
Heidegger on Living Gods

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Identifying the presence, or at least traces of the presence, of divinities plays an important role in Heidegger's later work. Their presence is crucial for living a non-nihilistic life, one where something has an authority worth making sacrifices for.¹ Hubert Dreyfus has helped us understand the sense in which, for Heidegger, works of art—what Dreyfus calls cultural paradigms—are gods.² In this essay, I will try to advance Dreyfus's work by drawing on Heidegger's account of the Greek daimons to show how Heidegger makes sense of the possibility of living gods in today's disenchanted world. I shall show that there are contemporary forms of religious and secular experience that accord with Heidegger's account of the presence of divinities and their traces. But we cannot make sense of these experiences with our minimal ontology of subjects and objects. We, therefore, need to add to our ontology "attuning," or the coming into an appropriate mood for making sense of things and people. Attuning is not mysterious; it gives us access to certain everyday phenomena that we would not want to live without but that our current ontology encourages us pass over.

In order to see what Heidegger understands by the divine and to make sense of attuning, I shall begin by distinguishing Heidegger's divine from that of Judeo-Christian religious experience, which philosophers usually take as their model. In the current philosophic world, the most influential phenomenological account of Judeo-Christian experience is the one developed by Rudolf Otto in his *The*

Idea of the Holy.³ Like Heidegger, Otto holds that the rationalizing of religious experience in onto-theology has had the effect of producing a domesticated god of interest only to philosophers.⁴ Also, both Heidegger and Otto recognize the difference between what Heidegger calls the ontological and ontic dimensions of life, which Otto calls the numinous and the natural. Generally, for both, the ontological or numinous is incommensurate with the ontic or natural that it makes possible. For Otto, as for the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, when the numinous or ontological is experienced, it is experienced as uncanny, as dreadful, as a *mysterium tremendum* (to use Otto's technical term) that gives one a sense of the insignificance of the ontic or the natural. Otto's religious phenomenology examines the nature of this dread. He admits that one must rely on analogy to natural states in order to articulate the numinous states with any precision, but it is a phenomenology of the incommensurable to which Otto is committed.⁵

Although Heidegger may have started thinking along similar—though secular—lines with his “*Grundbefindlichkeit*” *Angst*, by the 1930s, when he starts thinking of the *understanding of being* (which, following Dreyfus, is the style of a culture as necessarily incarnated by a gripping, living work of art or some other cultural being), he opens the possibility of relating oneself to the ontological in more ontic or normal ways. Heidegger's divine experiences are more worldly than those of the Judeo-Christian heritage. Heidegger shows that the Greeks' practices for seeing and dealing with the temple attuned in a specific way their practices for dealing with virtually everything else in their world.⁶ Practices for dealing with the temple's luster determined how the Greeks saw the brightness of anything. The temple's solidity determined how they dealt with anything's solidity or fluidity. Even blades of grass were seen by the Greeks in terms attuned by their way of dealing with the temple. The Greeks, in Heidegger's account, experienced the divine when the temple worked to light up their world. Consequently, Heidegger's investigation of the experience of the divine among the Greeks leaves him mostly uninterested in the dreadful experiences of the other-worldly that Otto describes.

Since Heidegger approaches the experience of the divine in a more down-to-earth, even Nietzschean, way, he writes in a way that

sounds both theistic and atheistic. Since attuning activity is the realm of the divine, Heidegger can write about gods with divine agency. And since attuning goes unthematized in modernity, Heidegger says that religious encounters are rare today because the gods have withdrawn themselves. He can also say, like Nietzsche, that such encounters are rare because our practices do not let us see attuning. We are the ones who are killing the gods and making ourselves nihilists. Since our practices are part of the problem, we can become part of the solution by recognizing attuning.

How does Heidegger think that we, in our disenchanted, hyper-reflective modern mode of being, can make sense of experiencing a living god rather than understand the experience as an hallucination? We can begin by drawing on Heidegger's claim in “The Origin of the Work of Art” that an entity that manifests and glamorizes the style of a people's practices will manifest for those people what they share and consequently be regarded as holding authority over their lives. Since such a cultural paradigm, whether it be a temple, sacred words, a sacrificial act, a constitution, or what not, manifests everything that is important to them as a people, it will be worth dying for. Since it creates and sustains their world, it will fill them with love, pride, respect, and devotion. In short, it will be adored as a god and in its power to grip be experienced as having a divine agency.

Let us now add those features of such a paradigm that would make the divine agency into a *personal* god. For Heidegger does not want us to think of the temple, the god within the temple, or other divine cultural paradigms as anything other than having a living agency. They have to be the kind of personal living divinities to whom man can reverently ask for guidance (most often in prayer), sacrifice to, fall on his knees before in awe, and play music and dance before.⁷

A living god would have to possess the power to affect our relation with nature, with our work, with others, and with ourselves. Such a god, moreover, would hold authority over us, not just because of its power, but because the god is sympathetic to our way of life, or, at least, our way of life when it is happening in its most exemplary form. And because the god uses its power in support of this way of life, the god elicits reverential behavior from us, much the way any living human authority figure elicits some degree of reverence. Most

important, however, this god is one that we can speak and pray to, and who can answer back. The god is also a person in that he or she takes responsibility for his or her acts and feels that both the actions and the responsibility for them matter. Indeed, by virtue of acts and responsibility mattering, we also understand that this god has passions and moods roughly like our own. Because the god has a voice, moods, passions, and a sense of responsibility like our own, and so far as we experience voices, moods, and passions as coming from bodies, we experience the god as embodied. (From this it is not clear that a god must be gendered, but it is likely to be the case, since most bodies for us are gendered.)

Such a description is incompatible with our modern sensibilities. Indeed, it strongly suggests that gods are nothing more than anthropomorphic inventions. But we should remember when thinking about anthropomorphism that our pervasively skeptical sensibility is a relatively recent development. Experiences in which a god communicated in person with people were common among believers both before the Enlightenment *and after*. Nor were such experiences reserved for the sensitive minds of those destined for sainthood. As William James points out, many hardheaded people had religious experiences right through the nineteenth century, and, again, as James points out, science could say little to dissuade them from the so-called truth of such experiences.⁸ For, first, such people based their beliefs on clear perceptual experiences that seemed to them no more hallucinatory than any scientist's data, and, second, the recurrence of such experiences meant that they were repeatable, though not at will.

That hardheaded people have long had perceptual encounters with gods does not mean that divine power is akin to the physical forces described by scientific laws. Just as, for Heidegger, being depends on man so does divine power. This condition, however, so long as man also depends on divine power, only diminishes onto-theological interpretations of the divine. The basic claim developed here is that gods give situations their particularly clear mood or attunement. As an example, Aphrodite's appearance would bring out the erotic aspects of a situation, or, better, reveal the situation as overridingly erotic. A modern being functioning as an erotic paradigm

can have the same power that such a god had. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, for instance, Marilyn Monroe became the paradigm of feminine erotic appeal. At certain moments, she was able, like Aphrodite, to change the look and feel of a situation. She could bring people into sharpened affective states that enabled specific possibilities to appear and others to remain hidden. In this basic way, she was a goddess. Our subject-object ontology leads us to describe such situation-changing effects in psychological terms, but we shall see that such description misses crucial aspects of the phenomenon and that the vocabulary of divine effects makes better sense.

I Heidegger on the Greek Gods

To start with, we shall consider two passages on the preclassical gods from Heidegger's *Parmenides*. In the first, Heidegger explains why we no longer experience divinities or, as he calls them here, daimons.⁹

[T]he *daimon*, the self-showing ones, the pointing ones, are who they are and are the way they are *only* in the essential domain of disclosure and of the self-disclosing of being itself.¹⁰

We do not experience gods because we do not appreciate the experience of revealing or disclosing nowadays. Our web of social practice contains no powerful beings that act with divine power by showing us what sorts of things are intelligible. Our modern subjective or postmodern ironic practices distance us from such beings. We may sense, as Wittgenstein points out, that particular things have a feel or an attunement associated with them.¹¹ Wittgenstein usefully calls this a "field of force."¹² But we do not sense ourselves under the spell of one or another mood or way of being. Certainly, nothing clearly shows us this.

The contrast of our condition with the preclassical Greeks in awe of their temple makes this point clearer. The web of interrelated Greek practices for making things and people intelligible was incarnated in the temple. Thus, the temple did not do its work in isolation. Its way of making things intelligible pervaded all of Greek life just as Gospels and later the Gothic cathedral pervaded Christian life. The pervasive force of such paradigms was experienced by

Christians as the holy spirit. The Greeks experienced it as daimons. Heidegger thinks of divinities or daimons as the ones who give things and situations their feel.

What shines into beings [i.e. lights up beings], though can never be explained on the basis of beings nor constructed out of beings, is being itself. And being, shining into beings is *to daion*—*daimon*. Descending from being into beings and thus pointing into beings, are the *daiontes-daimones*. The "demons" . . . are not casual additions to beings, which man could bypass with no loss of his own essence and could leave aside. . . . In consequence of this inconspicuous unsurpassability, the *daimons* are more "demonic" than "demons" in the usual sense could ever be. The *daimons* are more essential than any being. They . . . determine every essential affective disposition from respect and joy to mourning and terror. Here, to be sure, these "affective dispositions" are not to be understood in the modern subjective sense as "psychic states" but are to be thought more originarily as . . . attunements.¹³

From this quotation, we see that gods, for Heidegger, have to do with the way things appear for us affectively, not with how material-physical things are caused to exist. The philosophical appropriation of the Christian God as a creator God had bound Him to material-physical causality and thus concealed the divine act of revealing or disclosing of how things and people matter in attunements or moods.¹⁴

Heidegger's point about attunement breaks down into two: (1) that gods are what lights up beings¹⁵ and thereby, give these beings their look¹⁶ and (2) that the look these gods give to things by looking at them is an affective one. Gods, we might say, give things the feel of their look.¹⁷ But (1) what precisely does this mean; (2) how can we get from what gods do to what gods are; and (3) how do these claims provide us with the sense of seeing, talking to, and worshipping gods? I shall take up these questions in order.

II The Feel of a Look

The first question has to do not only with the particular effect of a god but also divine power generally. Heidegger tells us that a god *imparts* the *feel* of the look that something has. To get a sense of what he means by the *feel* of the look, let's turn to a simple example. If we

look at our own nation's currency in one hand and another nation's currency in the other, we see something very curious. In one hand, we see something that *looks* valuable. In the other, we see something that looks like play money. We might try to tell ourselves that *really* we are having very similar visual experiences of paper, color, texture, shape, etc., and that we are *interpreting* the money in one hand with one subjective feeling and interpreting the money in the other hand with another. Or, we might try to say that we are *ascribing* the subjective feeling we have when we see either of the currencies to the currency itself as an objective feature. But when did the interpretation or ascription take place? Upon examination of the activity of looking at the money, it becomes clear that we experience neither ascription nor interpretation. If we are told, for instance, that our nation's money which we hold in our hand is counterfeit, we are still likely to see the money as valuable. Thus, we see the value despite our active ascription or interpretation. Indeed, to deal with our own money as just paper inscribed with certain markings requires development of specialized skills, like those of Treasury agents.

This example should help us recognize something beyond the normal phenomenological claim that instead of mere objects, we see meaningful equipment. We do not just see useful things soliciting us. We see useful things soliciting us *with attitudes*, not our attitudes but attitudes appropriate to the kind of useful thing they are. Money is seen as valuable, guns as threatening, and so forth. These attitudes are not imposed by us in any ordinary sense of imposition. We cannot make them go away by simply shifting our stance. We have to work hard to change them.

One does not want to reject subjective interpretation or ascription and say, instead, that the difference in our responses to the currencies must lie in their material-physical aspects. We do not want to say that any or all of the physical-material aspects in some particular set of configurations are what makes us see currency as valuable. For if our nation changed many of the material aspects and their configuration on the currency (for instance, its color, the monuments pictured, and so forth), after some experience, we would lose our sense that the old aspects looked valuable and see the new ones as valuable.

Generalizing on the basis of this phenomenon, the valuable look of money, like the official look of a diploma, like the look of other socially constructed things comes neither from any particular physical/material characteristics or configuration of characteristics nor from some particular interpretation or ascription we impart to it. Rather, the affective or attitudinal look (of being valuable, official, and so forth) derives from a category of being that is neither objective (in the thing) nor subjective (in psychological stances).

What is it? To hint at the answer briefly, notice that we respond to a look of the official, the look of the serious and valuable, and many other looks. Designers constantly develop these looks. They are the affective aspect of common meanings.¹⁸ Common meanings are those meanings that are embodied in exemplars and dispose those who share them to act in accord with them. So, for instance, Marilyn Monroe was an exemplar of feminine beauty. Those who shared this meaning understood various looks and actions as Marilyn Monroe-like. They celebrated them and were thrilled by them. Like other common meanings, this one could be reduced neither to subjective preferences nor to objective features. We see subjects, objects, and situations in terms of these common meanings and the attunements they solicit because of the practices that make us what we are and make everyday objects what they are.

It is easy for us to believe that we see things through our moods. A bright day looks wonderful when we are in a happy mood and annoying when we are down. We all have felt infected by the exuberant mood of a party, even if we did not have the mood to begin with and even if nothing particular happened to us to put us in such a mood.¹⁹ In the 1950s, Heidegger focused on the way things gather us to them, the way they draw us to regard them with a certain attunement. Think of wandering into a cathedral, for instance. It draws us to a certain reverential, awestruck attunement in dealing with it and the people inside, and we come to inhabit that attunement more and more as we get increasingly in tune with the cathedral. The more reverential we feel, the more we will see things as laid out in ways that confirm that mood.

In thinking about the Greeks, Heidegger came to notice that things draw our attention with looks that act as affective solicitation. We are drawn to feel reverential in the cathedral because it has an awesome look, with all the interplay of stone and light. Our practices for dealing with even everyday things include an affective solicitation beneath our notice. This solicitation determines the mood in which we will be disposed to act and the strength of our disposition to act. Heidegger sees the Greeks as allowing their sensitivity to these affective solicitations to move their culture in a different direction from ours. To understand better the presence of divinities, we need to see the differences between the Greeks and us more clearly.

III From What Gods Do (the Causal Power of Attuning) to What Gods Are

We are interested in causal powers, and so were the Greeks. We are particularly interested in causal powers in two registers of being. We are interested in the material causal powers of the natural kinds in the universe. That is what our science investigates. We are also interested in what individuals can do and ought to be held responsible for. Our social sciences and history, and sometimes our philosophy, investigate what individuals can do, and our law and jurisprudence, along with our ethical and moral thinking, investigate what people ought to be held responsible for. But the preclassical Greeks were comparatively weak in both of our familiar kinds of causal investigation. They investigated the causal powers of attunement much more than physical and intentional causality. Attunements do have such powers. Because our currency looks valuable, we handle it with care. Because other nations' currency looks like play money, we have to stop ourselves from using it unwisely. The mood of reverence enables us to see more of a cathedral than the mood of relaxed play lets us see. The power of shared affective attunements comes to life even more when we look at shifts in common meanings. Moving, for instance, from Marilyn Monroe to Madonna gives us a significantly different sense of what is erotically appealing. At the very least, we move from soft subservience to ironic assertiveness.

In order to see where gods come in, we begin by asking how we account for such changes in affectivity. Since, for the Greeks, the gods are the ones who give situations, people, and things their look, going from, say, Marilyn Monroe to Madonna would indicate that we passed from one goddess of femininity to another, and this change gave women their new look. How do we see this phenomenon today? We generally see our artists, particularly our popular artists, and our charismatic leaders as responsible for effecting such changes. But we do not see them as responsible in a legal sense or even, for the most part, as intentionally effecting the changes. Though the Beatles changed the way we saw many things, from lovers to political concerns, we do not believe that the change was something John Lennon or Paul McCartney or the commercial enterprise called "The Beatles" actively sought. The goal of the four musicians was to make their music popular. They matched their mannerisms and their dress to their music so they could present a coherent image to the public. But it is doubtful that they would have characterized their style in the terms in which it was affectively appreciated—and taken over—by the public. (Imagine how hard it is for us to predict how our styles will be taken over by our children.) The individual Beatles were probably as much changed by their music as we were. The artist is in the same position as the critic when it comes to saying what his or her work means to the culture. The eleventh- and twelfth-century troubadours who sang songs that wove elements of religious devotion into their descriptions of erotic love could hardly have said that they wanted to transform their common meaning called erotic love into something called romantic love. Yet they succeeded famously. For this reason, when we respond to art, we are not as interested in what the artist thought he or she was doing as in the changes the artwork made or makes in our attunements.

Nor can we convince ourselves that the changes the Beatles brought about were part of a general *Zeitgeist* or drift in our cultural practices. Surely, there was a drift in our practices toward certain kinds of irony and toward certain kinds of self-indulgences. The optimistic, smart, bravado of a John Kennedy who embodied young masculinity was replaced by the sweetly ironic, artistic spirituality of a John Lennon. We were transformed. But this transformation did not

happen by cultural or practical drift. It was too much tied to the person of the artists. Thus, our accounts of changes in common meanings miss something that happens before our eyes. In this unremarked realm, the Greeks saw their gods. For Heidegger's Greeks, change in the look of things or in our attunement occurred when a god him- or herself looked at the thing—brought his or her energies to bear on it—or when a new god looked at it differently.

What is the nature of the agency that the gods brought to bear? When a god brings his or her energies to bear on something, it is not a matter of physical causation as it is studied in our sciences. A story about a god stopping the sun or living on Mt. Olympus does not tell us about an astronomical event or about a domestic address. The story about the sun's stopping changes the common meaning of the sun. The sun indicated orderliness and steadiness. That it could have been stopped tells us that wonder counts at least as much as order. Everything could be regestalted. To say the gods lived on Mt. Olympus is to say that that was how Mt. Olympus looked, just as our money looks valuable. When a god brings his or her energies to bear on something, the god changes the force or kind of its affective character. And the Greeks actually saw this change occurring; they saw the god acting. Heidegger follows the Greek formulation for identifying this power of common meanings by calling it the look of the look. By this he means the look of a god illuminating a situation in a certain way so that, for instance, everything is seen as erotic or as rationally disciplined.

We can get a feel for such power of illumination if we think of ourselves as designers and ask ourselves, what is the look of the look, say, of being valuable or official or (to attend more closely to Greek concerns) erotically appealing. Then, we may see why an account of this look must exceed the realm of simple objects. Why, that is, it could not be understood as an object in the world. Particular instances of the erotically appealing are shown to us on dozens of magazine covers monthly. But the look of this look, what this look is in general or as a whole is not something we imagine we encounter at all. When we are interested in the look of being official, we are not interested primarily in how academic regalia looks official or how judges' robes look official, but in the nature of the official look that pervades

all of such items. We are interested in what, in our culture, something official looks like. If we imagine ourselves having to design an official-looking dress for a new adjudicating board, we would probably find ourselves leafing through magazines that showed various kinds of official dress in order to get a feel for what looks official. When we did that, what we would be getting a feel for is precisely the look of the look. A fashion designer who changes what we perceive as erotically powerful evening wear will succeed not just by selling many copies of a garment with a new look but by accentuating some grace that was missed before and that is now desired. Therefore, with this new cut, the general look of what we find desirable is changed. We need only leaf through magazines from past decades to see how much the erotically desirably look has changed in a short time.

Divine power is the look of things' looks when they are seen and felt most concretely. The divine beings have a power on a human or even animal order such that their looking at a situation can transform it. We have some small experience of this when someone with a very strong character comes into the periphery of a situation. We also can easily imagine how everything in a situation takes on a different look when we are told that a fierce bear is lurking about.²⁰ This power could be exercised by statues of gods. That is what made temples sacred. The statue or altar cross gives a situation in a temple or a cathedral its look and feel. Thus, for Heidegger the statue of the god "lets the god himself be present and thus is the god himself."²¹ Now, we can say two things about the Greeks and their gods. First, because the Greeks were intensely sensitive to the affective power of the looks of things—that is, affective power of their common meanings—they could see and feel gods present in their statues and other artworks. Second, because they could see divine agents stirring affects, they had much greater sensitivity to common meanings in their world and to the ontological status of common meanings than we have. For common meanings are authoritative but neither subjective nor objective.

Art was not the only visual, bodily experience the Greeks had of gods. We can further understand what it meant for the Greeks to be looked on by a god from what we have just been saying. In situations

such as graduations, weddings, and moments of inspiration when writing, things show up with a look different from the one they ordinarily have. People look more joyful at weddings than they do on most other occasions. At graduations everything seems touched by more dignity than we are generally accustomed to. At moments of inspiration, things appear with greater clarity than usual. For Greeks, these feelings, which we know are shared, would be enough to warrant a sense of being beheld by a divinity.

Though we might imagine ourselves seeing the look that a god casts over everything by way of a common meaning, it seems an excess of fantasy to imagine the god in full visibility somewhere on the scene irradiating everything with this look. However, if some person possessed by the spirit of a situation were really to speak, act, or think beyond him- or herself (as we know him or her), we would have little problem in saying that so-and-so was so inspired that he or she really expressed the meaning of joyfulness or dignity or clarity. When someone embodies the common meaning so thoroughly that their look entrances us—think of Marilyn Monroe—the Greeks would see the god as present in the form of the person. If the person is someone who has no previous memorable identity²²—we might think of Mario Savio—then the god that pours his or her light into the situation is simply present on the scene. We should recall that Greek gods often impersonated mortals and often appeared as average people.

IV Seeing and Talking to a God

We can get a clearer picture of what the presence of a Greek divinity would be like if we examine the account of a typical fundamentalist Christian who encountered an angel.²³ This fundamentalist volunteered to purchase tickets for, and to put on a plane, four blind and wheelchair-bound children. Because of traffic, he arrived at the airport so late that there was no way he could both purchase the tickets and get the children to the gate. As he stood in consternation, a middle-aged man emerged from the crowd and asked if he could help. The fundamentalist felt strongly that the man was trustworthy, and with only a second to think he asked the man to lead

the children to the gate and wait for him to arrive with the tickets. When he got to the gate with the tickets, he saw the man with the four children, waiting by the departure door. He thanked the man, who said that the reward was all his own. The fundamentalist turned and handed the tickets to the gate attendant whom he watched lead the children down the ramp. When he turned back, he could not find the middle-aged man. He searched the airport and had an announcement made. As he ran over the events in his mind, it made no sense that the man could disappear so instantly. Finally, he accepted what seemed to him to be the only sensible conclusion: the man had been an angel.

Of course, to skeptical, disenchanted ears, this conclusion does not follow at all. Each of us could give a perfectly sensible disenchanted account of what had happened. The middle-aged man had a blind, wheelchair-bound son, and his wife had called him just a few hours earlier to tell him that their child had died. Grief-stricken, he was rushing home when he saw the four children, who reminded him of his son. Sympathetic to the problems of caring for such children, he saw immediately what was wrong. He offered to help. Indeed, he was glad to help, because it relieved some of his pain. When it seemed as though an explanation would be required of him, he could not bring himself to tell his story. He just blurted out that he liked to help people. And with that, he ran off to catch his flight, which was about to leave, a few gates down. Could we, given this disenchanted description, describe the man's actions and demeanor as angelic? Most of us would allow such a usage, granting, of course, that we were comparing a regular living person to a fictional being. But now we come to the important questions. We have a fundamentalist who claims he has encountered an angel and our own claim that he has encountered an angelic person. What is the difference between the two accounts? And which does better justice to the phenomenon?

In answering these questions, we should not be thrown off the track by claiming that the difference between us lies in the fundamentalist's belief in a place called heaven where angels warble praises of God except when they are on holy missions. For such angelology plays no decisive role in the fundamentalist's experience. Similar angel stories can be found among those who have significantly dif-

ferent angelologies. Indeed, even people who are not fundamentalists report such encounters. We begin, then, by answering a simpler, similar question that has the same ontological implications. What is the difference between seeing our own currency as valuable and seeing it as a piece of paper on which are printed many inscriptions that can be analyzed to determine if it carries value?

When the fundamentalist sees the angel, what he sees is a perfect embodiment of his subculture's common meaning of angelic action. The angel made real for him (brought him into tune with) something that he had only understood before in the abstract. Indeed, seeing the angel brought his beliefs into tune with his perceptions and emotions. Such a sighting need be ontologically no different from seeing a freshly printed \$1,000 bill as a perfect embodiment of our common meaning of valuable money.²⁴

To see neither angels nor money as affectively valuable is ultimately to see nothing but wholly disenchanted things, things with no affective meaning. Obviously, if we cultivated ourselves to see that way, we would become a different form of life. It would surely be an affectively diminished form of life with its sense of mattering wholly absent. In place of mattering would lie practical considerations. On this score, it seems obviously preferable to see valuable things as valuable. Why not see angelic actions as performed by angels? There is only one reason. That could lead us back to all the metaphysical notions of angelology. But there should be little problem if we could keep clear that divinities are divinities only so far as they embody the powers of affective common meanings.

So long as people can be seen either as agents of common meanings (culture figures, gods, or angels) or as objects, we should be able to say that a world in which there are angels or gods makes sense. It has all the advantages that seeing money as valuable has over simply determining that money is valuable. But what about cases where a god or angel appears out of thin air, when there is no other person there whom we could say the god or angel is impersonating? How can we assimilate actual divine presentations in terms of a common meaning or an attitudinal look? In a famous scene in the *Iliad*, as Achilles is about to pull his sword on Agamemnon, Athena grabs his hair from behind, and when he turns, she tells him not to attack

because he will regret it. Suppose that the Greeks actually encountered gods this way. Nonbelievers would want to describe such an experience as hallucinatory and therefore as dangerous in a way that the angel in the airport is not. Let's look at such phenomena to begin with in an open yet skeptical way.

Let us start with a commonplace set of phenomena in the auditory sphere. When we are anxious to hear from a loved one, we may find ourselves thinking that we have heard our telephone ring. When we are in a situation where someone such as a parent regularly calls our name, we do sometimes hear our name called by that person even though he or she is not calling us. People who have grown familiar with spouses or parents will sometimes hear them say the expected thing even if they have said nothing at all. What is happening in such cases? We have not *simply* had an auditory hallucination. In these cases, we do not assume that there was no sound at all. We normally believe that the affect or the feel of the situation is so strong that it pulls sounds into the pattern that we hear. Indeed, such moments have been portrayed in literature and on film enough for us to say that they are paradigm embodiments of longing. If we had the sensitivities of the preclassical Greeks, we would be likely to say that the rings and spoken words were produced by the divine powers of longing. Indeed, the perceptual impressions here are just like the perceptual impressions of dignity at a graduation, joy at a wedding feast, and the valuableness of money, except that in the cases of the telephone ringing or the noise at the door, the common meaning misleads us by *disguising* the state of affairs rather than bringing the state of affairs to full expression.

We should not be distracted by divinities misleading us. Rather, we are interested in the power by which they can transform states of affairs, drawing from us immediately appropriate responses, as in the case of Achilles. In the real-life examples of our *current* responses to common meanings, we see and hear the affective aspect of common meanings taking over whatever perceptual material is available in order to express the power of the feeling of a particular situation. We do not infer that there is joy, we see intensely joyful weddings. We do not feel intense longing, we hear the phantom telephone rings. Likewise, we do not see a chthonic demon spooking us, but

we hear noises at our door. Even with our modern ontology, our common meanings sometimes have enough affective power to produce perceptual effects as real as the god for the Homeric Greeks. But we call these events hallucinations.

The Homeric Greeks and other undisenchanted people would not have had to live with such a cramped interpretation. Indeed, just as we may hear a ringing telephone when none is ringing, the voice of a spouse when the spouse is absent, and someone breaking in when no such thing is happening, they would have experienced the voice of Aphrodite, the common meaning of desire; the voice of Hera, the common meaning of domesticity; or, let us suppose, the voice of Hermes, the common meaning of thievery. And the voice would say something fairly typical of that common meaning.²⁵ It would work on the undisenchanted Greek much the same way telling ourselves a story or more likely, watching a television movie works on us. It stiffens our resolve, intensifies our excitement, brings us more in tune with what we are feeling, gives us a keener awareness of the consequences of our actions, and so forth. That the voice of the divinity affects us in this literary register is what Heidegger means when he says that myth is the appropriate mode of relation to the divine.²⁶ Can we say that it makes sense to see a divinity in thin air?

So far, we have answered the simpler question: how does it make sense to hear the voice of a divinity saying particular things when in the world of objects there is no such voice? We hear voices when the power or feel of the situation is so strong that we construe random sounds as a voice. The pervasiveness of imperfectly distinguished noises in our environment together with the affective quality of common meanings ground these auditory phenomena. But visual phenomena tend to be different from auditory phenomena in that we see more transparently than we hear. While we work, we are aware of a din around us. But we tend to think that visual phenomena are far more determined, except in fogs, at dusk and dawn, in dense forests, in shadows, in conflagrations, in battles, storms at sea, and so forth. Making such a list makes us aware of how much our current forms of landscape and architecture enhance the determinateness of visual phenomena. Our lawns dotted with shade trees, our cleared fields, our straight highways, our wide streets and sidewalks, our street

lights, our unflickering indoor lighting, our cleared park paths and trails, our towers all make vision regularly more determinate than it was in earlier times.

Sit around a campfire. Notice all that is to be seen indistinctly when we light our rooms with candles. Stare into the flames of the fire in the fireplace. If we focus on such times, when visual fields have much in them that is indistinct, we have reason to believe that we might well be drawn to see the common meaning affecting us. We can easily list cases where the common meaning of our situation determines what we see. When we are walking across a college campus, we are attuned to the academic life and world. On such occasions if a business acquaintance happens to be within our view, we will frequently not recognize her. In other situations, we can easily find ourselves seeing someone who looks just like another person we are expecting to meet. We may even begin speaking to the stranger before we realize our mistake. If we had less disciplinary forms of landscape and architecture, we would have more opportunity to become sensitive to visions which we now take as simple hallucinations or illusions.

But we have yet to reconcile the perceptual presence of divinities changing the attunement of situations with the skepticism that comes with our disenchanted ontology. For the disenchanted person, reports of divinities reveal various kinds of mistakes. In one case, the reports might be the sentimental misidentification of human actions for divine ones. In other cases, the reports would be stress-induced misidentifications of auditory or visual patterns as words or divinities. They could even be full-fledged hallucinations. For someone sensitive to the power of common meanings, the genuinely experienced god is the agency of the affective power of a common meaning bringing us into tune with our situation.

We experience such attuning when literary works or a television movie bring us into tune with changed situations. A figure like Marilyn Monroe or Humphrey Bogart brings us into attunement when she or he speaks and acts in such a way as to make us sensitive to the feel of things in our world and, thereby enables us to act more spontaneously and effectively. When this happens, such figures have been acting with a super-human power that we have called the divine. Since this power

is neither subjective nor objective—it does not reside in either our subjective response to Marilyn Monroe or Humphrey Bogart or in them as people or even as actors—we should not be disturbed when the power comes free of subjects and objects. If a seeming subjective (sentimental) or objective (perceptual) “misidentification” brings us into tune with our world, then we are witnessing a divinity at work. Given these considerations, we should not say that, when we watch television, the Greeks and other undisenchanted peoples misidentify indistinct noises and sights unless we are prepared to say that, when we watch television, *we* misidentify images or people playing at being other people as attuning figures. For it is quite clear that our fully absorbed experience of dramas is not the experience of someone playing at being someone else. Yet we do not believe that, when we are in such an entranced state, we are misidentifying what we see.

Recall that so long as our ontology allows only for subjects and objects, we have no place for *seeing* money as valuable. Our experience of seeing money as valuable has to be accounted for as an act of ascribing or of interpreting. This limited ontology makes us unable to account for the effect that occurs when the figures in a movie bring us in tune with our lives. We cannot seriously say we see images and hear recorded sounds to which we ascribe or interpret certain feelings, motives, and so forth? We see and hear in a dimension that we may call mythic, attuning, extraordinary, or uncanny. (Heidegger uses all these terms.) With an ontology that accepts attuning and common meanings, we could experience the gods appearing out of thin air, “materializing” before us and yet not confusedly think that we are either hallucinating or seeing physical objects in unusual circumstances exhibiting their causal powers. Finally, we could see that phenomenon of materialization also taking place when an actor plays a character which becomes a culture figure or when an average person such as Mario Savio takes on a new luminence in a movement. For someone is a culture figure at certain moments, in certain actions where he is bigger than himself. Those moments come and go, and no one can be fully in control of them. Either the god materializes as the culture figure or fails to.

When we are seeing or listening to voices and sights from this dimension whether it is like a movie or the value we see in the dollar,

we are able to act more flexibly and decisively. Consequently, the movie figures and the value we see are attuning presences. Since our way of acknowledging this dimension is far less direct than the Greek way, we have a hard time saying that we see divinities. What we experience, therefore, has far less authority. We become attuned by indirect, furtive means. Our ontological neglect of both common meanings and attuning enables us to experience them only in a degraded form. Getting us to change our ontology to accept the experience we marginalize was, famously, Heidegger's project.²⁷

Trusting

Robert C. Solomon

Until very recently, the philosophical literature was virtually silent on the topic of trust and trusting although trusting's importance was presumed at every level. One does not have to dig very deeply behind Kant's arguments in the *Groundwork* or Mill's utilitarianism or, especially, Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* to find it loitering at every turn. Sissela Bok, in her popular book, *Lying*, repeatedly refers back to trust as the "atmosphere" or "climate" presupposed in every social interaction, "like the air we breathe." Religious faith can readily be viewed as a species of trust, and even epistemology might be viewed as an extensive concern about trust, trusting in other people's testimony (according to Tony Coady), trusting in one's own cognitive apparatus and good sense (according to Keith Lehrer).¹ But philosophers have been prodded to turn their analytic skills to trust only recently. (Annette Baier deserves credit as a philosopher who ignited the current interest in the topic.)

In sociology too, trust has emerged as a "hot topic." Bernard Barber wrote a study of trust back in 1976, the distinguished German sociologist Niklas Luhmann tackled the subject in his *Trust and Power* and more recently the dean of English sociologists, Anthony Giddens, has been pursuing the subject in a number of books and studies. And then there was Francis Fukuyama's well-known and rather controversial study in 1996.² The sociological literature has tended to substantivize trusting, turn it into a mysterious "thing" or medium, but as usual, there has been relatively little communication