because, until she is released, her vengeful mother Demeter is bent on "keeping seed hidden beneath the earth." In other words, the crops cannot grow because their life is held down, which is the central archetypal expression for the chthonic refusal of life.

We should note that the chthonic "underworld" is more closely associated with contamination and darkness rather than literal depth: for this reason, it can be pictured as a lake, as in Beowulf, or within a mountain. For example, in discussing Near-Eastern cylinder seals from 3235-2155 B.C., Pierre Amiet identifies the repeated "iconographic" theme of subterranean gods and goddesses presiding at "the appearance of the sun god, adorned with flames, at the center of a massive mountain on which a tree grows." Similar scenes appear on several noteworthy seals in one, Amiet notes that the sun-god's "exceptional posture suggests that he is attempting to free himself from the mountain"—as in autochthonic emergence myths. In another scene featuring a combat, the conquering deity is pictured reigning within the mountain, whereas the defeated gods, who are associated emblemsatically with vegetation, are held there in captivity, like the Greek Tithon.

4. The Earthly as 'Tied down' and the Mark of Mortality

As these examples already indicate, the "depth" has more than one meaning, and its associations expand outward as we trace them through world mythology. The chthonic significance of the "underworld" is figurative rather than equivalent to a literal position "beneath the earth," for example, destructive subterranean dragons such as the Babylonian Tiamat also inhabit chthonic "depths" within the sea. As an expression of the dasyial, as something that takes one down under the earth, the "chthonic" also includes the earth itself — "earth" thought of not in its rich, lovely, life-supporting sense, but as the dead matter of remains. It is this sense of the chthonic which is operative in Levi-Strauss' famous non-French reading of the Oedipus legend. In which he argues that the entire legendary "cycle of Thebes" from Kadmon's founding of the city to the Oedipus sequence is focused structurally on balancing man's "autochthonous origin" or emergence from lifeless clay, with the "denial" or attempt to escape such origins. In particular, in the Theban cycle, Levi-Strauss recognizes the theme of autochthony in many accounts of creation to feet:

In mythology it is a universal characteristic of man born from the Earth that as at the moment they emerge from the depth they either cannot walk or they walk clumsily. This is the case of the chthonians beings in the mythology of the Pacific Melanesians, who leads the emergence, and the Athabascan Shyndalk are born ("hiding foot," "concealed foot"). The same happens to the Kondori of the Kwakiutl after they have been awakened by the chthonic monster, Tsalalik. When they emerged to the surface of the earth, "they limped forward or tipted sideways."

Like Oedipus, these figures bear a mark or " flaw" that signifies the mortality of human existence by connection with the chthonic — a sign that shows up on feet, which are prostrate because they touch the ground. In his remarks on "Apoprotic Foot-Twisting," for example, Christopher Paranoa notes that many profound mythic characters, such as "Death and Sleep" (nursed by Nyx, and Morpheus are often depicted with feet "completely twisted around" or reversed. Similarly, as Levi-Strauss points out, Oedipus' name may mean "two-walled" (or "club-footed"), the attribute legends his lameness to being nailed to the side of a mountain as a baby. Although Levi-Strauss focuses on the chthonic in the contexts of myths of emergence, however, paradigmatic expressions for being "tied down" to the earth have a more fundamental prostrate significance, of which autochthonic origination itself is only one possible expression. Prometheus, for example, does not emerge from the earth, but when Zeus chains him down for his misappropriation of fire, we have the same chthonic motif suggesting subordination to the power of the sacred. Similarly, in a different genre, the Rumpelstiltskin fairy tale (in versions prior to misguided contemporary "sensitizations") has a violent etiology that illustrates the tying-down motif particularly clearly. When the Queen guises his name, thus saving the firstborn child she promised him in return for his spinning her straw into gold, he reacts as follows:

"The devil told you that the devil told you that?" cried the little man, and not in his anger, as she plunged his right foot so deep into the earth that his whole leg went in; and then in rage he pulled at his left leg so hard that he tore himself in two."

Rumpelstiltskin is chthonic being, a type of doppelganger trickster figure, and he ends by being sucked into the earth; in attempting to break away from its grasp, he destroys himself.

Yet more connection to the earth in itself is always equivocal, because "earth" has both its range of life-sustaining vitality and its chthonic significance as the "dust" into which we return, a "material undertow." As Amiet notes in discussing the iconography of the cylinder seals mentioned above, the mountain image is "symbolic both of the fertile earth and of the netherworld." Heidegger recognizes the same ambiguity in his famous description of Van Gogh's portraits of peasant shoes:

"In the shoes where the upper sole of the earth, its inner gift of the opening spring and its uninterrupted self-flow in the follow descent of the watery field. This expression (the shoe) is pervaded by unexplained waxy as to the certainty of broad, the weightless joy of having once more witnessed ward, the trembling before the impending childhood and striving at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth."
In these shoes, Heidegger thus reads the tension in humanity's relation to the earthly: on its chthonic face, the earth stands over against us as the chaotic contingency to be resisted by work; on its sacred face, it is a bounty that our work can never earn, a gift we can never fully appropriate.

The same ambiguity is expressed in many symbolic expressions of man's autochthonous emergence from the ground (implying an anticipated return to the earth in death), for example in the origin myth at the beginning of the Theban cycle. The legendary founder, Kadmus, slays a dragon, a "chthonian" being which has to be killed in order that mankind be born from the earth. He tosses the dragon's teeth (planting the mark or remnant of this life-holding being), and the Thebans—his army of soldiers—spring up from them. Significantly, he does so by fighting one another: this simply expresses the notion of chaos, which is associated both with the 'dragon below' and the chthonic in general, as we will see.

Within the complex of the chthonic at the earthly in the sense of that which lies down, we should include the 'craftsman god' motif: for instance, Hephaestus, the Greek god who creates out of the primal matter of fire and earth, is traditionally pictured as "sneer," like Oedipus. The dwarf, an earth-bound creature who, characteristically smithies under mountains, functions as another symbol for autochthony. For example, Vinsm in the Odyssey is described as "he who stayed in the mountains wandering in the Ag Yeda is described as "he who stayed in the mountains wandering as a dwarf cruelly like a wild bear." Vinsm in his earliest manifestation was a dwarf figure whose cosmic 'three strides' measured the world, thus "creating" it by giving it logos and order. Indeed, his famous "three footprints" were considered magically powerful symbols: as Wendy O'Flaherty comments, "...it is significant that Vinsm's feet are the object of worship," since they serve as symbols for hierophany, the sacred point of contact with the profane order. In other words, we should think of these feet as 'imprinting' form or significance onto the previously unmeasured chaos.

A similar idea is involved in an activity that might at first glance seem completely unrelated to these figures of the chthonic: naming something. In the activity, which became the earliest form of "writing" in human culture, was first performed in the earliest Near Eastern cultures with cylindrical seal-stones used "to make marks on clay as signs of the ownership of property or the authenticity of a document." As Edith Pendu argues, these seals also served as amulets that "had a close relation with their owners: they were considered to be an integral part of their owner's person, like their fingerprints, the impression of which could replace that of a seal." The seal, in other words, was originally not just a metonym but almost an extension of the owner; its impression was a trace of the person himself, which literally made what it sealed "part of his or her being. Vinsm's 'footprints,' like other sacred 'marks,' have a similar function of giving order and intelligible being by "marking" or imprinting a chthonic indeterminacy, or giving it meaningful form by assimilating it to an agent who 'owns' or controls it. To be marked is to be appropriated (a wedding ring is a mark in this sense). And when these seals or marks are found on humans themselves, as we noted, the foot (which is associated with the clay) is frequently the location of the divine mark of mortality: 'Achilles' heel' and similar "points of vulnerability" keep otherwise quasi-divine heroes within the limits of human finitude. There is thus a relation between the motif of the 'law' or weak point that signals profane imperfection and the motif of being marked: both are chthonic metaphors for being claimed, possessed, or fated by something that stands hierarchically above what is marked, i.e. by something that is 'sacred' relative to its profanity.

These different examples seem to converge on a certain kind of subordination of the chthonic as a profane mass that is 'beneath' all meaning, or that is sealed, 'bound down,' or assigned a proper place by being imprinted with a function, and thus given its significance by the sacred. In this connection, the chthonic as base 'matter' is also associated with all that goes under the heading of "facticity," especially in Sartre's sense of the utterly opaque "in-itself," which is the unintelligible core of absolute contingency at the heart of human existence. Pitude or the limitation that comes from earthbound existence is related to the notion of a substratum of 'pure existentials' as Heidegger called it, which serves to 'tie down' abstract possibilities into concrete or situated lived possibilities.

The chthonic in this sense as 'what is tied down' is also expressed throughout the mythical lineage which Hans Blumenberg identifies in "the personal extending from chaos or Nixy (Night) to the Titans." Like Oedipus, who was literally "tied down" to the mountain, the Titans were earthbound in the depths, along with even these feet as 'imprinting' abstract possibilities into concrete or situated lived possibilities.

5. Binding, Teleology, Appropriation and 'Enfaming' Underlying these motifs is the even more primordial notion of being 'bound' simplistic, or enclosed in a bind. As Alexander Mourelatos demonstrates in his study, The Route of Parmenides, within pre-Socratic poetry this notion of binding is intimately related to resistant subordination
lead Heidegger to reject modern philosophy's whole conception of Being as the object of our representations, because it is missappropriative.

As Leibniz clearly saw, perceivable is like an appetite which seeks out the peculiar being and attacks it, in order to grasp it and wholly subsume it under a concept... Representational thought (Vorstellung) is defined as the perceptive self-interpretation (of the self in ego) of what appears.

This contextual perception of reality as chaotically attacking, violently binding or 'grasping,' enclosing or 'subsuming' the object by drawing it to the consuming ego is overdetermined with the very chthonic metaphor that (consciously or unconsciously) Heidegger has learned from Parmenides' Of Moira, the "destining of Being" that first "allows the presenting of what is present to arise as outer appearance and aspect," making perception possible.

Moira does not grasp or master Being, but rather the Moira which appropriates Being grasps, destinies, or "keeps" him, and death as his "outermost possibility" is an expression of this. Moreover, "man's subversion" of these relations of mastery (e.g. in making language his tool) is profane: it "drives his nature into alienation." When misappropriated, "even God can, for representational thinking, lose all that is exalted and holy, the mysteriousness of his distance." An authentic attitude, which allows the sacred its mastery rather than leveling it off, requires affirming our chthonic nature.

To be a human being means to be on the earth as mortal. It means to dwell, to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine.

Thus the juxtaposition of Heideggerian concepts with mythic paradigm of the sacred as superabundant and the profane as chthonic is certainly not ad hoc: the themes of Heidegger's later writings cannot be comprehended, let alone evaluated, without recognizing this connective. The fact that there is a direct association between the chthonic and the mechanical (as we will soon see) only strengthens this hypothesis that Heidegger's horror of modern technology is inspired by his sense that our "technological viewpoint" is anarchetically profane.

6. The Chthonic as Chaos and Contingency

At this point, however, another unavoidable ambiguity must be recognized. Although the telos that appropriates gives limit and definition to its matter, when it becomes an absolutely fixed or rigid frame, it becomes as mindless, violent, and hence chthonic as that which it binds up. Thus paradoxically, the sacred itself can turn chthonic when it takes the form of "iron law" or absolute fate. Hence the Moira's divinities that hold the Titans below (or that keep Ares bound) are inevitably, like the figure of Pluto, assimilated to the chthonic significance of the forces they bind so tightly: absolute chaos and absolute binding order become but two sides of the profane itself. In this section and the next, we will see how each of these motifs in turn comes to form its own complex of chthonic meaning.
As George Seidel points out, in Plato's *Eunaudo*, "Chaos" is the absolute nothingness of mass utterly devoid of form,* and "Mother" (Gnai) is characterized as which is related to the Greek word for "mud or slime," is characterized as "infinite or limitless (Iatrapop. II. 415)." This illustrates the primordial status of the organic realm as a whole is merely reflected in the existence of the individual outside the uterus, in the risky situation in which he is abandoned to his own self-preservation and self-determination. Nausicaa in Sartre's special sense is moved by everything that suggests how vulnerable the body is, prompting the giddy realization of our nothingness, our lack of secure foundation. Thus in his section on "The Body" in Being and Nothingness, Sartre argues that there is no contingency without color, a pure apprehension of the self as factual existence. This perennial apprehension is the apperception of an impalpable whiteness which I cannot place, which accompanies me even in my efforts to get away from it, and which is my truth.

As with Heidegger, of course, one may ask why Sartre should revert to a mythic sense of profanity, or whether this comparison may not be unfounded. But this doubt is reduced if we keep in mind that Sartre, like Heidegger, is committed to elucidating the most basic experiences that give meaning to existence. If the sacred/profane dyad is the most primordial contrast within the horizon of meaning as a whole, as I have suggested, then it was perhaps inevitable that in their search, existential phenomenologists would return to it, and explore the chthonic paradigms of its latter pole. It is compelling, in any case, to compare Sartre's sense of the in-itself to Seidel's mythopoeic point of view that "gnoe" (chaos) is related to "gnoic," which means loose, porous, or spongy. In this indeterminate nothingness of our chthonic materiality and its vulnerability, Sartre sees this nauseating apprehension as an expression of the "contingency" that "remains at the heart of the for-itself," the "facticity" which "does not cease to haunt the for-itself" even though it is surpassed towards one's possibilities, which always transcend one's actual state.

This sense of the chthonic as exposure to utter arbitrariness or chance defines another profane sense of "fain." Thus Blumenberg suggests that the system of connections drawn by sacred myth has a "life-stabilizing" function, because it insists on "the inadmissibility of the arbitrary, the elimination of caprice." Western literature is full of figures representing this kind of chaotic arbitrariness as an unalterable danger to be overcome. Consider Machiavelli's *fortuna* or Edward Spencer's *Mabillon*, to take two disparate examples. As J.O.A. Pocock explains in his study of the development of republican political thought, unless the occurrence of emergencies could be attributed to eschatological providence, the occurrence would thus be without essential meaning, the sequence or time-dimension a mere spinning of the wheel. Fortune thus cease to symbolize the irrationality of history, the medieval sense of the absurd... When medieval minds despairs, this symbolism appeared...
The capital plane arrived promptly to the terminal, but within the walls the atmosphere was not always pleasant. The passenger from the United States had been booked on the same flight and was sitting next to the window. As the plane began its descent, the sky turned gray and the wind picked up. The passenger from the United States looked out the window, taking in the view of the city below. He had been looking forward to this trip for weeks, and he was eager to see what the city had to offer.

As the plane landed, the passengers began to stand up and collect their luggage. The passenger from the United States quickly gathered his belongings and made his way to the exit. He was excited to start his trip and see all the sights.

The airport was bustling with activity as passengers made their way to their respective gates. The passenger from the United States walked through the terminal, making his way to his gate. He was looking forward to his journey and the new experiences that awaited him.

As the plane took off, the passenger from the United States sat down and fastened his seatbelt. He was ready for the journey ahead and the adventures that it would bring.
The article discusses the concept of death and its philosophical implications. The author explores the idea of death as a natural and inevitable part of life, challenging the common notion of it as a tragic event. The text delves into the implications of death on human existence and the role of哲学性死亡 (philosophical death) in shaping our understanding of life. The author also examines the historical and cultural perspectives on death, as well as the role of religion and spirituality in coping with mortality. The discussion includes the interplay between death and existentialism, exploring how the concept of death affects our perception of life's meaning and purpose.

The text further examines the philosophical implications of death, including the idea of an afterlife and the concept of rebirth. The author discusses the role of death in the development of philosophical thought, highlighting key figures and their contributions to the field. The article concludes with a reflection on the enduring relevance of the concept of death in contemporary society, emphasizing the importance of understanding death in shaping our approach to life.
equivalent of marlock). As its very name suggests, though this stronghold of the Evil Empire is the size of a small planet, it is a "world" entirely devoid of
the nourishing vitality of an 'earth.' Its 'ground' is entirely mechanical, entirely composed of fruitless artifice. In other words, the Death Star is a
completely, technically-wrought world in the chthonic sense of this term: it is
Heidegger's (or Tolkien's or Law's) worst nightmare. The same chthonic
sense of mechanism gives 'the Borg' (short for 'cyborg') their horror in films
like Star Trek: First Encounter. In the form of Borg, human beings are
"assimilated:" their organic forms are fitted into a controlling mechanical
frame and their individual minds absorbed into a Hegelian central absolute
consciousness. They produce revelation by tapping into our sense of the
chthonic significance of form: the depth of a labyrinth (the Borg cube), of
being appropriated by a 'program' not our own, or of being coerced by
an absolute necessity summed up in the Borg's refrain: "resistance is futile."

8. Conclusion: the Chthonic From Genesis to Postmodernity

This analysis of the chthonic has given us a brief overview of four variant
complexes of figures that express 'the profane.' Although they are
provisional, the results may be conveniently summarized in a table to bring
out some of the most important comparisons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Complexes of the Chthonic</th>
<th>Tying down</th>
<th>Crying morality</th>
<th>Cyclical iron law</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>underworld</td>
<td>death</td>
<td>mortality</td>
<td>&quot;terms of time&quot;</td>
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<td>death</td>
<td>descent</td>
<td>heavily vulnerability</td>
<td>lifeline mechanisms</td>
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<td>moral</td>
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<td>deaths</td>
<td>inaccessibility</td>
<td>formless seas, savannah</td>
<td>corporeal/scarifice</td>
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It should be noted that these four divisions are mainly heuristic and far
from exhaustive, and that the forms of the chthonic I have distinguished here
are closely interrelated, and tend to merge together in actual myth, legend,
and iconography. These four basic ways in which early mythmakers
were able to express their notion of the profane are each figuratively associated
as a means of paradigmatic expression) with all the others: for example, the
depths) connotes death and darkness, opaque unintelligibility (as in Plato's
cave), and emerging from and being 'ceded' to the ground expresses the
"enmeshment" of humans to the soil, which is the very essence of mortality.

As God says to Adam after he has sinned, "Cursed is the ground for thy
take...for dust thou art, and into dust shalt thou return."[9]

In fact, the J-source Genesis story of creation in replete with many of the
same figures and themes of the chthonic we found in the Theban cycle of legends.
The serpent in Eden is an earthly creature, like Kadmu's dragon. Adam and Eve
suffer from 'nausea' at becoming aware of their insecurity and exposure:

their literal lack of garments expresses the fact that they are naked in the
most primordial, chthonic sense. The need to till the soil and bear children
becomes for them an 'iron law' of necessity. And chaotic strife rears its head
when Cain kills Abel, whose blood, God says, cries out to him from
the ground. As God tells Cain: "And now art thou cursed from the earth, which
hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand."[10]

Finally, God places his mark of ownership on Cain - a 'mark' that protests
because its chthonic significance has apotropaic power, like that of a profane
Gorgon's Head.[11]

This biblical narrative thus provides a good example of a story in which
different types of chthonic metaphors are combined to express the profanity
of this original murder. It is against this background that Emmanuel Levinas
argues that every treatment of the Other as a thing involves 'murder,' i.e. a
chthonic reduction that attempts to misappropriate the Other or to violate
them.[12] As we have seen, this theme of strife feeds into the ambiguous
associations of chaos, necrophilous destructiveness, and mechanistic
necessity as a paradigm for the utter futility also expressed by postulated
matters.

These basic paradigms of the chthonic are thus closely intertwined in
myth, philosophy, and the history of art, yet they each constitute a
discernible line of figurative associations. Together, we may say, they
give sense to the one superarchetypal which stands in their juncture: the
profane as such. The profane pervades this entire network of mythic motifs of
the chthonic, which are correlated in sacred myths, hero legends, and even
completely "iron-sacred" genres such as fairy tales, fantasy literature, and
film in the expressionist tradition.

This preliminary phenomenological analysis has also shown that a
familiarity with these different sides or aspects of the profane as chthonic
may be indispensable for understanding some central themes in existentialist
philosophy. Likewise, in comparison movements in continental thought,
from 'deep ecology,' to feminist interpretations of the body, to Levinasian
ethics, we find a list of postulates that draw on symbolic associations to which
the profane is relevant. In some cases, the negative associations expression of
the chthonic are accepted as they are, and then (mis)deployed for evaluative purposes.
For example, we have the idea that conceiving the 'other' through any kind of
universalizing projection is profane because it grasps or appropriates or
metaphorically 'seizes' them to the dominant first-person. Similarly,
technology is corruptive because it is domesticizing and totalizing. As we have
seen, grasping' acquires this negative connection from its chthonic meaning,
its symbolic association with 'pressing under' into the dark, or subjugating to
iron necessity. In other cases, writers consciously invert the profane, trying to
give a positive valuation to figures which have traditionally symbolized the
chthonic. For example, although Levitasians frequently describe the body in self-evidently chthonic terms as a 'graving' which de-converts the subject by exposing consciousness to fatality, this is portrayed as good, since such a body is the site of lived care. My approach in this paper has the radical implication that before any satisfying resolution of these questions can be reached, we have to look at the linkages made by these postmodern themes to their mythological origins. Only then, I think, does something closer to an objective adjudication of these first becomes possible.

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References
2. Ibid., p.27.
3. Ibid., p.31.
5. See Martin Heidegger, Being and Time (tr John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 153-52, p.193, where he argues that entities with the character of presence-at-hand are essentially devoid of any meaning at all in the existential sense, and hence can appear as "should" against the background of our constitutive expectation of meaning.
6. In a fashion similar to Orr's analysis of the different 'moments' of the samadhi.
7. Indeed errors of this sort can be found in many different contexts, from the literature of the "deep ecology" movement to opposing arguments employed by either side in the right-to-life debate.
9. These include, for example, evil as a state contrary to human well-being or flourishing, vice or motivational evil of character, and moral injury, either in personal action or in state action and institutions.
10. Ibid., p.34.
12. Ibid., p.55.
13. Ibid., p.25.
14. This is analogous to the difficulty Heidegger perceives in capturing the "meaning of Being".
17. Hans tells us that Zeus's champions assailed the Titans and "laced them beneath the wide-pathed earth" (*Theogony*, p.121, lines 737-740) or "had them tearing each other to wreck" (again). These three winners of Zeus than guided the war that roamed the domain of the Titans, fighting them in (lines 747-752). Significantly, one of these champions is "Ogyrs", whose name may be etymologically related to the legendary Lydian Ogyae who finds the King of Invisibility. In Plato's version of this myth (Republic 2, 576-560), Ogyae encounters the earth into a "chaos" opened up by an earthquake (like that described in the battle of gods and titans), finds a cryptor buried in a bronze house sarcophagus (a figure combining both the "night's ellack" archetype and perhaps the "trace of honor") encircling the Titans — *Theogony* (p.111, line 725), and removes the perfest ring from its hand, which having escaped from the underworld, emerges in winter. Plato's version is full of chthonic suggestions that this hypothesized link to the titan myth would explain.
18. Ibid., 119, lines 525-527.
20. In one comparative study alone, Jack Lynch (now of Rutgers University) has surveyed and analysed over one hundred such deus ex machina narratives from culture spanning the globe ("The Deuce and Her", 1989, unpublished paper on file with the author).
23. Ibid., p.44.
24. Ibid., p.46.
25. According to the O.E.D., the term "chthonography" refers to "A history of description of soil" (p.193).
26. This analysis is found within Levi-Strauss's "The Structural Study of Myth" (Journal of American Folklore 1955), and republished in revised form in his Structural Anthropology (New York: Pantheon Press, 1963), p.215. What attention there has been to the chthonic as an archetype in recent decades may be largely due to the influence of Levi-Strauss's analysis for example, neoclassical structures of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Robert Packer in Interpretations of Greek Mythology, ed. Ian Brown (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1989) debate the theme of archetypical origins.
28. The Chinese practice of forbidding and the archaic aesthetic valuing small and "dainty" feet for females—although now primarily explained in terms of its function in male domination of women — may have derived in part from this negative paradigmatic significance which feet had already acquired in the ancient known mythology. We can recognize traces of the same associations in both, where the minimization of foot contact with the ground (standing on toes etc.) stems to create a sense of real, almost divine power—stem from the bare material reality of the world. In this same vein, my wife brings to my attention the emphasis on foot imagery in Flannery O'Connor's stories, "A Stomach of Good Fortune".
29. Christopher Parson, Tailormen and Trojan Heroes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.155-155 (see note 8 on a creature well portraying the battle of Penman and Minchau). Parson notes that this rearing forth the reversal of focus on woods androliths and wicked. That reversibility, however, may derive instead from the separability of the dragon's head from its lower portion, or tail. Moreover, Parson thinks that this swelling back of the paw is meant to "emn" the influence represented by the figure, but I suggest that the motif is essentially an expression of chthonic polarity — any apotropaic power it might derive from this more basic significance.
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86. Sartre, p.408.
87. Blumenberg, p.127. He adds, against Certeau, that “the effectiveness of the consciousness of accidents is eliminated, in mythical reasonability, by connections that are not causal and are not explanations” in any proto-scientific sense (p.128).
89. See Pocock on the development of the humane conception of politics from its Aristotelian roots, pp.65-71.
90. Pocock, pp.77, 78.
96. Ibid.
101. Sartre, pp.405-3 (emphasis added).
103. It is interesting to compare this to Fretern’s suggestion – probably motivated more by the force of his theory than moral evidence – that “unscrupulous behavior” can be found more frequently among medical students and physicians than in the general population (see Fretern, p.375).
107. King Jesus Bible, Genesis, verse 17-19.
108. Ibid, Genesis, verse 11.
109. There is even a remarkable structural relation between the story of the Fall and the elements in the Cycle of Thesius, which would repay closer investigation. In the Thesius the legend, we have: (1) a symbol of evil (the weaving eerie emerging from the dragon’s teeth) which stand for wasted souls, (2) a curse for his slaying (an Xing Oedipus), and (3) a bad grain (inverted, due to the scrutiny (or plague-like profanity) of Oedipus’ (unnamed) sin with his mother. In Genesis, we have: (1) a bad grain (the implied reason why Cain the farmer is driven from his brother the shepherd), (2) his slaying (Cain’s fratricide) not indicated profanity (Abel’s heew), and finally (3) the curse and mark on Cain. A purely morphological analysis might suggest that these stories are simply variant versions of the same narrative structure, with different collocations of the same thematic elements.
110. As with Heidegger, Levinas’s choice turns on the two meanings involved in the mythological significance of the chthonic as negative and affirmative.