

Introduction

LENART ŠKOF AND PETRI BERNDTSON

What then, in today's world, can we do in philosophy with the breath? It is our wish in this volume to present the readers with a new genre in philosophy—namely, a respiratory philosophy¹—as an archeology of breath, and think of respiratory philosophers as spiritual archaeologists excavating its hidden ontological, epistemological, ethical, religious, and political layers. According to Luce Irigaray, it is our future task to become awakened to a new ethical constellation in which we will be “making awareness of the breath essential for an embodied ethics of difference in our globalized, ecological age.”² This future age is called by Irigaray in her more recent writings the Age of the Breath or, within Christianity (in sense of its fulfillment), the Age of the Spirit. Since Anaximenes's famous sentence on breath as “aer” and “pneuma,” Western tradition has entered an age of oblivion of the breath as a philosophical topic or principle. Analogously to Irigaray's designation of Heidegger's philosophy as one forgetting the breath,³ we could depict Western tradition since Plato as being a part of the long process of forgetting this ever original of spirit in many traditions of philosophical and religious thinking of the world (we think of ancient notions of a *breath-spirit* substance, called in different traditions *lil*, *ka*, *ruah*, *pneuma*, *aer*, *spiritus*, *prāṇa*, *ki*, *qi*, *ik'*, *mana*, *orenda* . . .). Analogously, we can trace in Judeo-Christian tradition the similar process of forgetting of the breath in its originary biologico-spiritual sense. In the Hebrew Bible, we still can understand *ruah* as identifying “breath” of men and women with the “Breath” of God and, as Škof and Holmes point out in their introduction to *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, also in the New Testament (cf. Rom 8:26), the life of prayer “brings spirit back to the body and back to the breath”⁴ and thus nurtures and preserves, as it were, an ancient and archaic pneumatic covenant in the hearts of men and women. But despite some exceptions (as for example of the role of *pneuma* in the contexts of ancient Greek medicine) in the philosophical tradition of the West, breath as one of the key epistemological foundations of both our biological and spiritual life has quickly been abandoned and has instead

become only one of many immaterial and disembodied substances, now being available only to specialists in one or another regional ontological disciplines (soul, spirit, ego, subject).

One of the *great breathers*⁵ of the twentieth century and Nobel literature prize winner Elias Canetti warned us of the thinkers who have not breathed enough, as he wrote: “It is not enough to think, one also has to breathe. Dangerous are the thinkers who have not breathed enough.”⁶ Another great breather of the twentieth century, Hazrat Inayat Khan gave his own warning related to the breath: “My spiritual teacher, my Murshid, once said, ‘People say that there are many sins and virtues, but I think there is only one sin. I asked him what it was, and he said, ‘To let one breath go without being conscious of it.’”⁷ The meaning of the word “sin” must be understood here as “fundamental error,” “wrongdoing,” or “misdeed.” Khan also says of the relation between breathing and philosophy the following: “the subject of breath is the deepest of all the subjects with which [. . .] philosophy is concerned, because breath is the most important thing”⁸ as “in it is hidden the secret of life.”⁹ Would this not mean that from the perspective of the great breathers the sin of philosophy, that is, the fundamental error of philosophy is its constant “forgetting of breathing”?¹⁰ What would be the connection between this possible sin of philosophy and dangerousness of the thinkers who have not breathed enough? A third great breather of the twentieth century, Japanese Aikido master Shinichi Suzuki, who emphasizes in his work the fundamental importance of the “world of nothing but breathing,”¹¹ sings along with Khan in harmony as he airs with confidence: “nothing is more important than breathing, breathing, breathing.”¹² If we would take these words of Canetti, Khan, and Suzuki very seriously, it would challenge us with a new task of thinking. This task would be to create systematically a new philosophy of breathing that we could call by the name of *respiratory philosophy*, *breathing philosophy*, or *breathful philosophy*. What kind of philosophy would this new respiratory, or breathful, philosophy be? What it would think? How it would think? How would it understand the relations between thinking and breathing, philosophy and respiration? How would it differ from any other kind of philosophy or way of thinking? What could, perhaps, be the starting point of this new respiratory philosophy? These are all essential questions regarding this new respiratory philosophy.

According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Philosophy will find help in poetry, art, etc.; in a closer relationship with them, it will be reborn.”¹³ Similarly, we suggest that philosophy could find help and guidance from the great breathers like Canetti, Khan, and Suzuki, as well as many other great breathers who will appear on the pages of this volume, and thus in a closer relationship with all them it could be reborn as a new respiratory philosophy. We have already received from Canetti, Khan, and Suzuki important guidance and warnings. Let us take these guiding words as the starting point from which we could perhaps begin to develop systematically this respiratory philosophy as an absolutely new way of thinking. So, what we have already learned from these great breathers is that it is not enough

to think—one must also breathe. What would be, then, the relationship between thinking and breathing? Would the relationship be parallel, in which the thinker as a respiratory philosopher investigates breathing from a distance, or would it be a chiasmic relation in which the thinker and the experience of breathing somehow constantly intertwine in an essential manner, perpetually inspiring each other? The latter option sounds more plausible, as otherwise Canetti's warning that those thinkers who *have not breathed enough* are dangerous would not make much sense. Why would the thinkers who have not breathed enough be dangerous if the relation between thinking and breathing is merely parallel and distant? The relationship is not parallel as, for example, by holding his or her breath, the thinker can quickly influence experientially the ability to think and lose his or her illusionary idea of distance and dualism between thinking and breathing. This idea of distance can be kept only in a certain kind of breathing, and it is this certain way of breathing that allows one, in the first place, to have that kind of illusionary idea. So, if breathing and thinking are essentially intertwined, even if we are normally quite oblivious of this crossing, it is important to ask what this really means. How do they intertwine? How do they influence each other? Is there still some kind of distance between thinking and breathing, since we can speak of them separately, or is this separation only separation at a conceptual, linguistic level? Would this mean that every thought, even those we barely notice, is at some fundamental level already in a hidden and latent manner a respiratory thought—that is, a thought somehow inspired by the breath?

Let us here take one important example from the history of philosophy. René Descartes begins the third meditation of *Meditations on First Philosophy* with these famous words:

I will now close my eyes, block my ears and shut down all my senses. I will erase from my thought all images of physical things or, since this is almost impossible, I will regard them as nothing, as false and empty, addressing only myself and looking more deeply into myself. I will try to make myself gradually better known and more familiar to myself. I am a thinking thing, that is, something which is doubting, affirming, denying, understanding a few things, not knowing many, willing, not willing, even imagining and sensing. As I already mentioned, even if the things that I sense or imagine happened not to exist, I am still certain that the modes of thinking that I call sensations and imaginings, insofar as they are simply certain modes of thinking, are in me. And in these few things I have listed everything that I know or, at least, what I have so far noticed that I know.¹⁴

If we truly take our initial guidance from Canetti and Khan in our efforts to think in a respiratory manner, we can say that the cardinal sin of philosophy, or the fundamental error of thinking, is in play with these words of Descartes.¹⁵

He forgets breathing completely, and as he forgets breathing he is not at all truthful in what he writes. As this major example from Western philosophy is investigated within the atmosphere of breathing, it reveals itself in a completely different manner to us than we are traditionally used to. Let us follow what Descartes does in this famous example, which has played such an important role in the whole of modern philosophy. What Descartes wants to do is to address only himself by looking deeper and deeper into himself. This means that he tries to make himself gradually better known and more familiar to himself. This path to self-knowledge as indubitable knowledge goes through various steps of withdrawal from the world. To be able to gain this indubitable and absolutely certain knowledge, one must withdraw from the world of senses, as the senses often deceive us. The first step in achieving this epistemological goal is to close one's eyes, thereby withdrawing from the visual world. After this, Descartes says that he blocks his ears, withdrawing also from the auditory world. He does not tell us how he does it. In order to make this epistemological move, he perhaps puts his fingers in his ear canals or blocks them with some fabric. After these two steps of perceptual withdrawal from the world, he states: "I [. . .] shut down all my senses." This must also mean that he somehow blocks his nostrils so as not to smell any odors of the world, either by holding his nose or by blocking both of his nostrils with fabric. But in order to shut down all his senses, he must also ensure that he does not accidentally taste anything. This means he must close his mouth, which is as easy as closing one's eyes. Now he is truly ready to address *only himself* with no distractions or deceptions from the outside world. He can truly begin to look deeper and deeper into himself and try to arrive at genuine self-knowledge. But the problem here is that he is not being truthful at all. There are two possibilities. Either he did not do what he said he would do, or he did not truthfully describe the experience of totally shutting down all of his senses. How do we know this for certain? If he did what he said he would do, he would have blocked his respiratory openings (both his mouth and his nostrils) and could no longer breathe in air. Thus, quite quickly, his task of addressing *only himself* and looking more deeply into himself to gain pure and indubitable self-knowledge would have manifested itself as a gradual sense of discomfort, leading ultimately to a dreadful experience of anxiety. This also means that Descartes would not have had the chance to state in a calm fashion the famous words, "I am a thinking thing"—rather, his sole thought would have been *I am feeling terrible. How long can I hold my breath? I really need to breathe.* With this train of thought, the Cartesian philosophy would have been an absolutely different philosophy. From Descartes's own description of his withdrawal from the world, we can easily infer that he did *not* shut down all of his senses as he said he would. He might have come close, opening either his mouth or his nostrils once in a while during his exploration of himself. In any case, it is clear that Descartes's "thinking thing" is from the very beginning tarnished by the breath, by the atmosphere of breathing.

This is an important example of what could be the meaning of the sin of philosophy from the perspective of respiratory philosophy. In his description, Descartes is not at all conscious of every breath he takes during the process of thinking. His cardinal sin of “forgetting of breathing” leads to a completely fictitious philosophical description. Following Canetti, could we say here that Descartes is indeed dangerous for philosophy because he has not breathed enough? If he would have breathed enough, he would have never been oblivious to breathing and would have never arrived at his dualistic philosophy in the way he that did. In respiratory philosophy, we can also conceive of a self separate from the world, but that self is an anxious self that has a constant urge to reconnect with our original way of being as breathing-in-the-world. Within the Western tradition, the almost universal forgetting of breathing made it possible for the dangerous idea of dualism to become a paradigm of modern philosophy.¹⁶ It could be argued that modern philosophy’s dualism is impossible if the starting principle of philosophizing is the experience of breathing, as breathing perpetually intertwines the self, the body, and the world.

If Descartes and most of the Western tradition have not breathed enough, then who could have breathed enough not to be dangerous? Perhaps we get a clue from the following aphorism from Canetti: “Philosophers one gets entangled in: Aristotle. Philosophers to hold others down with: Hegel. Philosophers for inflation: Nietzsche. For breathing: Zhuangzi.”¹⁷ In his autobiography, Canetti names Zhuangzi as the one “who for me has been the most intimate of all the philosophers.”¹⁸ So the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi, according to Canetti, as his most intimate companion of all the philosophers, is *the* philosopher for breathing. If this is the case, we must be quite confident, even if we do not know this for absolute certainty, that Zhuangzi is a thinker, a philosopher, who has, in Canetti’s view, breathed enough not to be dangerous. Would this make Zhuangzi, perhaps, the respiratory philosopher *par excellence*—even if we do not yet know in any explicit manner what that really means? Canetti does not tell us why he thinks Zhuangzi is the philosopher for breathing. Before we investigate why Canetti *perhaps* understands Zhuangzi as the philosopher for breathing, we should consider the other great thinkers he mentions in his aphorism. Does Canetti mean that Aristotle, Hegel, and Nietzsche, despite being some of the greatest thinkers of all time, remain dangerous if they did not breathe enough? Again, Canetti provides no answer. These thinkers would require similar kinds of respiratory investigations to those just described for Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. One of the important tasks of anew respiratory philosophy will be to reread the great thinkers in a respiratory key to examine their relation to the phenomenon of breath.

So why choose Zhuangzi as the philosopher for breathing and a potential guide toward a new respiratory philosophy? The clue perhaps can be found in the following words: “The True Man [*zhenren*] [. . .] breathing deep breaths. The

True Man breathes with his heels; the mass of men breathe with their throats.”¹⁹ In these words of Zhuangzi we can first notice that he makes a distinction between the “True Man” and the “mass of men,” and the difference between them is the way they breathe. First of all, let us briefly investigate Zhuangzi’s Chinese term *zhenren*, which is often translated as “true man.” The Chinese *ren* means “Man, a man, a person.” The meaning of *zhen* is more complex, as it means “true, real, authentic.” So, in addition to “true man,” *zhenren* might be translated as “real man,” “authentic man,” or “true person.” But why do many of the translations capitalize Zhuangzi’s *zhenren* as a “True Man”? This is because, in his usage, “true man,” or “authentic person,” derives a special meaning—“Daoist spiritual master”—that is, a person who has undergone a spiritual transformation and thus has become perfected as a human being, that is, has realized his true or authentic nature as a human being. In achieving this spiritual transformation, the practice of breathing, or the cultivation of breathing, is essential. Thus, in this quotation from Zhuangzi it is highly important that this difference between the “True Man” and the “mass of men” is not in the first place at the level of thinking, and especially not at the level of knowledge, but at the level of breathing. Would this mean that, according to Zhuangzi, the difference of breathing is a more fundamental difference between people than the difference in their way of thinking? Yes, it would. So, there is *a fundamental difference of breathing*. The True Man breathes deeply. He “breathes with his heels.” This expression can be understood in the sense that he breathes so deeply that his breath reaches his heels. His expanded breath, cultivated through breathing practices reaches his uttermost depths. He breathes from head to toe. So, it could be said that to breathe with his heels means to breathe with his whole being. In comparison to this, “the mass of men breathe with their throats,” which means they breathe superficially and are thus hardly at all consciously connected with their breathing.²⁰ As they do not breathe at all deeply they do not reach the depth dimensions of breathing. They do not experience the vastness of the breath in all of its spiritual and ontological possibilities and atmospheres.

So, let us return to the heart of the matter: “It is not enough to think, one also has to breathe. Dangerous are the thinkers who have not breathed enough.” First of all, most of the thinkers belong to “the mass of men [who] breathe with their throats” and thus “have not breathed enough.” This makes them dangerous in Canetti’s respiratory view. It is extremely rare to find a thinker who has breathed enough, that is, who breathes with his heels, with his whole being. In Zhuangzi, Canetti saw this rarity of the meeting of a great thinker and a great breather, and for this reason it could be very well said that this philosopher “for breathing” was for him “the most intimate of all the philosophers.”

In this, our initial explorative journey of respiratory philosophy, it can be said that Canetti’s respiratory view of the dangerousness of thinkers who have not breathed enough matches well with Khan’s view of the real sinners who are not conscious of the breath. So, in Khan’s respiratory view, as mentioned earlier, “there

is only one sin” and that is “to let one breath go without being conscious of it.” This is the only true error or fundamental wrongdoing in human life. Everything else is secondary in comparison. Shinichi Suzuki’s phrase that “nothing is more important than breathing, breathing, breathing” states perfectly Khan’s view: “breath is the most important thing.” For this reason, to miss this most important thing in life is to sin, and sin we do, as most of the time we human beings are eminently unaware of the phenomenon of breathing and its manifold mysteries. The only antidote against this cardinal sin, according to Khan, is to become a “master of breath” who “*always* consults his breath” and is “*always* conscious of the breath.”²¹ But this is of course extremely difficult, as anyone who has tried even for short moments to be as conscious of the breath as possible knows. But the more one practices and cultivates the art of conscious breathing, the more possible the impossible begins to appear in one’s experience.

According to Khan, breath is “the deepest of all the subjects with which [. . .] philosophy is concerned.” If according to Martin Heidegger, “Being is the proper and sole theme of philosophy,”²² then—from Khan’s point of view—we could say the same thing about the breath. Khan could, thus, perhaps say: *the breath is the proper and sole theme of philosophy*. He writes: “People ordinarily think of breath as that little air they feel coming and going through the nostrils, but they do not think of it as that *vast current which goes through everything*, that current which comes from our consciousness and goes as far as the external being, the physical world.”²³ So as for Heidegger, Being as the clearing is that open space within which everything appears and disappears, for Khan the atmosphere of breath is that “vast current” that surrounds, intermediates, and flows “through everything.” In another instance, Khan says that “to an average person it seems as if [in breath just] some air goes out and comes in. But the mystics [as the masters of breath] follow this chain of breath in the pursuit of the Infinite.”²⁴ In these quotations Khan makes a very similar distinction to that of Zhuangzi. Whereas Zhuangzi speaks of the “mass of men,” Khan speaks of the ordinary or average people. And when Zhuangzi speaks of the “True Man” as a spiritual master, Khan speaks of the mystic as the master of breath. For Khan, a mystic is a person who has devoted his or her life to the study of the “*mystery of breath*.”²⁵ The respiratory content is very similar to that of Zhuangzi, as also in Khan’s view the ordinary, or average, people experience their breathing only as “little air [. . .] coming and going through the nostrils.” This average person’s experience of breathing is superficial and misses completely the vast depth dimensions of the breath and the immense atmospheres of breathing, that is, all the possibilities of breathing. On the other hand, the mystic as the master of breath or as the great breather experiences the breath as “that vast current which goes through everything.” For the great breathers, “everything breathes again.”²⁶ From these great breathers, or masters of breath, the new respiratory philosophy takes its inspiration as it tries to learn to re-experience all the questions of philosophy as questions concerning the atmospheres of breathing.

So, what could this completely new philosophy as respiratory philosophy be? That remains mostly an open question, as our respiratory journey has just begun. We could perhaps say that this question is as open as breathing itself. Breathing is openness, that is, respiratory openness, a perpetual opening to the atmosphere of air. The air itself is also pure openness as in itself it obstructs nothing. Things around us obstruct as, for example, they block our vision, movement, or speech, but the atmosphere of air is pure open freedom, free from any obstruction. In this respiratory and aerial openness, all questions, problems, and subjects of philosophy appear as questions, problems, and subjects of respiratory philosophy. Their appearance takes place within this respiratory openness as the atmosphere of breathing.

The basic insight of this new philosophy of breathing as respiratory philosophy is that there is a *respiratory difference* that makes this new way of thinking possible. What is this respiratory difference? It is what we have previously referred to with the help of the great breathers. It is the difference between breathing consciously and thoughtfully and not breathing consciously and thoughtfully. It is the difference between thinking breathfully and not thinking breathfully, and the difference between cultivating breathing and not cultivating breathing. It is the difference between the breath of the “True Man” and the breath of the “mass of men.” This respiratory difference is a perpetual choice that we face each and every moment with each and every breath. The understanding of this difference in thinking is the fundamental principle of respiratory philosophy.

We can offer here one possible idea of what this respiratory difference in thinking could mean. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty defines “true philosophy” as the task of “learning to see the world anew.”²⁷ What might this mean if interpreted through the insights of respiratory philosophy? What would this *new way* of seeing the world entail? Let us take our lead from Canetti again, who once pondered “If eyes could breathe.”²⁸ Could we learn to see the world anew with eyes that breathe? And if we would listen to Khan on this matter, what could we learn from him? Khan would advise that the vision would always consult with the breath. How would one learn to see in collaboration with the breath? Perhaps we could simply say that the meaning of this new way to see the world would be to see the world in a *respiratory way*. To see the world in a respiratory way would mean to see it within the atmosphere of breathing, and perhaps to see it according to the breath or to see it in collaboration with breathing. The respiratory philosophy would then be to relearn to see the world perpetually within the atmosphere of breathing. This would mean that whatever we are looking at, we must always be conscious of the atmosphere of breathing and strive to see our subject within it. In this way of seeing the world, the philosopher takes into account that his or her vision always takes place within the atmosphere of breathing and, similarly, that the object at which he or she gazes also appears within this respiratory atmosphere. There is no vision and no

visual object without the respiratory atmosphere that surrounds and mediates them. Thus, through this new way of seeing the world, all the questions of life, including all philosophical questions, are transformed into respiratory questions. All questions of philosophy become *respiratory questions of philosophy*. They are seen perpetually from the perspective of breathing. A good example of what this means in practice is how *we looked* earlier at Descartes's words of *Meditations on First Philosophy* from the perspective of breathing. Our respiratory interrogation showed that if Descartes would have remembered breathing, his examination would have had a completely different outcome. This means that forgetting of breathing can have very serious consequences, and for this reason the great breathers like Canetti and Khan warned us of the thinkers who have not breathed enough.

Notably, the history of Western philosophy is a history of masculine domination in philosophical thought. It is thus no coincidence that as a thinker of sexual difference, it was precisely a woman philosopher, Luce Irigaray, who *as philosopher* has for the first time in the history of philosophy breathed through her entire philosophy. In her short but beautiful piece "Ethical Gestures Toward the Other" (Irigaray 2010), Irigaray devotes thoughts to breath/ing and warns us that we too often forget our breath as being the first autonomous gesture of our lives. She writes: "No doubt, we breathe on pain of death, but we breathe poorly, and we worry little about our first food of life: air."²⁹ Even more importantly, Irigaray links the cultivation of breathing to the cultivation of ethics in ourselves and in our intersubjective relations. Let us, nearing the end of this introduction, look at her words:

Not only does our culture not teach us how to cultivate breathing to assure our existence in an autonomous way, but it does not make known to us that becoming spiritual amounts to transforming our elemental vital breath into a more subtle breath at the service of loving, of speaking and hearing, of thinking. Too often we confuse cultivation and spirituality with the learning of words, of knowledge, of competences. We have forgotten that to be cultivated amounts to being able to breathe, not only in order to survive, but in order to constitute a reserve of breath as a soul that helps us to transform our natural life into a spiritual life.³⁰

Finally, it was Luce Irigaray, who in *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*,³¹ again for the first time in the history of Western thought, devoted an entire book to a criticism of a major Western thinker (Heidegger) for the forgetting of breath in his philosophical oeuvre.

In each chapter of this volume the questions of philosophy are investigated from the perspective of breathing, and thus these questions are transformed into respiratory questions. These philosophical questions include, for example,

questions of ontology, ethics, aesthetics, hermeneutics, phenomenology, politics, and environment. Throughout the pages of this volume these different philosophical questions are changed into respiratory questions of ontology, ethics, aesthetics, politics, and so forth. Through this process of exploration, these phenomena can be understood as new depth dimensions or atmospheres of breathing. If the task of respiratory philosophy is to perpetually relearn to see the world in a respiratory way, that is, as a respiratory revision, this means that everything within our lifeworld needs to be re-thought, re-examined, and re-experienced within these atmospheres of breathing. The respiratory philosophy as the revision of the world is a cultivation of breathing. The thinker inspired by this respiratory revision, to borrow from Canetti, “no longer wants thoughts that bite. He wants thoughts that make it easier to breathe.”³² This volume is one of the first attempts in this task of relearning to see the world in a respiratory way as it offers to the readers so many in-depth variations and rich modulations of this world where “everything breathes again.”

David Kleinberg-Levin’s chapter on hermeneutics of breathing is without doubt one of the key elaborations on breath in the entire history of philosophy. In this chapter the phenomenon of breathing is articulated and interpreted in its vastness as the most open openness of human existence as well as the most fundamental openness to the world. This expansive openness gives Kleinberg-Levin space, time, and freedom to breathe in such an inspiring manner that it breathes room for any attentive reader to see immense possibilities and potentialities of new connections and intertwinings in respiratory terms. In this seminal text, Kleinberg-Levin presents—with the help of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty (“respiratory body”), Heraclitus (“psyche” and “logos”), Kierkegaard, Rilke, and a few others—a completely new atmosphere: a respiratory atmosphere to think and explore questions of ontology, psychology, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, poetry, speech, spirituality, communication, embodiment, religion, and more. Respiratory philosophy researchers of the future will benefit from this opening overture in which Kleinberg-Levin has laid out for us to understand how any theme can be investigated via the most fundamental openness of the breath. Further, his chapter suggests how breathing might constitute the whole of our life—from space to time, from speech to poetry, from anxiety to self-development. It is the challenge for future respiratory thinkers to develop further the multiple philosophical implications that can be articulated within this most fundamental openness of respiratory atmosphere that Kleinberg-Levin has offered to all of us.

Petri Berndtson explores in his chapter the possible relations between respiration and ontology. The leading question of the chapter asks if the experience of respiration can teach us an ontology that it alone can reveal to us? If so, what kind of ontology would this respiratory ontology be, and how would the phenomenon of breathing redefine the question of Being? With the help of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, this question of Being will be redefined as the question

concerning “inspiration and expiration of Being.” This notion of “inspiration and expiration of Being” comes from Merleau-Ponty’s work “Eye and Mind.” In this chapter, Berndtson’s ontological investigation of “inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being” will find help especially from Merleau-Ponty’s and Martin Heidegger’s ontological thinking of Being. In his investigation, the question of Being is understood as the question of ontological difference—the question between Being and beings. This ontological difference is given a respiratory interpretation as the difference of inspiration and expiration of Being and beings. To clarify the respiratory dimensions of ontological difference, Berndtson includes an examination of Zen Buddhism. In Zen, emphasis is on the breathing practice of *zazen*, as well as on the notion of *kū* (emptiness, sky, space, and air). These ideas from Zen will be understood ontologically within the context of ontological difference. In addition to Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Zen, Gaston Bachelard’s aerial poetics, as well as Luce Irigaray’s aerial and respiratory thinking, are used to elaborate what this new respiratory ontology could be and how it would define basic ontological questions concerning, for example, what is a thing and what is not a thing. The basic insight of this respiratory ontology will be that it is not object- or thing-related, but atmosphere-related.

Lenart Škof argues in his chapter that breath perhaps was (and still is) the most neglected way of self-affection in the history of Western thought. By first introducing aerial elements in the thoughts of Feuerbach and Nietzsche, he continues by analyzing the most recent work of Luce Irigaray, in which a new ontology of sexual difference and breath is offered. Irigaray has proposed in her writings that humanity must search for a new way of intersubjective and communal dwelling known as the “Age of the Breath” (or, in terms of Christianity, the “Age of the Spirit”). In his chapter, Škof radicalizes Irigaray’s thought by introducing Schelling’s ontology of co-breathing from his famous *Human Freedom* essay and by thinking of a breath in a deeper ontological sense. According to Škof, breath could thus be a sign of our own path toward future divinization of our selves, of becoming more linked to the spiritual breath, and thus fully autonomous. The wounds of the world, as ontological fractures in the very core of our Being, are to be cured through our sensitivization of the breath. Finally, Škof argues that this is to be achieved by the means of a new pneumatic covenant, based on a new temporality of an ethical encounter as mutual ethical co-breathing, and, finally, of human as well as divine exchange of our spiritual breath(s).

In his chapter, Rolf Elberfeld discusses breath as a central aesthetic category within Chinese and Japanese traditions. First, he offers a semantic clarification of the meaning of various words for breathing and continues by elaborating on *qi/ki* as an aesthetic phenomenon in China and Japan. The main part of his chapter is dedicated to the aesthetical elements in Nō theater: here Elberfeld focuses on Zeami’s (1363–1443) famous treatise on aesthetics and its implications for the mutual resonance between actor and audience via the mutual exchange

of breath. For Elberfeld, aesthetic and artistic practices—such as Taiji, Qigong, music, Butoh dance, ink painting, drawing—as well as treatises in aesthetics are of vital importance for our time. Through an understanding of Asian cultures of breathing, according to Elberfeld, we are able to direct more attention to neglected elements within extant Western aesthetical theories and thus become more sensitized to the role of breath.

Silvia Benso puts thinking of breath in relation to Pre-Socratic tradition and its echoes in Levinas. We know that the Pre-Socratics held the elements fire, earth, water, and air of key importance. Benso's elaboration of Levinas's thought in this respect is highly important for the evolving tradition of the new respiratory philosophy we are proposing in this volume. We know that, for Levinas, inspiration represents a key concept, and that he regards the lungs as an ethical organ. Breathing, for Levinas, is *in-spiration*, a continuous process of ethical circulation of air, of our reaching of the other in an ethical way. Benso first discusses in detail the proto-respiratory philosophy of the pre-Socratics (particularly Anaximenes) and continues by elaborating the psychism and air in Levinas's main works (*Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*). By drawing on rich deposits of respiratory phenomena in Levinas (psyche, air, inspiration/ expiration, spirit, lung), Benso aims to point to ethical subjectivity as enabling us to interpret the *pneuma* of psychism as a gift and donation for the other—an inspiration for-the-other, as it were, and toward the other in an ethical exchange yet to come.

Tamara Ditrich discusses in her chapter one of the key conceptual tools in Buddhist meditational practices, namely, mindfulness of breathing. This is one of the key methods in traditional as well as modern Buddhist contemplative practices. It also has a wide spectrum of uses in contemporary humanities and social sciences, and—in one or another version of this doctrine—especially in contemporary methods of psychology, psychiatry, and health science. Ditrich first explores breath in ancient Indian religion (Vedas, early ascetic movements) and then proceeds toward situating mindfulness in its original Buddhist contexts (early Buddhism). It is known that Buddha first attained his awakening through mindfulness of breathing. Ditrich analyzes textual evidence for mindfulness of breathing in a detailed manner in the rest of her chapter. In the conclusion of the chapter, she reflects on broader ethical usages of mindfulness (Buddhism itself did not develop a special philosophical discipline of ethics) and also views it as a constituent part of the meditation of loving kindness.

James Morley offers in his chapter an interpretation of the yoga practice of *prāṇāyāma* (breath control) influenced by the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This approach to yoga is less concerned with comparison between Merleau-Ponty's thought and the texts of classical yoga than with the elucidation of the actual experience of breath control through the constructs provided by Merleau-Ponty's extension of Husserl's philosophy of the lived-body. The discussion of yoga can answer certain pedagogical goals, but it can never finally be severed from *doing*

yoga. Academic discourse centered entirely on the theoretical concepts of yoga philosophies must to some extent remain incomplete. Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* is itself a manual of practice. It is for this reason that Morley chooses to take as the basis of his study the commentary of the scholar-practitioner T.K.V. Desikachar, rather than a more exclusively theoretical commentary. In so doing, he approaches yogic breath work as an experience or phenomenon and not only in the context of a series of academic debates.

Jana Rošker's chapter deals with the concept of *qi* in Chinese philosophy—especially in the light of its role as a vital force of cosmic and human breath. According to Rošker, this concept is one of the most difficult and complex notions in Chinese ideational history. Rošker first analyzes various translations of *qi* in order to show how the concept has been misused and has diverged from its original meaning. Later in her chapter, she interprets *qi* in various philosophical, physiological, psychological, and ethical dimensions. Rošker shows that on a semantical level, *qi* is related to air, and especially to breath as the origin of the living world. One of her conclusions is that in a Chinese holistic worldview, *qi* can simultaneously be both immanent and transcendent and, along with being the source of life, its vital rhythm and nourishing could also be understood as “creativity” or a potential that enables us to function in a creative (and autonomous) way.

Tadashi Ogawa's contribution tackles wind, air, and breath from the holistic philosophico-medical point of view. Ogawa discusses the medical philosophy of Japanese thinker Kaibara Ekiken (1630–1713), a contemporary of Pascal and Leibniz, writing in his books on cosmic, philosophical, and medical aspects of our being-in-the-world through the cultivation of breath and breathing. For Ekiken (being both natural philosopher and Shintoist), human being is born in the atmospherical and ontological space between heaven and earth, and, clearly, this means that her existential basis is closely related to *ki* (Japanese for *qi*) as their basic principle and also—more concretely and naturally—the wind spirit. Ogawa analyzes Ekiken's books and searches for relations between the meanings of *ki* and related words that mean “breath.” Ogawa explores the relation of *ki* and “breathing” in the context of Ekiken's writings in great detail, comparing them to Plato (the inner fire of the body movement versus the inhalation and exhalation of air) and Christianity (the divine workings of the Holy Spirit). Finally, Ogawa reflects on the practice of health (medical prescriptions and daily regimen as related to everyday activities) and its cosmic and philosophical implications.

Kevin Hart breathes into his chapter the poetic world of the late American poet Mark Strand. Hart walks through Strand's poems, paying special attention to “Breath,” a poem that is Strand's most extensive treatment of our selfhood in its various physiological and spiritual layers. By reading Strand's poetry, according to Hart, we might at first think that breath is a mirror, but in a more fundamental poetic sense, breath is the medium of our language, its words, breaths, and thoughts.

Breath is somehow (poetically, but also naturally) related to the moves of our body, to our personal autonomy, which flows from our internal space(s) toward the other, in an ongoing dialectical encounter between the two, in a process of proximity and love, resembling Celan's designation of our poetic dwelling with the beautiful expression *Atemwende*, or "turning of our breath," enabling a new being in the world for us. Hart also tackles in his chapter the more hidden presence of breath in Mark Strand's poetry. In some of his more sublime poems, and in dialogue with Whitman, Rilke, and Stevens, Strand evokes in magical poetic moments the dependence of poetry, longing, and poetic salvation on breath and breathing.

Jones Irwin's chapter is a dialogue between Derrida and Artaud on the topic of breath. Derrida's encounter with Artaud is first analyzed, followed by a reading of Artaud with particular focus on the body, breath, and expression. For Artaud, flesh emphasizes the return to reality and, as he shows in his *Theatre of Cruelty*, breath as flesh's lifeforce has been too often suffocated by metaphysics. We need to think of breath beyond the metaphysical, both in Derrida and Artaud. Thus, the body will be reborn. Irwin shows in his chapter how a re-inspiration of breath is to be achieved in Artaud's philosophical project and, at the same time, how fragile this new embodied breathing can be.

In his chapter, John Durham Peters writes on the media of breathing. His approach is not limited by a narrow understanding of media but brings an innovative, expanded conception that includes technologies or techniques of our selves (such as cultures of breath), animal bodies and their breathful selves, and nature as revealed through technology. Durham Peters distinguishes between many arts of breathing. Especially illuminating are his original thoughts on a unique respiratory signature of each person, or even natural being. His analysis of cetaceans (whales, dolphins) and their breathing apparatus is without doubt among the most original accounts on animal and interspecies philosophy ever written. His comparative animal phenomenology, based on breath techniques, brings new insights into many fields in the humanities, particularly philosophy. In an idiosyncratic manner, Durham Peters also introduces and analyzes the term "cloud" as a new atmospheric media of breathing and concludes his chapter with the art of writing and vowels as the breathed part of language.

Marijn Nieuwenhuis takes us one step further in our rethinking of the breath. As a political scientist, he focuses in his work on the "politics of the air" and deals with questions of technology, pollution, security, territory, and governance. He provides a genealogical historiography of how knowledge of breathing has emerged and continues to evolve as an interest of governance. Nieuwenhuis is situated in the "Western" experience of breathing from Aristotle and ancient Greece, through Christianity all the way to the modern era. He elaborates on a more recent biopolitics of pneumatic therapy and the thanatopolitics of "gassing." He thus argues in his conclusions that breathing and knowledge of breathing have always been in interest to the governing of bodies.

Drew Leder addresses in his chapter breath as a theater for the play of health and illness. For him, in medical contexts, breath should be regarded not only as a respiratory fact in our organs but should play a much more sophisticated role. He thus introduces in his chapter the concept of a “hinge,” as an interface, a living nexus between voluntary and involuntary, visible and invisible, interior and exterior. He elaborates on various techniques and medical traditions (including Daoist, Ayurvedic, Buddhist, Yogic breath) and argues in his conclusions for a more mindful approach toward our bodies-selves in medical as well as other life contexts.

Havi Carel’s chapter presents a philosophical framework for the understanding of breath and breathlessness in terms of respiratory medicine. She first deals with the symptom of breathlessness within the clinic and outside it. Breathlessness, according to Carel, is a pathological derivative of many and varied physical, cultural, and religious forms, usages, and technologies of breathing. Breathlessness as an “invisible” but extremely dangerous symptom appears in a number of dangerous diseases. But for Carel, this symptom also needs a complex phenomenological elaboration. Phenomenological approach enables us to see deeper—that is, into the very logic (physiological, psychological, existential, cultural, spiritual) of this symptom. It also gives a new meaning to the personal and always unique experience of a bodily breakdown, or, as proposed by Carel, “bodily doubt” of an individual. This enables Carel to ask how this knowledge could be transmitted into the inherent logic of the clinic. She thus wishes to articulate the symptom and give phenomenology of breathlessness a new ethical meaning. Phenomenological reflection of breathlessness can help sufferers (patients) and doctors, in Carel’s opinion, to develop a reflective stance from which to think about the painful experiences of illness and breathlessness and, importantly, to develop new knowledge and new strategies for those directly involved in these processes—in order to be able to treat them with care and ethical resilience.

In her chapter, Magdalena Górska presents a feminist politics of breathing. For Górska, breathing is situated in a natural and existential shared space of human and inhuman life forms. In these contexts, it clearly is represented in different respiratory forms. Through Karen Barad’s concept of an “ethico-onto-epistemological” constitution, Górska wishes to engage with breathing as a relational enactment in all its environmental, social, and cultural practices. One of these contexts is related to various corpomaterial situations, as proposed by Górska, that is, in the worldly metabolization of oxygen, such as coal mining and suffocation by smog and pollution, among others. From these unequal exposures to air and its mutual sharing, inequalities in health follow as direct consequences. But also, in a more philosophico-ethico-political sense, with Górska, it really matters in our lives “how one’s life is breathable.” Feminist studies enable us to think of these processes within a broader context of various oppressive social structures. Upon this basis, Górska understands breathing as a force that enables social and

environmental transformation to engage with oppressive structures and enable individuals to achieve their *freedom to breathe*.

David Abram concludes the collection with his chapter, “The Commonwealth of Breath.” In a meditative-reflective manner, he argues that we need to create spaces of proximity that are not void and meaningless but filled with an atmosphere of air and breath. Abram thinks of the breathing atmosphere we need to regain for ourselves, and for our human and nonhuman others. For this purpose, he deals with Inuit and Yupik cosmology, and their understanding of *Sila*, a mysterious breath-like power, or spiritual essence residing in nature and in ourselves as its part. Abram also presents us with another example from Amerindian Dineh (or Navajo) people and *Nilch’i* as atmosphere, the Holy Wind, or the whole body of the air, as a medium of all beings. Finally, he draws on pueblo cultures from New Mexico and their emphasis on *kachinas*, or spirit ancestors. Above all, Abram is aware that this sacred, and especially oral, tradition should be regarded with the greatest respect and greatest care. In the conclusion to his chapter, Abram returns to his own Jewish tradition, and to *ruah* as unseen presence in the Hebrew alphabet, arguing again for respect for a language that is not written but spoken and breathed. Since today we live in the world of forgetting of the breath, including in our languages and its media, Abram’s message is a precious gift to our written respiratory project in philosophy.

Notes

1. One of the first explicit uses of the notion of “respiratory philosophy” can be found in Petri Berndtson’s “The Inspiration and the Expiration of Being: The Immense Lung and the Cosmic Breathing as the Sources of Dreams, Poetry and Philosophy,” in *Thinking in Dialogue with Humanities: Paths into the Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Karel Novotný et al. (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2010), 281–293.

2. Lenart Škof and Emily A. Holmes, *Breathing with Luce Irigaray* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1–2 and 11.

3. Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

4. Škof and Holmes, *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, 9.

5. This notion of “great breather” is taken from Gaston Bachelard. For Bachelard, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is an example of “a great breather,” as he “breathes as the earth breathes. Goethe breathes with all his lungs as the earth breathes with all its atmosphere. The man who reaches the glory of breathing breathes cosmically.” Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, trans. Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 180–181.

6. Elias Canetti, *The Human Province*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 194.

7. Hazrat Inayat Khan, “Breath,” in *The Art of Being*.

8. Hazrat Inayat Khan, “The Mystery of Breath,” in *In an Eastern Rose Garden*.

9. Hazrat Inayat Khan, "Pasi Anfas: Breath," in *The Gathas*.
10. Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, trans. Stephen Pluháček (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
11. Shinichi Suzuki in Robert E. Carter, *The Japanese Arts and Self-Cultivation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 32.
12. Ibid.
13. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes des cours au Collège de France 1958–1959 et 1960–1961* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996), 39.
14. René Descartes, *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, trans. Desmond M. Clarke (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 30.
15. For more on Descartes's forgetting of breathing see Lenart Škof, *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 129–131.
16. This sentence is very much inspired by Irigaray, who wrote: "The forgetting of breathing in our tradition is almost universal." Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 77.
17. Elias Canetti, *The Secret Heart of the Clock: Notes, Aphorisms, Fragments 1973–1985*, trans. Joel Agee (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989), 10–11.
18. Elias Canetti, *The Memoirs of Elias Canetti*, trans. Joachim Neugtoshel and Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999), 491. This translation is an alteration of Neugtoshel's and Manheim's translation based on the original text offered by Chunjie Zhang, "Social Disintegration and Chinese Culture: The Reception of China in *Die Blendung*," in *The Worlds of Elias Canetti: Centenary Essays*, ed. William Collins Donahue and Julian Preece (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 146.
19. This translation combines two translations of Zhuangzi's text. These translations are Fung Yu-lan, *Chuang-Tzu: A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2016), 41; and Burton Watson, *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 74.
20. Herbert A. Gilles, *Chuang Tzu: Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 72. See also Dennis Lewis, *The Tao of Natural Breathing: For Health, Well-Being, and Inner Growth* (Berkeley, CA: Rodmell Press, 2006), 99–100.
21. Khan, "Breath."
22. Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 11.
23. Khan, "Breath." My emphasis.
24. Ibid.
25. Hazrat Inayat Khan, "The Power of Silence," in *Art of Being*. See also Khan, "Breath," in which he states the following connected to this task of the mystic: "Every school of mystics has, as its most important and sacred teaching in the way of attainment, the control and understanding of the mystery of breath."
26. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 52.
27. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), lxxxv.

28. Canetti, *Memoirs of Elias Canetti*, 601.
29. Luce Irigaray, "Ethical Gestures Toward the Other," *Poligrafi* 15, no. 57 (2010): 3f.
30. *Ibid.*, 4.
31. Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*.
32. Canetti, *Secret Heart of the Clock*, 51.

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