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Heidegger on the Relationship between Steresis and Kairos: Heidegger's Interpretation of Aristotle's Steresis as the Basic Movement of Kairological Vision

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Abstract

This article offers a short analysis of Martin Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's use of sterēsis ("privation"). This article has three primary goals. The first goal is to establish a structure of sterēsis. This structure reveals a type of movement that characterizes its function. What the function of sterēsis emphasizes is the role (qualified) non-being plays for Being, in general. This point is made broadly by Aristotle in his Physics pertaining to the nature of "becoming" and then employed by Heidegger in reference to Dasein. Establishing the structure of sterēsis leads into this article's second goal of demonstrating Heidegger's privileging of non-being. Heidegger seems to take his cue from Aristotle regarding the ontological importance of "privation" and privileges it as a determination of Dasein's authentic possibilities. The third goal of this article is to illuminate Heidegger's use of the Kairos. As the privileged movement of non-being becomes apparent, the Kairos emerges as the very location and vision of this movement. What can be acknowledged, then, is that the structure of sterēsis displays the fundamental movement of what the Kairos indicates. Consequently, this article will attempt to conclude that for Heidegger sterēsis can be understood as the radical movement of the Kairos.

Keywords: Heidegger, Aristotle, Steresis, Kairos, Non-Being, Authenticity

1. Introduction

This essay will argue that there is a certain relationship between steresis (privation, withdrawal, qualified nonbeing) and Kairos (moment, immensurable time, proportion) for Martin Heidegger. Sterēsis accounts for that quality of a thing that is absent and hidden yet still determinant of the thing's existence. Steresis refers to "lack" or "privation" as a constitutive feature. For example, a blind person is blind (determined as such) by the "lack" of vision; it is the 'privation" of sight that determines the person as blind. Kairos, for Heidegger, accounts for the moment of authenticity, the moment of Dasein's vision of its own-most unique potentiality. It is in this moment that Heidegger describes Dasein as aware, on some level, of its unique individuality within the "in-authentic" world of public opinions. Sterësis notes a type of movement that withdraws from this "in-authenticity" and allows Dasein to approach an authentic vision of itself (Augenblick). So, the relationship between steresis and Kairos marks how Dasein withdraws from its average-everyday self into its absent and hidden determinant qualities for the sake of catching a glimpse of itself as authentic. The attempt to identify this relationship will begin by pointing to a particular structure of steresis. This structure will lay-out how absent qualities can in-form one's present situation. These "absent" qualities are referred to throughout this essay as a form of non-being; but this non-being is understood here as a feature of being. So, this non-being is a qualified non-being – not just any type of nothingness. The structure of sterēsis will hopefully show how qualified non-being enables Dasein to become authentic. As authentic, Dasein is able to acquire the vision of its individual limitations and thus resolve itself to some form of true-being (whatever that would mean). It is the Kairos that accounts for Dasein's vision of its unique self.

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There are three basic goals of this study. The first goal is to establish the structure of the term *sterēsis*. The reason why the "structure" of steresis is of interest here is that Heidegger employs the structure in an important way – even though the term itself is used quite rarely. Essentially, it will be argued that this structure unfolds the way to think steresis as a type of movement; in fact, the primordial movement that enables non-being to be a determinant quality. To make this case, certain works of both Aristotle and Heidegger will be addressed. The second goal of this study is to show that Heidegger gives a privileged status to non-being. This second goal will mainly be approached by way of Heidegger Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning). The third goal of this study is concerned with Heidegger's use of kairos. It will be argued that the privileging of non-being unveils the Kairos as the sight and site of the primordial movement of non-being. In other words, this third goal will attempt to establish the Kairos as the vision and location of the structure of steresis. Taken together, these three goals will reveal the structure of steresis as the radical movement of the Kairos. There is one note to make before the study gets underway. Ultimately, sterësis and Kairos seem to have a temporal connection, for Heidegger. However, time itself will not occupy much of this study. What will be taken as the structure of steresis – withdraw into non-being only to return "back" into presence – is the formal movement of Heidegger's notion of time. This study is primarily concerned with the essential design and function of steresis and eventually with the importance of Kairos. Steresis will unfold as the condition (or perhaps pre-condition) for Heidegger's notion of time. Subsequently, the treatment of Kairos will not overtly be presented according to its temporal dimensions; but, instead, it will be dealt with as the vision and location of the structure of steresis.

2. Establishing the Structure of Steresis

There are two particular references to *sterēsis* that Aristotle makes which allow us to get a sense of the term's function. The first reference comes from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Delta 22 where he offers four ways of articulating *sterēsis*. These four descriptions are not necessarily distinct, but four articulations or modes of *sterēsis* which entail some degree of overlap. Aristotle writes: "Privation" means (1) not having something which can be had by nature, even if that which does not have it would not by nature have it... (2) Not having something which a thing, either itself or its genus, should by nature have. ... (3) Not having something if and when a thing should by nature have it... (4) The taking away of something by force is called "privation." (*Metaphysics* 1022b 23-33)ⁱ What is interesting to note about this passage is that the first three articulations reveal three modes of not-having. The fourth articulation, however, speaks of a "taking away." This last mode of *sterēsis* shows more than a simple not-having but points to the way in which the not-having comes about. This fourth articulation illuminates an important part of the structure of *sterēsis* in that it uncovers an active element. In other words, it is not safe to think *sterēsis* as a stagnant concept that reveals some sort of deficient quality of a given being. Instead, this last articulation shows *sterēsis* as always and already at play as a being's not-having. *Sterēsis*, here, should be thought as an *active* "privation."

In Heidegger's essay "On the Essence and Concept of *Physis* in Aristotle's *Physics*, Beta 1," he seems to take sterēsis primarily in terms of the fourth articulation. Heidegger writes: "In sterēsis, "privation" is a matter of "taking something away" by a kind of saying it away. Sterësiscertainly refers to an "away," but always and above all it means something falls away, has gone away, remains away, becomes absent." (Pathmarks, p. 226)" It seems that Heidegger is making the suggestion that any possible characterization of steresis must understand it as active. As active, steresis allows that which is absent to stand-out as present. The second particular reference to steres is that Aristotle makes comes from *Physics*, Beta 1 where he tells us that *sterēsis* – as "privation" – is not simply a mere lack but holds a certain ontological status. Here, Aristotle writes: Into what does [physis] grow? Not into that from which it begins but into that toward which it proceeds. Thus it is the form that is the nature. "Form" and "nature", it may be added, has two senses, for privation, too, is in a way a form;... (*Physics*193b 18-21)^{III} There are two points of interest in this passage. First, by calling steresis a type of "form" (eidos), Aristotle is pointing to the ontological significance that it holds. For Aristotle, sterēsis can be said (if only analogically) to be a constituent principles of nature (physis), i.e., the totality of beings as such. Sterēsisis one of the three principlesiv of "becoming" that determine a natural being's course of movement. The second point of interest from this passage is that steresis "appears" and contributes to a being in its presence; and does so from out of concealment. Sterēsisshows itself as an undisclosed characteristic of a present being; it appears in hiding.

Heidegger makes this point when he writes: When something is missing, the missing *thing* is gone, to be sure, but the *qoneness* itself, the lack itself, is what irritates and upsets us, and the "lack" can do this only if the lack itself is

"there," i.e., only if the lack is, i.e., constitutes a manner of being. Sterēsisas absencing is not simply absentness; rather it is a presencing, namely, that kind in which the absencing (but not the absent thing) is present. Sterēsisis eidos, but eidospōs, an appearance and presencing of sorts. (Pathmarks, p. 226-227)^v

As such, these two points together reveal that *sterēsis* "sort of" shows itself; that is, shows itself as hidden in every appearance. If we take the above passage from the *Metaphysics* (showing *sterēsis* as an "active" privation) and the above passage from the *Physics* (showing *sterēsis* as a hidden constituent of beings) and read them through the assistance of Heidegger's explanation, then *sterēsis* can be thought as a determinant quality of a being in its presence that constitutes from out of concealment. Cooperatively, these two references illuminate four dominant characteristics of *sterēsis*. (1) as privation or non-being, (2) as determinant or constitutional, (3) as active and (4) as hidden. So far, the discussion of *sterēsis* sees a certain movement emerging. This movement is two-fold. First, *sterēsis* points to a withdrawing from the present being toward the being's hidden constituents. Second, *sterēsis* points to a return from concealment back into the present being, i.e., for the sake of the present being. The presence of the present being (as this study will attempt to unfold) rests on this active privation that *sterēsis* indicates. This double-movement of "privation" (concealed withdrawing-constituting) is what will be taken here as the structure and structuring function of *sterēsis*.

3. Heidegger's privileging of Non-Being

In this essay, Heidegger writes, "[f]or in steresis is hidden the essence of physis." Without devoting time to Heidegger's commentary on Aristotle's notion of physis, we can see something very important being said about steresis here. Specifically, there are two points that can be pulled from this line. The first point is that, for Heidegger, physis likes to hide. If steresis is a determinant principle of all beings – physis in general –and the essence of physis lies hidden in it, then it is the nature of the essence of physis to hide. The second point, which is much more important for this current study, is that this Heidegger line shows show *sterēsis*as enjoying a privileged position. Here, Heidegger is telling us that steresis is the keeper of the essence of physis. This is the case for Heidegger because it is, in sense, up to steresis to reveal the essence of physis, that is, the essence of the totality of beings. The way steresis discloses the essence of beings is through its structure, i.e., by way of its double movement discussed earlier. When the structure of steresis shows itself, the essence of beings emerges. As such, the structure of steresis, the movement of non-being, occupies a privileged position for Heidegger. Now, it is the goal of this study to address Heidegger's privileging of non-being. In Contributions to Philosophy, Heidegger discusses what he calls the "other beginning." This "other beginning" is set apart here from the "first beginning" (if only as a radical reaffirmation of the first beginning). The "first beginning." Heidegger tells us, refers to a somewhat narrow perspective of being where non-being is either taken in exclusively negative terms or is not given any attention at all. Heidegger writes: The first beginning experiences and posits the truth of beings, without inquiring into truth as such, because what is unhidden in it, a being as a being, necessarily overpowers everything and uses up the nothing, taking it in or destroying it completely as the "not" and the "against." (Contributions, p. 125)vii

This "first beginning" is the study of being that is bound to the "unhidden." What gives itself in its presence is understood here not simply as the beginning but also as the totality of being itself. The "first beginning" sees being completely in terms of beings. On the other hand, the "other beginning" takes non-being seriously and allows presence to guide the confrontation with being without dominating the totality of being. In other words, the "other beginning" sees non-being as a constituent of the presence of beings. Heidegger writes, "The other beginning experiences the truth of being and inquires into the be-ing of truth in order first to ground the essential swaying of be-ing and to let beings as the true of that originary truth spring forth." This originary "swaying of being" that allows beings to spring forth is the movement of sterēsis. What Heidegger seems to be stressing here with the "other beginning" is that there is an essential movement of being (be-ing) that permits beings (the objects and goals of the "first beginning") to be. That is, it is only in light of this movement (the withdrawing from a present being toward its absent constituents for the sake of that being as present) that beings emerge in their presence. This distinction Heidegger is making between the "first beginning" and the "other beginning" is a very pregnant one. Though a thorough analysis of these two beginnings is beyond the relative scope of our current study, there is something important about this distinction that speaks to our immediate concerns of sterēsis. In fact, it may be safe to characterize the difference between these two beginnings in terms of our structure of sterēsis.

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That is, the difference Heidegger is presenting is not simply a matter of seeing the truth of being in light of the being of truth but – and perhaps more importantly – seeing being in light of the movement of steresis. As mentioned above, this movement of steresis points to the withdrawing that reveals "privation" as a determinant quality of being. This determinant quality, Heidegger seems to be saying, is what allows being (and thus the being of truth) to "spring forth." This double movement of steresis discloses non-being as an aspect of the being of Dasein that affirms Dasein by moving beyond itself. The being of Dasein, for Heidegger, establishes itself by being ahead of itself in such a way that its current situation is affirmed. In this way, every current situation spring from what Dasein immediately is not. The structure of steresis shows that Dasein moves toward what it is not in order to return back to itself and secure itself anew. In that the structure of steresis is determinant, securing itself anew is a continual state of affairs. As continually beginning, the being of Dasein is always and already re-birthing itself. In that being is essentially and originarily thrown-forth from what it is not, non-being for Heidegger is a privileged quality of being. Heidegger writes: The "no" is the great leap-off, by which t/here [Da] in Da-sein is leaped into: the leap-off that both "affirms" that from which it leaps and has itself as leap no nothing [nichtNichtiges]. The leap-off itself first undertakes to leapopen the leap, and in this way the "no" surpasses the "yes." If this passage is read with an eye to the structure of sterēsis, then it seems as though Heidegger is telling us that sterēsis unfolds the "Da" of Dasein. Dasein is always and already in (or perhaps "of") the structure of steresis. If this is the case, then we can say that Dasein is its own double movement away from itself for the sake of itself. Immediately following the above passage from Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy, he writes, "Therefore, however, seen externally, this "no" sets the other beginning apart from the first beginning – never "negating" in the usual sense of rejecting or even degrading." x From this line, we can see that the "first beginning" and the "other beginning" can be differentiated through the thinking of the "no." Specifically, Heidegger is saying that the privileging of non-being, i.e., taking the structure of steresis as originary, allows for the "other beginning" to be separated from the "first beginning" (which takes non-being as a type of deficiency).

However, it is the specific way of thinking the "no" that demands it be privileged. Here, the double movement of the "no" is made formal. The "no" compels Dasein to move ahead of itself. As compelling, the "no" warrants Dasein's immediate state of affairs. The "no" leads Dasein away from itself in order to establish itself. The compelling-affirming movement of the "no" presents Dasein as always and already led ahead of itself. So, this double movement of the "no" is the format of Dasein's current situation. Heidegger writes, "[r] rather, this originary negating is like that not-granting that repels from itself a still-going-along-with out of knowing and recognizing the uniqueness of that which in itself calls for the other beginning."xi Heidegger is characterizing the movement of the "no," that is, the structure of steresis, as the "not-granting that repels from itself." What Heidegger appears to be speaking to here is the lack of stagnancy that the structure of steresis yields. In other words, the movement of the "no" prevents Dasein from establishing itself in its being in some type of permanent manner. Due to the movement of the "no," Dasein is constantly at the inception of a new beginning. Dasein is in a continual state of re-defining and re-birthing itself for itself. As claimed earlier, being beyond itself, this open-ness to non-being, characterizes Dasein's current situation; it is the "Da" of Dasein, the place where Daseinis. Yet, there is more to this last passage than the point that Dasein entails a sort of existential movement. Heidegger tells us that the "still-going-along-with" is what gets repelled in the repelling of the "no." "Still" going along with indicates a certain maintaining of an existence that had been. What had been (and potentially still is) is Dasein's overlooking of the importance of the "no." This overlooking of the "no" is a demonstration of Dasein's natural inclination to make life easier. In an essay from 1922xii Heidegger writes:

A characteristic of the being of factical life is that it finds itself hard to bear. The most unmistakable manifestation of this is the fact that factical life has the tendency to make life easy for itself. In finding itself hard to bear, life *is* difficult in accord with the basic sense of its being, not in the sense of its contingent feature.xiii What is important to note here is that Heidegger claims factical life to be intrinsically difficult and, as such, something Dasein naturally runs from. One way Dasein runs from the difficulties of factical life is by *objectifying* the world and turning beings into graspable, measureable and completely knowable objects. In doing this, Dasein overlooks the appropriate focal point of its confrontation with the world, namely, the being of factical life – the being of Dasein. In the winter of 1921-1922, Heidegger presented a lecture at the University of Freiburg entitled *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research.* In this lecture, Heidegger writes: In its broadest relational sense, to live is to care about one's "daily bread."

This must be understood very generally, as a formal indication. "Privation" (privatio, carentia) is both the relational and the intrinsic basic mode and sense of the Being of life. Where the opposite character asserts itself, where life is full of possessions, e.g., in a so-called objective life, which is totally lived in a world of Objects and which is, as it were, "self-sufficient," this basic mode is even more inexorable, because it then eats in a corrodes insidiously.

Self-secure Objectivity is insecure flight from facticity, and this Objectivity mistakes itself precisely in believing that this flight increases Objectivity, where it is precisely in facticity that Objectivity is most radically appropriated. (p. 68)xiv Here, Heidegger makes thematic the point that to care about one's "daily bread," i.e., the being of factical life, i.e., the being of Dasein, is the way Dasein overcomes the objectifying and inappropriate attempt to make life easier. Here, life is simplified by denying the importance of the "no" and categorizing being (and beings) according to what is "unhidden." Categorizing beings according to what is "unhidden" describes the "first beginning" mentioned in the above passage from Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy. The "first beginning" then, characterizes the "still-going-along-with" existence Heidegger speaks of in the above passage. By repelling this sort of past existence, the "no" is repelling and resisting the "first beginning." That is to say, the movement of the "no," or structure of steresis, overcomes the thinking of non-being as something negative and deficient. Repelling the "first beginning," which now can be understood in light of the appropriate focus of Dasein's confrontation with being, and, as such, as a characterization of the structure of steresis, results in treating non-being in a positive and affirmative way (however much it may constitute a threat to the possibility of objectification). As such, the "no" not only becomes treated (ontologically) with the "yes," but in fact gets privileged above it. What is important to emphasize from these few passages from Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy is that non-being is not only originary but a privileged quality of being. The mentioning here of the "first beginning" and the "other beginning" is only to reveal that Heidegger is illuminating a certain privileged move toward non-being. Moving toward non-being (a move that show non-being as determinant) is a move away from what Heidegger sees as a misunderstanding of the movement of the "no." The movement of the "no" is a demonstration of what we have been calling the structure of steresis. The move beyond itself into what it currently is not – always returning back to itself for affirmation – only to move beyond itself again, is this privileged structure of steresis.

What the structure of *sterēsis*en tails beyond the privileged status of non-being is Dasein's natural inclination to overlook it. This existence of overlooking the role of non-being in an attempt to make (factical) life easier is what Heidegger in 1920's calls "inauthentic." Although a discussion of authenticity and in-authenticity is not irrelevant here, it will not be included in this study. What this study will treat now is Dasein's acknowledgment of non-being. Specifically, Dasein's vision of privileged non-being points to Heidegger's use of the *Kairos*. As mentioned early in this study, although *Kairos* is a temporal concept, time will not be the architect of this analysis. Instead, Dasein's understanding of its authentic being, its vision of the *Kairos*, will be our focus. That is to say, the *Kairos* will be treated as the site and sight of the privileged nature of non-being – which can then serve as the condition for the possibility of treating the *Kairos* as a temporal "moment" of authenticity.

4. Heidegger's Use of Kairos

What this study has attempted to show so far is that the appropriate confrontation with beings takes place with the acknowledgment of the importance of non-being. Said differently, Dasein's dealing with beings, its comportment with the world, from out of an understanding of the structure of *sterēsis* sees Dasein demonstrating a particular vision. This vision is the vision of the *Kairos*. This particular sight is described by Heidegger during his explanation of *phronēsis* in the 1922 essay on Aristotle cited above. Heidegger writes: What *phronēsis* brings into true safekeeping is the toward-which of going about those dealing that human life has with itself and the how of these dealing in their own being. These dealings are *praxis* [action]: i.e., how one handles oneself in dealings that are not productive but rather in each case simply perform *actions* in the precise sense of this term. *Phronēsis* is the illuminating of dealings that co-temporalize and unfolds life in its *being.** What Heidegger seems to see in Aristotle's use of *phronēsis* is a way to concretely, that is, through comportment, "[unfold] life in its *being.*"

If this passage is read in light of what was discussed above regarding the being of factical life, then *phronēsis* can be seen as comportment with an eye to the privileged nature of non-being. That is, the being of factical life is accessed through a counter-movement to the natural inclination to objectify beings and treat beings according to what is "unhidden." The being of factical life illuminates the privileged nature of non-being, i.e., the structure of *sterēsis*. What we see in this last passage is Heidegger presenting *phronēsis* as a concrete demonstration of treating beings not in an objectified way but in suc a way that the being of life emerges.

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What this means is that Heidegger sees phonesis as comportment that behaves from out of a certain sight. This sight penetrates the inclination toward objectification and makes visible the privileged nature of non-being. In other words, phronesis maneuvers according to the ability to see the structure of steresis. The ability to see the structure of steresis enables Dasein to "locate," in a sense, the privileged movement of non-being. That is, the vision of the structure of steresis illuminates a certain ontological-topographical characteristic of Dasein. In other words, the very "place" of Dasein (the "Da" of Dasein) emerges as the movement of non-being. The movement of non-being – the compelling-warranting motion of the determinant yet concealed aspect of Dasein – emerges as the situation within which Dasein always and already is. This ontological location that is characterized by the structure of steresis is what is seen by the vision entailed in phronesis. Heidegger writes, "Our concrete interpretation of phronesis shows how these kinds of beings (actions) are constituted in it, namely, in terms of the Kairos [timeliness, the moment]." xvi The Kairos points out the appropriate location within which Dasein unfolds the being of factical life. The being of factical life, the being of Dasein, is thus uncovered in the Kairos. Therefore, the Kairos is both vision and location, both sight and site of the structure of steresis. As both vision and location of the movement of non-being, the Kairos indicates a double-unfolding. On the one hand, the Kairos is privileged non-being that unfolds non-being as a type of guiding force that overcomes stagnancy and objectification by leading Dasein ahead of itself. As leading ahead, Kairos shows non-being as that which places Dasein in a position to continually re-birth itself. On the other hand, Kairos shows non-being as a type of location that is affirmed and is the site of this necessary re-birth. The Kairos jointly indicates the not-yet and the already characteristic of Dasein. This not-yet and already characteristic of Dasein describes the double movement of the "no." So, the essential movement given by the structure of steresis shows itself in the Kairos. Heidegger elucidates this when he writes:

This "not-yet" and "already" need to be understood in their "unity," i.e., on the basis of an original givenness, with reference to which they are particular explicate. We say "particular" because here the objects in question are placed under determinant aspects of movement. The concept of sterēsis [privation] is the category of the above named explicate.xvii What we can see here is that Heidegger illuminates the Kairos and the structure of sterēsis together. Sterēsis to category of the unfolding of the Kairos. What this means is that the privileged double movement of non-being un-conceals a certain demarcation that Heidegger indicates with the Kairos. The Kairos, then, is a type of "area" within which a certain vision id possible. This vision is the sight of the very movement that does the demarcating. In other words, the Kairos is the vision of the movement of non-being – that essentially locates the kairos in the first place. It is the movement of non-being, the structure of sterēsis, which designs the "location" of the Kairos and gives the Kairos something to see. The structure of sterēsis is both the seen and scene of the Kairos.

5. Conclusion

What was referred to in the introduction to this paper as the three goals of this study can now be seen as one, three-fold goal. By establishing the structure of *sterēsis*, the privileged movement of non-being becomes apparent. As the privileged movement of non-being becomes apparent, the *Kairos* emerges as the very location and vision of this movement. As the location and vision of this movement of non-being emerges, the structure of *sterēsis* unfolds as the architect of the location as well as that which is seen in this primal sight. What can be acknowledged, then, is that the structure of *sterēsis* displays the fundamental movement of what the *Kairos* indicates. Consequently, *sterēsis* can be understood as the radical movement of the *Kairos*.

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"Aristotle. Physics. trans. H.G. Apostle. p. 27

In Aristotle's Physics, Alpha heoffers three principles of becoming beings as (1) logos – the being as addressable, (2) sterēsis – the privation of and withdrawal from the being as logos, (3) hypokeimenon – the underlying substance that remains the same throughout change.

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