

ONTIC PROXIMITY AND THE FALL OF SLEEP: FINK, HEIDEGGER, AND NANCY

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Abstract

This text explores the philosophical dimensions of sleep through the lens of philosopher Eugen Fink, delving into the existential implications of sleep. Fink introduces the concept of ontic proximity, suggesting a unity in the dissolution of binaries during sleep and portraying it as a profound encounter with the anonymous realm of the world. Drawing from Heraclitus, Fink depicts sleep as a fall from individuation, a departure from human consciousness characterized by darkness, obscurity, and a loss of verticality. Sleep, in Fink's view, signifies a communion with nature and a departure from human consciousness. Through ontic proximity, sleep unveils existence's essential vulnerability and its immersion in the rhythms of life and death.

Keywords: Sleep; Ontic proximity; Vulnerability; Heraclitus; Heidegger; Nancy

Introduction

Denn Nichtseyendes ist es nicht wegen Mangel an Licht oder Wesen, sondern als aktive Verslossenheit, tätiges Zurückstreben in die Tiefe und Verborgenheit, also als wirkende Kraft.¹

In the present, sleep is a crucial concern, not least a significant political one. The biopolitically oriented sociologist Simon Williams makes the important observation that sleep is increasingly becoming an object of governance. He

¹ Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm von: *Die Weltalter. Fragmente*, Schellings Werke, Nachlassband 1, Beck, München 1946/1966, p. 39.

illustrates how this occurs in all spheres of life, where everyone's sleep becomes a matter of public interest, and various strategies are employed to encourage people to manage their sleep.² Since the publication of Williams' book in 2011, this concern about sleep has become even more evident, aligning with the obsessive focus on health. Importantly, sleeping bodies have become more visible in public spheres, interrupting the movements of the consumer-workers of the cities.

However, in his book, Williams also makes the important philosophical point that when sleep increasingly becomes an object of governance, there are also consequences to be drawn regarding the very concept of biopolitics. This shows that through using the concept of *bios*, one tends to forget that human life is not only awake but also asleep. The politics of *bios*, the governance of life, can be said to increasingly concern *zoe*, what can be called anonymous life, of which sleep is perhaps most exemplary. Speaking with Jean-Luc Nancy, the anonymity of sleep lies in its falling movement, in which the I only exists through the erasure of the fixed distinctions between the I and what is perceived in wakefulness as being other in relation to it.³ This means that the attempts to control sleep may be more radical than the governance of bodies that are awake, as these attempts are not addressed at any particular individual but penetrate through the subject into the sphere of life where the subject loses itself. It may be possible to say that the governance of the anonymity of sleep is directed towards the anonymous life of life itself.

This text does not intend to delve into biopolitics. But Williams' suggestion that it is necessary to recognize sleep as an integral part of life, and consequently, that the governance of sleep is a highly political question, prompts a philosophical inquiry into how sleep should be understood as a dimension of existence. Such inquiries can be found scattered throughout Eugen Fink's works and notes, where the theme of sleep indicates a core problem in philosophical thinking as it has developed from Plato to Heidegger – its inability to think the obscurity of the world that cannot be controlled by the human, but which reveals existence's fragile immersion in the world.

² Williams, Simon: *The Politics of Sleep – Governing (Un) Consciousness in the Late Modern Age*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan 2011.

³ Nancy, Jean-Luc: *Tombe de sommeil*, Galilée, Paris 2007, p. 23, 28.

1. Fall from individuation

On several occasions, Fink notes the wonder that we are not astonished (*erstaunt*) about the fact that we can speak about sleep at all when we are awake.⁴ This should be understood in a very strong sense, as astonishment (*Staunen*) holds a central position in Fink's understanding of the initiation of philosophical thinking. This is most evident in several texts from the late 1930s, where Fink develops what can be considered a descriptive phenomenology of the inception of thinking: How does existence experience the necessity of thinking, and how does the necessity of thinking befall existence? In these discussions, Fink makes a crucial distinction between the classical interpretation of *wonder* (*thaumazein*) as the amazement that beings exist at all and *astonishment*. He suggests that astonishment is a distinct opening for thinking compared to wonder, formulating it as the trembling appearance of the world as a problematic whole. In the text *Die Entwicklung der Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls* from 1937, Fink describes astonishment with the following words:

Das Staunen ist wesentlich *ent-setzend*: Es setzt den Menschen heraus aus einer Befangenheit und wirft ihm diese dadurch gerade vor; als so Vorgeworfenes (PROBLEMA) wird sie allererst für ihn *Problem*.⁵

Fink's distinction between wonder and astonishment can be articulated as follows: In wonder, the world transforms into a field, an open horizon for a potentially infinite inquiry into meaning (a legacy particularly pronounced in Husserl's conceptualization of Europe as a *telos*), without the inherent meaning itself becoming problematic. Astonishment, on the other hand, can be likened to a lightning strike in the night, forcefully descending upon meaning, illuminating the world's problematic nature precisely through the obscurity of its vanishing.

From Fink's perspective on astonishment as the manifestation of the world in its full problematic nature, it becomes clearer in what sense we can approach sleep as a philosophical problem. This is evident when considering his remark about the strangeness of our obliviousness to sleep. Fink finds it remarkable that we are not astonished by the fact that we can talk about sleep. In our attempt to describe sleep, we find ourselves intimately close to the experience of the loss of meaning that marks the beginning of thinking. In simpler terms, it's strange that we are

⁴ Fink, Eugen: *Epiloge zur Dichtung*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1971, p. 62. Fink, Eugen: *Studien zur Phänomenologie 1930–1939*, Nijhoff, Den Hague 1966, p. 63.

⁵ Fink, Eugen: *Nähe und Distanz*, Alber, Freiburg 1976, p. 64.

not astonished by the withdrawal that occurs when we discuss sleep – a withdrawal from the possibility of descriptive phenomenological fixation. To underscore the philosophical significance that Fink attributes to the question of the nature of sleep, it's curious that we are not astonished by the *as if* mode through which we speak about sleep. We spontaneously relate to our own sleep as if it were a possible object of experience (as in Kant), as if it could be an originary given (as in Husserl), or as if it could reveal itself in apophantic saying (as in Heidegger). Fink's discussions about sleep aim to pose a challenge, rightly or wrongly, against the philosophical lineage he identifies from Kant to Husserl and Heidegger. This challenge is directed at what Fink, in his notes, refers to as the presentism dominating the philosophies of these thinkers.⁶

Nevertheless, even though sleep eludes efforts to grasp it as an appearance, Fink, in *Vergegenwärtigung und Bild*, underscores that when we face the challenges of articulating thoughts about sleep and acknowledge these difficulties, we, in fact, reveal a certain understanding of sleep.⁷ By this, he does not imply that we can fully grasp sleep as an appearance (*Erscheinung*), even to some extent, through a kind of peripheral view, akin to a deficient mode of fixating sight. Instead, in this early text, Fink envisions a form of understanding that transcends *logos*. According to him, the concept of *logos* is operatively determined by sight and the distance to what is seen, characteristic of how things are perceived through this sense.

The meaning of defying *logos* in our understanding of sleep can be elucidated further by turning to the famous seminar on the fragments of Heraclitus, conducted by Fink alongside Heidegger in 1966/67. In this seminar, sleep becomes a crucial point of discussion as Fink addresses the primacy of *aletheia* and *logos* evident in Heidegger's interpretation of the fragments. Throughout these discussions, Fink articulates more precisely the kind of understanding he envisions when referring to the understanding of sleep as a distinct form, separate from the understanding governed by *logos*. According to Fink, the latter is bound to what he terms a metaphysics of light. In contrast to the perceived primacy of light and openness in *logos*, he introduces the form of understanding he has in mind as ontic proximity (*ontische Nähe*).

If one is familiar with Heidegger's work, the expression ontic proximity might evoke the description of existence's relation to itself in *Being and Time*, where

⁶ Bruzina has shown the affinity between Fink's thinking regarding this presentism and the critique of the metaphysics of presence in Derrida. See Bruzina, Ronald: "The Transcendental Theory of Method in Phenomenology; the Meontic and Deconstruction", in *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 14 (1997), pp. 75–94.

⁷ Fink: *Studien zur Phänomenologie*, op. cit., p. 63.

Heidegger characterizes it as being ontically closest to itself but ontologically farthest away from itself. However, it is crucial to note that Fink does not intend ontic proximity to convey what Heidegger means by existence being ontically close to itself. Fink does not suggest that ontic proximity is a form of understanding through which existence interprets itself in terms of a being. Simultaneously, Fink does not have in mind the ontological openness of existence investigated in *Being and Time* as a question about fundamental ontology.

Instead, Fink operates between existence's ontic understanding of itself and its ontological openness. He attempts to grasp the very movement through which existence is close to the ontic. This closeness is not in the sense of interpreting itself in terms of a being, but rather in the sense of existence's understanding of a belonging together with everything that is. One could even argue that by ontic proximity, Fink refers to the togetherness of all that is appearing. However, for Fink, this togetherness is sensed when existence is touched by the very movement of the *disappearing of appearing*.

The belonging sensed in the movement of the disappearing of appearing does not manifest in ontological openness, which, for Fink, is the openness of beings as they differ from each other. This distinction is crucial for Fink. Instead, the togetherness in appearing reveals itself in the countermovement to appearing. Through this countermovement, everything ceases to manifest itself in binary distinction to what is other.

Phrased in Schellingian terms, which seem to be close to Fink despite the scarcity of his references to Schelling⁸, ontic proximity entails a closeness to the noc-

⁸ I am well aware that Fink was not a favorable reader of Schelling. Compare, for example, the following critique of the role of myth in Schelling's thinking: "In den Mythos und seine tiefere Wahrheit kommt das Denken nicht zurück, wenn es – wie beim späten Schelling – sich radikal mißtraut und als negatives Raisonement entwertet, eine „positive Philosophie“ aber aufbauen will in einer Deutung der *Mythologie und Offenbarung*; bei Schelling führt es schließlich zu einer tiefsinnigen, kryptogramatischen Mantik, die Heidnisches und Christliches vermengt und als ein mißglückender Versuch einer Mysterienweisheit betrachtet werden muß, – weil die Intuition der Strenge des Denkens entbehrt" (Fink, Eugen: *Sein und Mensch: Vom Wesen der ontologischen Erfahrung*, Alber, Freiburg 2004, p. 221). Fink also argues that Schelling, through his pantheism, blurs the distinctions between philosophy and religion, so that he ultimately fails to do justice to either of them (Fink, Eugen: *Natur, Freiheit, Welt: Philosophie der Erziehung*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 1992, p. 101). However, note the following positive remark about the significance of negativity in Schelling (which Fink writes in connection with his criticism of Heidegger's concept of care): "gehört der dunkle Grund im Menschen, den Schellings „Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit..." ursprünglich in Gott selbst und dann abgeleiteter Weise im Menschen aufgedeckt, nur einer empirischen Psychologie und Anthropologie an?" (Fink: *Sein und Mensch, op. cit.*, p. 18). In this context, Fink is thus interpreted here against his own opinion, as Schelling's concept of indifference contributes to a deeper understanding of the negativity that characterizes ontic proximity in Fink. This is supported by Schuback, who notes a closeness between Schelling and

turnal movement of the indifferenciation of the differences that appear in the open. Schelling understands the first nature, the nature that has not yet appeared in the open, as the living ground of indifference, which he describes as a non-binary neither-nor (*Weder-Noch*).⁹ This indifference should not be interpreted as a description of the collapse of appearances into a logical identity where “all cows are black and all cats are gray,” as Hegel famously formulated it in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹⁰ Instead, indifference should be understood as the movement through which differentiation occurs. Based on this, Fink’s understanding of sleep as a fall to the obscure ground can be interpreted as a sense of unity that nullifies all ontic differences – not by merging them into a logical identity, but through a separation of all binary differences from themselves, allowing them to touch and permeate each other, and touch the plurality of otherness as such.

That Fink’s concept of ontic proximity can be interpreted as the movement of an indifferenciation is supported by Schelling’s understanding of indifference, marked by a disjunctive identity where differences are present simultaneously without opposing each other.¹¹ In the living ground’s indifference, day and night, light and darkness, are present at the same time. They become opposites only through revelation, in other words, through the illumination of *logos*. This means that if ontic proximity is interpreted based on Schelling’s concept of indifference, ontic proximity must also be characterized by disjunctive identity.¹²

Thus, sleep’s movement of indifferenciation propels existence to the limit of the being it can call its own. Simultaneously, it senses a unity with all that

Fink regarding the understanding of man as a medium and as a symbol reflecting the immensity of the world (Schuback, Marcia Sá Cavalcante: “On Immensity”, in Bornemark, Jonna and Ruin, Hans (eds.), *Phenomenology and Religion: New Frontiers*, Södertörn Philosophical Studies, Huddinge 2010, p. 265). Giubilato also highlights the proximity between Fink and Schelling in understanding the absolute as a freedom beyond the finite freedom of the subject (Giubilato, Giovanni Jan: *Freiheit und Reduktion. Die Idee einer meontischen Phänomenologie bei Eugen Fink (1927–1946)*, Traugott Bautz, Nordhausen 2017, p. 47, 124). Giubilato refers to Schelling’s well-known formulation in *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie oder über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen* that freedom is the beginning and end of philosophy. However, Giubilato does not develop this line of thought, which must be considered from the perspective of *der nie aufgehende Rest* of negativity that is central to Schelling (Schelling, Friedrich von: *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*, Meiner, Hamburg 1997, p. 32).

⁹ Schelling: *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, op. cit., p. 29, 79.

¹⁰ Hegel, Wilhelm Friedrich: *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1986, p. 22.

¹¹ Schelling: *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, op. cit., p. 78.

¹² The disjunctive synthesis occurs between the head and the body, iugulum, which etymologically is related to iugum, meaning “yoke.” The disjunction can thus be described as “acephalic” (ἀκεφαλός), marked by the “eternal beginning” of the ground (on the acephalic nature of nature, cf. Schelling, Friedrich von: *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, Schellingiana Bd. 1, frommann-holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstadt 1989, p. 132).

is, a unity differentiated within itself. In this sense, ontic proximity describes a distancing of existence from itself, from its appearance in ontological openness. However, this distancing is not a reifying act; rather, it is a simultaneous movement of falling into and falling away, akin to Nancy's previously mentioned description of what happens to the I in the fall of sleep. Thus, ontic proximity reveals what Fink understands as the Janus-faced character of existence, signifying not only a duality turned towards life and death, day and night, light and darkness, clarity and obscurity, wakefulness, and sleep but also indicating the ambiguity and intertwinement of all opposites.¹³ This ambiguity is sensed in ontic proximity as a fall from individuation – from the binary difference of individuality – through in-differentiation.

However, it is precisely in this fall – from individuation, from appearing in the open – that existence is in touch with the singularity of all that is, and with the world as the All of singularization. Therefore, following the gist of Schuback's interpretation of Fink, it is possible to say that ontic proximity is a sense of being-together in-difference (or in undifferentiation, as Schuback phrases it in the quote below), a way of becoming intimately other beyond the dialectical distinctions of the day, between the universal and the singular, the general and the particular:

[...] it becomes possible to think being-together beyond the dialectics of universal and singular, general and particular, and to discover another meaning of the singular. The realm of the night exposes the limit of clarity and hence of philosophical commitment to elucidation. In the night, all cows are black, things lose their contours, the gaze becomes blind, differences turn into undifferentiation; the night is the realm of closed eyes, either as sleep or as abandonment. The night imposes a mysterious loss of distance, a gain of abyssal proximity, which explains that in the night one enters the realm of touching, and the other way around.¹⁴

2. Sleep's nocturnal touch

In the joint seminar on Heraclitus with Heidegger, Fink distinguishes between two different principles of knowledge: "like cognized through like and unlike cognized through unlike [Gleiches durch Gleiches und Ungleiches durch Ungleiches erken-

¹³ Heidegger, Martin & Fink, Eugen: *Heraklit: Seminar Wintersemester 1966/1967*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1996, p. 209.

¹⁴ Sá Cavalcante Schuback, Marcia: "The Philosophical Question of Community in the Light of Cosmologic Difference", in *Phainomena*, Vol. 31, No. 122–123 (2022), pp. 187–208.

nen].”¹⁵ The latter represents an articulated form of understanding, which Fink tentatively contrasts with the former’s obscurity:

Gegenüber diesem artikulierten Verstehen in der Helle gibt es vielleicht die Weise eines dunklen Verstehens, das nicht artikuliert ist und sich nicht im Schein einer Helle vollzieht, die auseinandersetzt und zusammenschließt, sondern das eine Art nächtlichen Anrührens ist und als Nachbarschaft der ontischen Verwandtschaft charakterisiert werden kann.¹⁶

“Unlike cognized through unlike” belongs to the openness of existence, where beings appear in distinction from each other, while “like cognized through like” allows an understanding of the obscure dimension of the world that resists openness and even repels it. According to Fink, it represents the countermovement within the very process by which beings appear through differentiation, a countermovement that can only be approached as a closedness:

Dieses dunkle Verstehen ist keine Weise des abständigen Verstehens, sondern ein insändiges Verstehen, was auf der ontischen Nähe beruht, aber keinen ontologischen Reichtum aufweist. Der Mensch ist vorwiegend der Licht Zündende, der der Lichtnatur zugestellt ist. Zugleich aber ruht er auch auf dem nächtlichen Grund, den wir nur als verschlossen ansprechen können. Der Schlafende und der Tote sind Figuren, die das Hineingehören des Menschen in die lebende und tote Natur anzeigen.¹⁷

Fink’s interpretation of “like cognized through like” should not be understood in its Platonic and Aristotelian sense, associated with *eidōs*. It is not a movement towards the good or a teleological progression from matter to form. In this metaphysical sense, “like cognized through like” describes an understanding of the process of actualization through which ontic differentiation occurs. In contrast, Fink envisions the opposite movement, characterized as a de-realization, absencing, or de-presencing (*Entgegenwärtigung*). This movement leads existence to proximity with nature in the sense of *physis*, which, in itself, involves a movement of absencing or withdrawal in what it allows to appear.

This suggests that Fink understands the principle “like cognized through like” as a form of understanding indistinguishable from a movement of existence. In

¹⁵ Heidegger & Fink: *Heraklit*, *op. cit.*, p. 235 / Heidegger, Martin & Fink, Eugen: *Heracitus Seminar*, translated by C. H. Seibert, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1993, p. 145.

¹⁶ Heidegger & Fink: *Heraklit*, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

other words, “like cognized through like” is not an intellectual attitude that relies on a distance between the knower and the known. As mentioned earlier, Fink explicitly distinguishes it from the optic metaphors associated with the other principle of knowledge stating that unlike is cognized through unlike. Instead, he thematizes ontic proximity in terms of touching; the obscure understanding of sleep is a form of touching that lingers in wakefulness, like a movement of attraction lingering in repulsion. Regarding the relation between wakefulness and sleep, Fink says in the seminar:

Das Wissen des Wachenden um den Schlaf ist eine Weise des dunklen Lebensflusses, wo das Ich für sich selbst in einer herabgesetzten Weise erlischt. Der Lebende rührt im Schlaf an die Weise des ungelichteten Aufenthaltes. Der dem Lichtbereich zugehörige und darauf hörende Mensch hat im Schlaf eine Art von Erfahrung mit dem Zurückgegangensein in den dunklen Grund, nicht in den Zustand des Bewußtlosen, sondern in ein Nichtunterschiedenes. Während für das Verhältnis im Lichtbereich als denkender Auftrag gilt *ἐν καὶ πάντα*, ist die Erfahrung mit dem dunklen Grund des Lebens die Erfahrung mit dem *ἐν καὶ πᾶν*. Im *ἐν καὶ πᾶν* müssen wir den Zusammenfall aller Unterschiede denken. Die Erfahrung mit dem *ἐν καὶ πᾶν* ist das Verhältnis des in der Individuiertheit stehenden Menschen zum nichtindividuerten, aber individuierenden Grund.¹⁸

Essential here is the very extinguishing of which sleep is one figure. The concern is to open for an understanding of how elevation and falling *touch* in the fall of sleep, through ontic proximity, when existence by falling into itself falls out of itself, overwhelmed by the movement of the world in which it is always already immersed.

In sleep, existence enigmatically passes away into a darkness where it is not there in the openness of Being, relating to beings and to itself. Yet, sleep is integral to the rhythm of existence’s life, even though it can never directly appear for existence. It signifies the continuity of a discontinuity essential to life, where a dimension of uncontrollability announces itself indirectly. With the ontic proximity of sleep, Fink has in mind a closeness to the discontinuous transitions of non-being within life, which he formulates in the above quote as “das Hineingehören des Menschen in die lebende und tote Natur [...]”¹⁹ Sleep is a figure that points to this discontinuity, as a movement of transcendence with regard to the individuality of appearances. In *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins*, Fink refers to this movement as *panic* (with *hen kai pan*, and the Greek deity Pan in mind), as a way

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

of participating (*Mit-Teilen*) in the rhythm of the world's play of presencing and absencing: between earth and sky, night and day, sleep and wakefulness.²⁰

When Fink asserts that ontic proximity cannot be elucidated through distinct articulation, he implies that what he envisions cannot be comprehended through the optical character of philosophical conceptualization described earlier. Instead, he underscores the necessity of thematizing ontic proximity based on the senses characterized by closeness. Specifically, touch occupies a significant role in his exploration of this concept, drawing upon an interpretation of Heraclitus' fragment 26:

Der Mensch rührt (zündet sich) in der Nacht ein Licht an, wann sein Augenlicht erloschen. Lebend rührt er an den Toten im Schlaf; im Wachen rührt er an den Schlafenden.²¹

According to Fink, in this fragment, Heraclitus describes the human position between light and darkness, illustrating that even the awake person is involved in the night's depriving movement by touching the sleeping one who, in turn, touches the dead. Through wakefulness, sleep, and death, existence senses the negativity of being in-difference. To understand the meaning of this, it is crucial that the touch in the fragment is not interpreted in terms of how things collide with each other. The awake does not touch the sleeping, and the sleeping does not touch the dead in this sense, just as sexual ecstasy is not merely a collision and friction between two bodies that remain separate. Wakefulness and sleep are not just two interchangeable states of one body, just as death does not begin only when life ends. Instead, the relationship between wakefulness, sleep, and death is a matter of ontic proximity for Fink, indicating that they constitute movements within each other.

Fink's interpretation of the significance of wakefulness and sleep in Heraclitus does not imply that philosophical wakefulness simply leaves sleep behind, as if sleep's closure to the openness of the world were possible to overcome. On the contrary, all wakefulness remains in an ontic proximity to sleep, in such a way that it can only take place from within closure to the world: sleep and wakefulness constitute the rhythmic entirety of the living, meaning that awakening is only possible from sleep, just as one can only fall asleep from wakefulness. In other words, it means that sleep and wakefulness touch each other by being movements that alternately emerge and withdraw within each other. As Fink formulates it in an

²⁰ Fink, Eugen: *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins*, Alber, Freiburg 1995, p. 324.

²¹ Heraclitus fragment 26 quoted from Heidegger & Fink: *Heraclit, op. cit.*, p. 195.

early note, there is, therefore, no absolute wakefulness, despite philosophy having been guided by the idea that such wakefulness might be achievable.²²

3. The vigil of sleep

In his seminar on Cesare Pavese's *Dialoghi con Leucò*, Eugen Fink suggests sleep, in the sense discussed, as an opening for a "titanically childish attempt" at an existential analytic that neither starts out from consciousness (Husserl)²³, nor from the disposedness (*Befindlichkeit*) of *Dasein* (Heidegger), where existence, at least to some extent, grasps itself (this is a theme already present in young Fink's notes²⁴). Instead, the suggested analytic would attempt to approach existence from conditions through which it eludes itself, such as the fall of sleep, the passion of ecstasy, or the intoxication of bloodthirst.²⁵ He also suggests such an analytic in *Natur, Freiheit, Welt*, where he writes (with an allusion to Hegel's well-known critique of Schelling) that he truly wants to think "the night where all cows are black, where

²² Bruzina, Ronald: *Edmund Husserl and Eugen Fink. Beginnings and Ends in Phenomenology 1928–1938*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2004, p. 6, footnote 16.

²³ Cf. Warren, Nicolas de: "The Inner Night: Towards a Phenomenology of (Dreamless) Sleep", in Lohmar, Dieter and Yamaguchi, Ichiro (eds.), *On Time – New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, Phaenomenologica, Vol. 197 (2010).

²⁴ "Schlaf ist ein Phänomen, das den Ansatz der Philosophie des ‚Bewußtseins‘ zu sprengen droht und ehestens auf die Metaphysik des Daseins verweisen mag; aber auch diese erfährt durch dieses defiziente Phänomen eine Beengung, mindestens ebenso sehr wie die ‚Bewußtseinsphilosophie‘. Husserl sieht keineswegs das Wesen des menschlichen Daseins im Bewußtsein, der Grundcharakter ist für ihn wie für Heidegger die Zeitlichkeit. Ist der Schlaf bestimmbar als ‚Bewußtlosigkeit‘, dann mindestens ebenso sehr als ‚Sorglosigkeit‘. Geht es dem schlafenden Dasein um sein Sein, ist es im Schlafen ein Zusihselbstverhalten? Schlaf ist ein defizientes Phänomen. Diese Grundthese ist uralte. Schlaf nur im Wachen interpretierbar. Aller philosophischen Bestimmung des Schlafes geht voran die Gegebenheit des Schlafes. Wie ist Schlaf ‚gegeben‘? Die Grundüberzeugung der Interpretationsversuche ist: Schlaf wird im Er-Wachen zugänglich, die Zugänglichkeit ist die Weise der ‚Gegebenheit‘: also Schlaf im Er-Wachen gegeben, im Zwischenzustand zwischen zwei Grundweisen zu sein. ‚Erwachen‘ angesetzt als die Seinsweise, die an beiden Anteil hat. (Zunächst haben wir hier ein methodisches Paradox: die ‚Gegebenheit‘ eines Phänomens (Weise seiner Zugänglichkeit) ist seine ontische Ungegebenheit. Damit wird hier ein Wesentliches ausgesprochen: die Idee der philosophischen Bestimmung ist nicht angewiesen an die ontische Gegebenheit. Philosophische ‚Gegebenheit‘ und ontische Gegebenheit decken sich nicht. Vielleicht ist in einem profunden Sinne nie das ‚Gegebene‘ das Thema der Philosophie. Philosophie ist wesentlich Spekulation und Konstruktion, so zwar daß dieser ein eigenes Sinn aufweisendes Sehenlassen eignet). Die Descartes'sche Analyse des Erwachens als Merklichwerden einer Unstimmigkeit zwischen Traumwelt und Wirklichkeitswelt ist phänomenologisch unhaltbar." (Fink, Eugen: *Phänomenologische Werkstatt 1*. Die Doktorarbeit und erste Assistenzjahre bei Husserl. Eugen Fink Gesamtausgabe (= EFGA 3.1), Alber, Freiburg 2006, Z.-VI 40a)

²⁵ Fink: *Epiloge zur Dichtung*, op. cit., pp. 111–112.

everything is one.” It is a night to which erotic ecstasy belongs, but also growth, aging, and sleep, all life movements in which the self lets go of itself.²⁶

Eroticism, intoxication, and ecstasy share a commonality with sleep. For Fink, they indicate existence’s immersion into a pre-moral and pre-human state: as a sleeper, a person is not distinguished by reason, freedom, or language.²⁷ Literally, sleep is characterized by a loss of verticality: the sleeper lies on the surface of the earth, drawn to horizontally coincide with its imperviousness, in a simultaneous loss of their waking horizons. When the sleeper’s eyelids touch, and they close their eyes to open them towards the night²⁸, the earth and the sky meet, collapsing towards the proximity of sleep to the world and the world’s envelopment of the sleeper – the body’s contact with the earth’s closure to the open is inseparable from the closing of the eyes as a sealing of sight in the open. In this state, humanity is no longer human, distinguished by its upright posture and reason – closest to the world, they are the least human.

Reading Pavese, Fink formulates this life movement as “a perversion of life’s natural tendency.” To think sleep, is an attempt to relate to the ground in-itself, a limit that not merely avoids direct experience but is an experience more intimate than all intimacy belonging to consciousness – Pavese “dives into the night of being” where the self, like all understanding derived from it, dissolves.²⁹ With this perversion, Fink refers to a distortion of the natural attitude, of grounded existence oriented towards the worldly. Sleep’s intimacy is not, therefore, an interiority, as it presupposes a subject, and subjectivity, according to Fink, belongs to the natural attitude. For him, any understanding of sleep in terms of interiority remains entangled with a philosophy of consciousness. Instead, the very distinction between interiority and exteriority (or between immanence and transcendence) originates from wakefulness, implying that they only hold validity in wakefulness. For this reason, Fink writes in an early note that sleep cannot be understood as immanence.³⁰

As Fink formulates it in connection with Pavese’s interpretation of the myth of Endymion and Artemis, sleep *touches* upon all things but without *encountering* them. According to Fink, this touching is a co-presence with all existence that is not dependent on distance, as in wakefulness. Instead, sleep is a communion

²⁶ Fink: *Natur, Freiheit, Welt*, op. cit., p. 78, 94, 100.

²⁷ Fink: *Epiloge zur Dichtung*, op. cit., p. 62.

²⁸ Nancy: *Tombe de sommeil*, op. cit., p. 47.

²⁹ Fink: *Epiloge zur Dichtung*, op. cit., p. 106.

³⁰ Fink, EFGA 3.1, op. cit., Z-XV 13a.

of humans, gods, and nature.³¹ Dreamless sleep is not a descent towards an interiority, delimited from exteriority, but an immersion in everything marked by indifference, contrasting with the difference between beings that characterizes the openness of wakefulness. Its touching is a movement of collapsing of all things into one. The fall is their shared contact, the movement of their immersion in each other. This is what Fink means when, with reference to Endymion, he writes that the state of the sleeper suggests a proximity to the in-itself as “the untouched,” as “the abyss of the terrible.” In other words, the movement of the fall itself is the untouched – it falls, and everything falls with it.³²

Endymion seeks a renewed unity with the nature-ground, and sleep becomes a passion for him because he desires to gaze into “the abyss of the in-itself,” into the living ground where all grounds fall away. This is also fulfilled as the goddess, with the help of Zeus, lets him fall into an eternal sleep. Endymion steps out of the human (organic) rhythm of wakefulness and sleep, becoming free from the sleep that carries wakefulness within it.³³ His anticipation of the night is, in this way, a longing to be liberated from himself: he desires the sleep that grants access to the untouched and tremendous ground that precedes all things human. According to Fink, his passion must, therefore, be understood as a tension towards the ground – reaching for it without being able to be in it (*In-sein*). He finds himself at the limit of having lost his humanity but not yet being united with nature. However, it is precisely in this placelessness, in “the wild,” through the uncontrollable, that Fink argues he gains a primordial experience of the ground.³⁴

Endymion’s sleep is, therefore, peculiar. It is neither the peaceful sleep he had before meeting the goddess, with the sense of unity with all beings, nor the ordinary sleep of a human as a temporary unconsciousness. Instead, asleep, he is exposed to the indifferent “revelation of nature.” Endymion’s sleep is a kind of vigil, which, nevertheless, sleeps along with the world’s sleep:

Der Schlaf Endymions ist gleichsam der Mitschlaf im Schlaf der Welt, ein bewußtseinsmäßiger Mitschlaf im Bewußtlosen.³⁵

³¹ Fink: *Epiloge zur Dichtung*, op. cit., p. 60.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 61, 62.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Conclusion

In the waking slumber, the wild fall of sleep announces itself, not by the world being lost to the self but when the self loses itself *in* the world through a terrifying un-grounding. Here, the transitional character of sleep, which distinguishes it from death³⁶, is felt, which, according to Fink, is central to Heraclitus. It allows humans to recognize themselves as natural beings. Not as biological entities, in the sense of modern biology, but as belonging to *physis*, which itself is the sleeping and the waking, a silent and inherently closed darkness and a simultaneous movement of appearing.³⁷ Through ontic proximity, human beings recognize themselves as creatures of nature in the sense above. This form of knowledge is obscure as it does not begin with the idea of human distinction from nature. The touch that fragment 26 describes, which, according to Fink, is characteristic of ontic proximity, is thus the movement of a discontinuous continuity of cosmic openness and closure.

Existence's attention to the falling movement of sleep is synonymous with an awareness of *physis*' withdrawing from the world of appearances that it, itself, brings forth. Therefore, the vigil with regard to sleep that Fink finds in Pavese's Endymion awakens a sense of *physis*' presence in the world of appearances as a withdrawal. If existence is attentive to the movement of sleep in life, sleep indicates, through its ontic proximity, the nocturnal touch of death, revealing the inclination of all appearances toward the earth's receptive closure, towards what Nielsen has called the "Unermesslichkeit der Erde" in Fink.³⁸ In other words, sleep shows that *physis*' movement of appearing is simultaneous with a movement of demise. The fall of sleep hints at how life carries death within itself through its own discontinuity. Sleep can be said to attain an exemplary status for Fink. For him, the fall of sleep arouses a vague intuition of the negativity of the night of being, of the nocturnal movement of the world, an insight that resonates with Nancy:

³⁶ For Fink, sleep is not "the brother of death", which has been a dominant thought since Homer, precisely because of its transitional character between closure and openness (Fink, Eugen: *Metaphysik und Tod*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1969, p. 34 ff., 184).

³⁷ Fink, Eugen: *Grundfragen der antiken Philosophie*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 1985, pp. 140–143.

³⁸ Nielsen, Cathrin: "Kategorien der Physis. Heidegger und Fink," in *Weltdenken: Annäherung an die Kosmologie Eugen Finks*, Nielsen, Cathrin and Sepp, Hans Rainer (eds.), Alber, Freiburg/München 2011, p. 170.

La nuit efface le rapport de la lumière à l'ombre. La nuit ramène obstinément l'indifférence dans le différent, elle retrouve le monde antérieur, le magma, le chaos, la khôra [...].³⁹

Attentiveness to the fall of sleep involves alertness to the rhythm of life, which, expressed with Nancy, can be described in terms of the beating of the heart: wakefulness is the beats, and sleep is the time between these beats, both necessary for life. It is a rhythm between something and nothing, the consonance of the world's dissonance unto itself.⁴⁰

Thus, Nancy describes the blind task of sleep from an approach to sleep that is close to Fink's: To think the non-givenness of sleep does not aim to make visible something invisible but to show that there is nothing to see but an absence of visibility.⁴¹ Similar to the feeling of the sublime, existence is touched by the fall of sleep, sinking away from the world of appearances. Therefore, sleep, like the sublime, can be said to be characterized by existence's sense of its own disappearance. What remains is the proximity to a movement of sinking away that existence must surrender to every time it is to fall asleep, to be able to fall asleep at all. When Nancy writes that the feeling in the sublime is not really a feeling in the sense of a state that can be attributed to a subject as a predicate but an *exposure*, this also applies to the fall of sleep as Fink understands it.⁴² The fall of sleep extends existence into the between of the world by ripping up this between in existence, separating it from itself, falling into its own disappearance.

Sleep's ontic proximity to the in-difference of the world reveals what Fink calls existence's eccentric essence, making humans "die Wunde der Welt, die metaphysische Lücke im Kosmos, das unvollendete Seiende, das kosmische Fragment."⁴³ The attempts to govern sleep, as suggested by Williams' biopolitical critique, unveil a paradox that echoes Fink's insights into sleep as a movement of ontic proximity. This will to governance underscores the modern compulsion to bring even the most intimate rhythms of existence under control. Yet sleep resists this control through its irreducible connection to *physis*. This resistance reveals that life is not wholly accessible to the structures of biopolitical governance; instead, it oscillates between controllable wakefulness and the ungraspable fall of sleep. In this way, the biopolitical framing of sleep points to its deeper significance: Sleep disrupts the

³⁹ Nancy: *Tombe de sommeil*, *op. cit.*, p. 42ff.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85ff.

⁴² Nancy, Jean-Luc: "L'offrande sublime," in Courtine, Jean-François (ed.), *Du sublime*, Belin, Paris 1988, pp. 76–82.

⁴³ Fink: EFGA 3.1, Z-XII 20d, 24a.

boundaries of individuation, falling into the movement of indifferentiation where human existence touches the night of being.

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