



Well-Being Through the Poet's Speaking: A Reflective Analysis of Well-Being through Engagement with Poetry Underpinned by Phenomenological Philosophical Ideas about Language and Poetry

Kathleen Galvin

To cite this article: Kathleen Galvin (2019) Well-Being Through the Poet's Speaking: A Reflective Analysis of Well-Being through Engagement with Poetry Underpinned by Phenomenological Philosophical Ideas about Language and Poetry, *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 19:2, 1-10, DOI: [10.1080/20797222.2019.1679434](https://doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2019.1679434)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2019.1679434>



© 2019 The Author(s). Co-published by NISC Pty (Ltd) and Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 18 Dec 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Well-Being Through the Poet's Speaking: A Reflective Analysis of Well-Being through Engagement with Poetry Underpinned by Phenomenological Philosophical Ideas about Language and Poetry

by Kathleen Galvin

Abstract

The poet speaks in a particular way that can “bring things to nearness”. This particular way of bringing things to nearness may have some useful implications for understanding human well-being. Sometimes I have noticed that, when I read a poem that really “speaks to me”, the poetic language puts me in touch with well-being in a very palpable way, and this has brought me to wonder about this question: What is it that is taking place in a much loved poem that can bring me close to a felt sense of well-being? This paper will draw upon some philosophical insights from the writings of Heidegger and Gendlin to explore what poetry opens up and holds in order to speak of well-being. What is it about poetry that is adequate to hold the deepest roots of hearing with the fullness of what is speaking? Heidegger’s later ideas about the essence of language and its non-representational power held within the unity of “the fourfold” may be helpful here. And what is it about poetry that can open up worlds, open us to sensation, and carry us beyond the literal words into the experience of well-being? Gendlin’s ideas concerning “thinking beyond patterns” and “carrying forward” may illuminate how poetry holds open what other language cuts off for us. The paper will conclude by pointing to poetry as a crucial form of adequate human discourse that is up to the task of understanding well-being and is therefore highly relevant to health and social care.

Introduction

*Quid est illud, quod interlucet mihi et percutit cor
meum sine laesione?*

[What is it that shines into me and pierces my heart
without wounding?]

(St Augustine, ca. 400 AD)¹

The motivation behind the present paper is to follow my intrigue with poetry and with phenomenology in order to explore how these two can inform one another and,

further, deepen understandings of well-being as a human experience. Heidegger’s thinking about the essence of language (1959/1971) may be useful in illuminating the complexity of the opening of worlds as manifest in poetry. I begin with some of my personal reflections and will then follow these first person emphases by “circling and dipping in and out of” a number of interrelated ideas concerning language, its power in non-representational ways, and the “togetherness of things” called forth by poems, before finally pointing to how well-being is palpably present as a human experience when reading much loved poems. The style of this exploration is contemplative, with the aim of opening up avenues for

¹ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (Nolan, 1990, Trans.).

further exploration in phenomenology, in psychology, and in social science, pointing to the relevance of philosophical ideas for practice disciplines. At times, some of the ideas drawn upon may be obscure and even seem overly complex, but it is hoped that application to the first person perspective with illustration through particular poems may open up novel scholarly directions and questions about human experience and our understanding of it.

The focus of what follows is an attempt to answer the following questions: What it is about relationship with a poem that “harkens” to well-being? And how do poets in their particular form of speaking tell us more about the human experience of well-being than does the more partial view of a psychological focus on “the inner world”? These questions strike at the heart of ideas about objective well-being and subjective well-being, and it is my hope that this paper may point to some fruitful touchstones for contemporary phenomenological projects that draw on foundational insights from the literature on phenomenological philosophy. In this endeavour, I look back to a philosophical heritage for human science, namely phenomenological philosophy, and firmly stand on the ground that is there, in an attempt to take forward intriguing philosophical ideas in contemporary ways for a range of disciplines.

So, in going back and forth between foundational ideas and contemporary possibilities, the paper proceeds in a kind of circling, raising questions that form a focus for reflecting on the particular way in which poetry works to bring things to nearness and considering what useful implications this might have for promoting human well-being. On the way, my reflections will circle the following:

- How “the togetherness of things” is a kind of well-being;
- Why Heidegger’s writings are an important foundation, his beginning place of possibility in the structure of Being and the relationship between beings and Being;
- The fullness of “the fourfold” (Heidegger’s ontology) and the openness of receptiveness to what a poem summons makes a particular relational space where there is a possibility of “an eventing”, which is a resounding, and a “harkening”;
- Heidegger’s (1959/1971a, 1959/1971b) thinking about the essence of language;
- What it is about relationship with a poem that harkens to well-being;
- How “entry to the implicit” (Gendlin, 2004) and embodied relational understanding (Todres, 2007) offer insight into the experience of resonance;
- That there are things we might learn from the poets as social and human scientists.

Bringing Things to Nearness: Personal Reflections

I have often been struck by how some poems, many poems, put me in touch with a sense of well-being in a very palpable way. Sometimes I have noticed that, when reading a poem, and when it really strikes me, the poetic language I am engaged with creates a *felt sense* that is much bigger and much more complex than the poetic language in itself. This has brought me to wonder about this question: What is going on in a poem that can bring me close to a felt sense of well-being? Something is brought to nearness that is opened by the poetic language and yet is much more complex than merely represented by the language and the precise words. Yes, poems indeed open up worlds, open up sensations, and can carry one beyond literal words. But, more than this, poetry seems to have the capacity to hold the deepest roots of hearing with the fullness of what comes in order to speak of well-being. What is it about poetry that is adequate to do this? And here I turn to some of Heidegger’s insights that may be helpful in exploring these questions.

What is Bringing Me Close to a Palpable Sense of Well-Being?

When reading poetry, silently, the words *carry more than words can say*: they open up a particular tone or rhythm that powerfully carries “sounds”. There is, in this silence, a palpable something that is deeper than the words in themselves; something happens that has the potential to bring the reader in touch with the deepest roots of hearing. All of this seems to concern something about non-representational speaking. More than sounds in themselves, this is not about literal sounds, or about reading aloud. Rather, in non-representational speaking a particular kind of resonance is made possible, which is named here as “my sounding”. When such resonance occurs, I fall in love with the particular poem. I argue that the palpable sense of well-being brought to nearness through a much loved poem is due to more than merely symbols, images, expression, turn of word or phrase, alliteration or poetic device, although these are all important.

There is something about non-representational speaking as given by a poem that is more than the sounds, even though the sounds are important too. Something very radical happens in a poem that resonates; the poem makes possible “*my sounding*”, palpable as a *happening*, an event, a “re-sounding” that is filled with meaningful resonance and full of a sense of well-being. What is this event? To begin to explore what is going on to bring well-being to nearness through reading a resonant poem, I have found it helpful to draw on the unity of Heidegger’s “fourfold” as a foundation (Critchley, 2004; Mitchell, 2015; Vycinas, 1969). Although a specialist place to begin, and perhaps for readers at first abstract and obscure, I have found myself intrigued

by “the fourfold”, and am particularly attracted to ideas articulated therein because I have not found anything else that better articulates the depths of the seamlessness of the lifeworld², the creative tension that is implicit in mutual co-constitution, and which can speak so deeply of the complexities of differentiation and connection with profound historical continuities, to nature and to culture. This complexity is a requirement to do justice to *poetry meeting phenomenology*. What follows is a much distilled summary of “the fourfold”, an idea that will be revisited as the paper proceeds.

Seamless Multiplicity: Gathered Through “The Fourfold”

These four – “earth”, “sky”, “divinities” and “mortals”, *the fourfold* – for Heidegger emerge from an eventing, or, put another way, a gathering or togetherness that is a kind of intersection. The *Event* (in this case, the poem, with me open to the poem’s words and to what it is speaking as a sense of well-being given there) concerns a “fissuring forth” in four directions. Heidegger uses the metaphor of a *bridge* to illuminate the eventing/gathering/togetherness intersection: “The bridge gathers to itself in *its own way* earth and sky, divinities and mortals” (Heidegger, 1951/1993, p. 355). According to Heidegger, the bridge therefore makes a site for the fourfold, making room for earth, sky, divinities and mortals. The bridge does not merely connect the river banks that are already there; rather, the banks *emerge*, one side set off against the other as the bridge crosses the expanse of water: “*the bridge reaches with ease and with powerful strength over the water and gathers the earth as a landscape around the water’s flow, leaving the water to run its course*” (p. 355). The bridge stands upright, ready for storm or quiet, and, as Heidegger writes, “*even where it covers the stream, it holds its flow up to the sky by taking it for a moment under the vaulted gateway and then setting it free once more. The bridge grants mortals their way*” (p. 354). Metaphorised as a bridge, the gathering “vaults” over stream, estuary, deep mountain ravine, motorway network: “*the bridge gathers as a passage that crosses, before the divinities*” (p. 355), and the four – earth, sky, divinities and mortals – are held together and they are held apart. However, it is important to note that they are not four discrete parts of the world, nor do the four add together to make a fifth; rather, they each infer the other three, and they *stand together in tension*, at the same time apart and unified. We are not approaching these four elements as obscure or romantic symbols, but as metaphors that can open up nature, the depths of possibility, freedom, vulnerability, embodied limits, and deep continuities of being-in-the-world through past, present and into future, mythology, deep history and heritage, and to radical otherness, that

² The lifeworld was first named by Husserl (1936/1970) as the seamless flow of experiential happenings that we are familiar with in the everyday.

which is not us. These ideas reflect one of Heidegger’s central tenets: that “World” is the interplay of the four and that to be-in-the-world is to stand in the openness of Being. Further, Heidegger’s insights about the unity of the fourfold hold something important that is relevant to what goes on in a meaningful connection with a poem, and this also has to do with the essence of language.

The Essence of Language: “Standing in Being”

For Heidegger, to be on earth, under sky, belonging to “togetherness”, is to be-in-the-world, and this means to stand in the openness of Being. For him, the essence of language has something of importance to reveal about “standing in Being”:

- The essence of language is non-representational and held within the unity of the fourfold.
- The essence of language is an interplay with all four parts of the fourfold – i.e., when a thing is named through a word or label, the characteristics of it are experienced, albeit not in a conscious way, with reference to earth (living on the earth in union with the things of the world), sky (a horizon with possibility and living within earth’s orbit, seasons, day and night), mortals (embodiment and living among others and vulnerability), and divinities (messengers of heritage and culture, speaking of deep historical continuities).
- In other words, the essence of language makes possible a kind of gathering, and this gathering is an intersection for human beings within the fourfold. So, for Heidegger, there is a mode of bringing things to nearness, and this mode lies in the unity of the fourfold and the essence of language. To experience the essence of language is, in part, to experience the fourfold: Human beings belong to one part of the fourfold, and may be spokespersons of language, but the essence of language is bigger and cannot be distilled to the human activity of discourse.

All this holds something important for understanding the relationship between beings and Being – which is, in essence, that the essence of language is a standing in *the openness* of Being. Here, I can draw on no better than Seamus Heaney to illustrate this. For me personally, Heaney’s poem “Postscript” (1992/1998, p. 411) offers such an intersection, although as reader perhaps you may experience your own access to well-being through a different much loved poem.

Postscript

And some time make the time to drive out west
 Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,
 In September or October, when the wind
 And the light are working off each other

So that the ocean on one side is wild
 With foam and glitter, and inland among stones
 The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
 By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,
 Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,
 Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads
 Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
 Useless to think you'll park and capture it
 More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
 A hurry through which known and strange things pass
 As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
 And find the heart unlatched and blow it open.

In the interplay of earth, sky, divinities and human mortals *an openness is stirred up*, or even “blown open”. Heaney as poet appropriates language and “lets shine” our engagement with the fourfold. I am using this poem, that puts me in touch with well-being in a very palpable way, as one attempt to illustrate, using a contemporary instance of what Heidegger was pointing to: The interplay of the four is world as a mirror play, with ontological depths of a calling from radical otherness beyond our own limits. The essence of sky, earth and so on is more than just a concept of sky, earth, divinity, mortal, in that the essence “expresses a mode of being by which whatever-is reflects the world, the whole, in which it becomes what it is” (Vycinas, 1969, p. 226). As such, the poem calls forth a togetherness of:

- 1) Mortal: vulnerable embodiment and living among others;
- 2) Earth: living in the natural world, revealed through rock, storm, lake, ocean;
- 3) Sky: day, night, stars, sun and seasons, living through three ecstasies of time, past, present and future;
- 4) Divinities as messengers: callings of cultural heritage, and of what may be also seen here as light, joy, serenity, natural landscape, gusts of wind, mythical images, and so on.

However, it is important to stress that this is not mere image or symbol, but a primordial “being at one” with the four, a belonging that is very profound and which resonates through the poet’s speaking. In Heidegger’s words, this is “*to dwell, to be set at peace, to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its essence*” (1951/1993, p. 351).

Accompanied by this philosophical foundation, it is possible to begin to reflect on what is here in my own relationship with the poem, and it opens up ideas about what poetry may tell us about well-being, and what poems may tell us about “the fourfold” in a more applied way:

- What is here in my relationship with the poem?

The fullness of the fourfold and openness of Being laid bare to what a poem calls forth creates a particular relational space where there is a possibility of “an eventing”, a resounding, a harkening.

- What does this tell me about well-being? The poem (and any poem that opens up a sense of well-being for me) holds a fullness of what comes to speak of well-being. The visibility of the deep sense of unity given of the fourfold is realised for me by the poem, and this includes well-being *felt*, as a sense, through engagement with poetry. Such experiential “deep togetherness” or gathering *is* well-being. Here well-being is a kind of pre-separated multiplicity, implicit before it is “patterned”. Well-being as an interplay of messengers (divinities) and mortals answering each other’s call, dwelling on the earth, under sun and stars and with the seasons: world is, in Heidegger’s phrase, “an eventful mirror play of all four”. He further holds that “*To preserve the fourfold, to save the earth, to receive the sky, to await the divinities, to initiate mortals – this fourfold preserving is the simple essence of dwelling*” (1951/1993, p. 360).

Well-being, as a particular kind of dwelling, is the kind of complex unity that Heidegger points to, and may be sensed as flow and rootedness, stillness and movement, peace and possibility, novelty and home, tranquillity, and aliveness (Todres & Galvin, 2010). The felt sense of this complex unity has inspired an existential theory of well-being as “dwelling-mobility” (Todres & Galvin, 2010). Although this is not the central focus of the present paper, a key point is that much loved poems that instil a sense of well-being as a complex unity provide a kind of personal access to the unity given by the fourfold. What goes on in such poems is the eventful mirror play of the simplicity of all four: divinities, mortals, sky and earth, a world given by them and brought into a poetic speaking. To elucidate these ideas further, the following questions are posed and my reflections on them offered: What does poetry open up and hold to speak of well-being? What is shown up and taking place within an experience of resonance with a poem?

What Does Poetry Open Up and Hold to Speak of Well-Being?

Certain poems have the capacity to hold and keep open, at the same time, a certain kind of unity: not a closed off or “totalising” whole, but a unity that oscillates, resonates in the multiplicity of a pre-separated lifeworld that can both hold and keep open the flow and aliveness of the pre-categorical. Here, the poem holds and opens up a particular resonance or sounding. Heidegger’s ideas about the appropriation of language offer some insights here. Firstly, he holds that language is not a separate entity; it is not found outside the fourfold, but is within

the fourfold as a nearness that “lives” there³. Heidegger was concerned with the deeper roots of hearing and of saying that are much more complex than the physiology of hearing and a speaking that is beyond mere naming. Language for him is in relation to stillness or silence – the spoken and the unspoken and the relation between the two – and he uses the term “the peal of stillness”, pointing to language as a primordial gathering that is soundless (White, 1978). As we are in-the-world, we exist within “that which is near”, and, according to Heidegger, as soon as nearness is brought to consciousness through representation, then this nearness is made more distant, and can even be cut off or separated. But, conversely, there is a certain language, the kind of words and form found in poetry, which breaks this power of representation, that does not separate, but mediates apartness and brings things together, through a kind of unity. In other words, poetry mediates the shadow side of representation. However, more than this, Heidegger’s ideas about the appropriation of language as “harkening” and “soundings” may be helpful to illuminate further. For Heidegger, all named things are interplays of the fourfold, “things” existing before they are named. “An entity speaks in its mode of existence and can be named through human speech, naming calls” (White, 1978). Heidegger explains this difficult idea through the example of an oak tree: “... the oak itself speaks in its presence, its presence can be named in language. The oak speaks to humans before humans speak about the oak through naming” (White, 1978). Within this ontological sense, human beings are always speaking, or “saying”; however, humans are in relation to a world full of entities, things of the earth, the sky, even divinities, human thinking, ideas, moods, and so on, and thus saying is not reduced to human discourse. Instead, saying takes place in a world in which entities can be *shown up as things in the gathering* of the fourfold: an entity can only be a thing if in relation to all parts of the fourfold (White, 1978). So here the appropriation of language makes possible a showing, a letting appear, a granting; and, within such disclosedness, some things are appearing and some are withdrawing, but even in their receding their presence is there. Within the essence of language not everything which can be spoken will be spoken; in the lighting up of an entity to show it as a thing, some of the relations with the fourfold remain hidden, are concealed and will remain unspoken in “the mystery of the word”. So it is possible to argue that the essence of language holds the four together and, at the same time, holds them apart; they are both in tension and in harmony, chorus, as unity. Bringing things to nearness in this way “is a mirror-play of world” which encompasses the things that are in relationship to the constituents of the fourfold into a totality or unity, and at the same time it reflects “world”, a complex fullness that is made visible.

³ If it were outside in a transcendental way would be to think of it in a metaphysical framework.

What is Shown Up and Taking Place Within the Resonance of a Poem?

I am the locus of intersection between what the poem carries and transports as I attend to it – I, and all my historical and personal experience, along with what visits, harkens or calls. Therefore, the fullness of the fourfold and the emptiness of being open to what the poem calls forth makes a particular relational space in which there is the possibility of “an eventing”, a resounding, a harkening. In this eventing, I come home to myself. In other words, the eventing makes possible a resonance with well-being as a kind of homecoming. It could be described as an experience of possibility and peace, rootedness and flow. Here the work of the poem makes a gathering; the poem holds the togetherness, in other words, keeps an opening and helps me not to seize what is called forth by analysis of my familiarity with its properties, but is both a connecting *with* and a different *than* in a mode of non-correspondence. Baker (2002), drawing on Gadamer, points specifically to this mode of non-correspondence:

A poem’s expressiveness has to do with its opening a world to us. We recognise something there in its abiding – something lives, abides in the showing, ... recognition is nothing to do with representation ... [but] the presence of something meaningful and recognizable in its own right. (p. 150)

Building on these reflections, the emerging ideas can inform what is taking place in a much loved poem. There is me, there is what the poem calls forth, and there is the fourfold as “the togetherness of things”. Well-being participates in this gathering. There is a fullness of the fourfold and the openness of stance: the relational space of an “emptiness–fullness” dimension. There is the poet’s non-representational language that is up to the task of “sounding” the fourfold (a kind of resonance), well-being is connected to the fourfold, and this is faithful to Being, making possible a harkening of well-being as an experiential sense. So, there is a gathering, a unity and togetherness given by the fourfold, I am in there as a (mortal) embodied self with the poem, and well-being calls – as a pre-separated multiplicity. So far, so Heidegger.

However, what I want to introduce now is how, in the resonance with a poem, I know and understand something of well-being in its fullness and complexity, and this has to do with a moving, oscillating unity: an aliveness that resonates. In other words, poetry holds open what other language can cut off, and poetry *can move*. Heidegger helps us see how poetry “holds open”, and perhaps there is also a *moving aliveness* emphasis here, implicit in Heidegger’s “revealing concealing” – and particularly *the mystery that is held* by something lighting up but always appearing in relation to some-

thing receding, in the dark. *This mystery, held in the naming, in the appropriation of language*, is what makes possible a stepped down opening or openness to do with the words. This is why a poet's words are not frozen or totalising. Furthermore, the thing is there before it is named; for Heidegger, *its naming calls* it forward. However, what is missing in Heidegger's writings is an embodied *emphasis*. Yes, it is there implicitly, and as one of the four, mortal, but it is not emphasised by Heidegger, and it is absent in his discussions on the appropriation of language. Eugene Gendlin has, more recently, offered a way of seeing how bodily understanding is core in how words carry forward meaning in his philosophy of "entry into the implicit" (Gendlin, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1997, 2004). Standing on Gendlin's work, when engaging with the poem I understand what is calling in a bodily felt way. This is a sensing of the fullness given by the fourfold. Gendlin's distinction from Heidegger is thus this embodied emphasis: the epistemic body sensing what the poet has appropriated through language. This nuanced distinction adds in something more that makes possible a moving aliveness, but this is in the bodily felt realm (Gendlin, 1992). Gendlin's work helps us to understand how there is a certain adequacy in poetry that gives access to a felt sense of well-being, and this is a moving aliveness where well-being is carried forward as a felt sense through a poem. Gendlin (1992) also helps to explore what *is in* the sounding, what makes human resonance with poetic words possible, and this has to do with the aliveness of the phenomena captured in the words, with what is held open, and with body, a sensing body. Here the embodied self is present with the poem, and any understanding is full of personal, tactile and historical references. It is the body that can gather the sense of fullness in a felt way. Such wholeness and multiplicity is open, alive, always on the way. If it were static, or a frozen wholeness, it would fall back into representation and cut off the experience. No words here are complete; rather, the words are not frozen or static, but open up a space and move (Gendlin, 2004). And it is in the moving aliveness that there is a carrying forward in the relational space between the poem and me. Possible meanings and horizons transcend all the patterns I may make of them, and I remain grounded in the multiple textures of an embodied world, bigger and deeper than any "thought that represents them" (Gendlin, 1997). In this creative tension, there is me, there is the poem, alive phenomena, and a togetherness that can carry forward well-being as an experience. The poem, and its language, is adequate for speaking of wholes and of gathering. Such gathering, unity or wholeness is attentive to the rich moving flow of the lifeworld, attentive to the thick pattern of knowing something, the holistic weave of living relationships, and thus holds a thickness of living, the known meeting the unknown: it is alive and ongoing. It is the epistemic body that is up to the task of intuiting and sensing this moving whole, and so forges a human connection with the poem

and makes possible the resonance with well-being as a homecoming.

In sum, poetry is thus adequate for speaking of wholes, of unfrozen, seamless, living wholes, thereby offering access to embodied relational knowledge. In other words, it has the potential to offer us a path to enter the deepest sense of well-being, which may be experienced as an alive sense of dwelling and mobility intertwined. Such embodied relational understanding carried by the poet's speaking is to know and understand something of the depths and complexities of human well-being *as a unity that resonates in multiplicity*. Heidegger gives us a foundation for the togetherness of all of this, poetry intuitively the fourfold, and well-being is connected to the fourfold and participates.

So What?

Readers might ask how these reflections can be taken forward in our current time and culture. My stance is that these philosophical foundations help us to see why poets may tell us more about well-being than does the sole focus on the inner psychological world that has been the mainstay of research on well-being. Furthermore, all this troubles notions of both subjective well-being and objective well-being, as they have currently been conceptualised, and problematises research studies that seek to abstract and reify understandings of human well-being. Additionally, the specific philosophical foundations offered by both Heidegger and Gendlin present some limits to any discourses that privilege language alone or cognition on its own, presenting an epistemological challenge to emphases that do not go beyond *language alone* or *thinking alone*.

If it is possible for me to palpably experience well-being through personal engagement with poetry, then the question can be asked as to how those who are experiencing an absence of well-being can be brought to a place of vulnerable embodiment that has the potential to offer reconnection with a sense of wholeness and unity. Can poetry help reclaim such a sense of unity? Here I need briefly to caution that sensation is never alone and thought is never alone, and what might resonate for me personally will not necessarily prove resonant for another. However, our shared vulnerable heritage is central here: since the epistemic body is up to sensing moving wholes, and can powerfully intuit more than words can say, there exists the potential to forge a connection with, and resonate with, poetry (and also music, images, painting, sculpture and any other form of connecting with otherness, space, mood, body or temporality in ways that are both meaningful and experientially nourishing). This is not an active "doing"; rather, it is a particular form of attunement. Attunement that offers a profound sense of wholeness cannot be approached in an instrumental manner by health care practitioners, but it could be encouraged in an invita-

tional way, where sensitising possibilities are opened up as part of care. The challenge is that, while each individual has to find her or his own invitation to resonance, whatever that might be, she or he can actively be encouraged to seek these well-being possibilities, and possibly to fall in love with a poem, or any other connecting force, be it music, dance, painting and so on. In the context of an increasingly reductionist health care system, these possibilities are important to hold onto, and invitations to them remain important, so that such well-being possibilities, that are not instrumental, are not lost altogether.

When people experience the extreme absence of well-being, they may feel fragmented, exiled, isolated, temporally frozen or stuck, temporally restless, agitated, alienated, or tortured in embodied ways, to name just a few variations (Galvin & Todres, 2013). Then the demanding challenge for the practitioner becomes how to help find some sort of settling or homecoming, or some kind of movement forward within such suffering. This might be through a variety of paths ranging from, for example, resolute anger and rage through to finding a letting-be-ness in spite of everything, and may, for example, include sadness, patience or resignation. A practitioner might be a companion on such a journey and might offer invitations to engage with particular poems or forms of imaginative life, leading the person to resources that, in themselves, productively offer a sense of solidarity or companionship. Poetry can fruitfully contribute here to “the quest of engagement with concrete experiences, in ways that point to more than words can say, and in ways that open up participation. Poetry reveals, poetry has the power to open up the unexpected ... it allows access to vulnerability, courage, and truth telling. ... This includes a *bearing witness* to diverse vicissitudes of life” (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xv). At a minimum, knowledge of others having born witness, or being in touch with multiple voices with shared experiences through poems, might offer solace in some circumstances whereby the practitioner acts as a guide, and can perhaps add to a supportive context with resources of this nature.

However, it is my view that there is the potential for something deeper. There is ample scope for practitioners in nursing, social work, psychology, counselling and psychotherapy to make use of poetically informed resources in order to guide people towards a portal to kinds of homecoming – in Hirschfield’s words “gates to poetry” (1997), a portal to somewhere they might experience something of “the song of Being” as an adjunct to current treatments. There is already a significant and growing field of poetry/exemplars of the use of poetry in practice to draw upon that is of relevance to social justice, abject injustices, illness, well-being and health care. This movement offers a form of the evidential that is beyond just a third person view, as in our usual health care evidence, by importantly including both first

and second person perspectives that form fertile avenues for ethical care and resources for empathic capacity. A significant body of work across a wide disciplinary field continues to develop. For instance, Prendergast (2009, 2015) and Clement and Prendergast (2012) have scoped and bibliometrically systematised poetic material in accordance with the foremost ways in which poetry appears in the human science literature, and indicate the following forms:

- *Vox Theoria/Vox Poetica* – poems about self and writing;
- *Vox Justitia* – poems about equity, equality, social justice, class, freedom;
- *Vox Identitatis* – poetry exploring self/participants’ gender, race, sexuality;
- *Vox Custodia* – poetry about caring, nursing, caregivers’/patients’ experience;
- *Vox Procreator* – poems of parenting, family, and/or religion.

(Prendergast, 2015, p. 6)

Poetry may not be for everyone, but the exponential development of works and resources of this kind perhaps indicates that poetry holds particular value that can be embraced more generally in caring and therapeutic work.

The challenges outlined in the present paper point to why poetry is up to the task as a phenomenological project for understanding human well-being that includes a lifeworld grounding. Poetry is highly relevant to psychology, social science and health care, because it is a crucial form of “speaking” that is adequate for understanding well-being as a deep human resource. Poetry has the potential to bring together the buoyancy of mobility with the holding of dwelling as a source for what makes a sense of well-being possible (Todres & Galvin, 2010). Poetry opens a path to explore human creativity and well-being in ways that can perhaps mediate the enframements and fragmentations of our current culture (Heidegger, 1954/1977). In health care specifically, poetry has the potential to mediate aspects of a disciplinary culture that is overly technical and rational in its approach (Galvin & Todres, 2012). Without attention to poetry’s riches, something important may be lost in my own discipline of nursing and within epistemology more generally. For poetry is an important portal to knowing something of well-being through access to embodied relational understanding (Galvin & Todres, 2010).

Hopefully, I have also pointed to how Heidegger has something important to offer in this regard with his critique of metaphysics and his insights into the unity of the fourfold poetised through language that he calls a pure speaking. In his later works (Heidegger, 1959/1971a; 1959/1971b), he wanted to loosen the hold of the representational and abstract character of language

inherited from the Greeks and dominant in Western scholarship, and this grounding opens up new insights about pathways to describing well-being as a human experience. Following Heidegger, well-being experience can be metaphorised as a “singing of the song of Being”, and as such it is intertwined with a particular kind of dwelling (Young, 2000). Metaphorising well-being as “the song of Being”, and pointing to the very act of engaging with a poem as enactment of a letting of something to appear, as opposed to a reproduction, I offer the following words from the *Commentaries on Living* (1956) of Krishnamurti, who notably held a mysterious relationship with silence. Silence is a particular emphasis within dwelling, but there may be other emphases, such as peacefulness, letting-be, a certain kind of attunement of settledness that constitutes an abiding in the world:

It was a long, wide canal, leading from the river into lands that had no water. The canal was higher than the river, and the water which entered it was controlled by a system of locks. It was peaceful along that canal; heavy-laden barges moved up and down it, and their white triangular sails stood out against the blue sky and the dark palms. It was a lovely evening, calm and free, and the water was very still. The reflections of the palms and of the mango trees were so sharp and clear that it was confusing to distinguish the actual from the reflection. The setting sun made the water transparent, and the glow of evening was on its face. The evening star was beginning to show among the reflections. The water was without a movement, and the few passing villagers, who generally talked so loud and long, were silent. Even the whisper among the leaves had stopped. From the meadow came some animal; it drank, and disappeared as silently as it had come. Silence held the land, it seemed to cover everything.

Noise ends, but silence is penetrating and without end. One can shut oneself off from noise, but

there is no enclosure against silence; no wall can shut it out, there is no resistance against it. Noise shuts all things out, it is excluding and isolating; silence includes all things within itself. Silence, like love, is indivisible; it has no division of noise and silence. The mind cannot follow it or be made still to receive it. The mind that is made still can only reflect its own images, and they are sharp and clear, noisy in their exclusion. A mind that is made still can only resist, and all resistance is agitation. The mind that is still and not made still is ever experiencing silence; the thought, the word, is then within the silence, and not outside of it. It is strange how, in this silence, the mind is tranquil, with a tranquillity that is not formed. As tranquillity is not marketable, has no value, and is not usable, it has a quality of the pure, of the alone. That which can be used is soon worn out. Tranquillity does not begin or end, and a mind thus tranquil is aware of a bliss that is not the reflection of its own desire. (para. 1 & 2)

Here, Krishnamurti points to a particular kind of peacefulness and letting be that is a well-being resource. Finally, to conclude with a return to how poetry may offer a portal to a potential manifestation of well-being as dwelling-mobility, I leave the final words to a poem by Mary Oliver, “The Roses” (1983, p. 67).

One day in summer
when everything
has already been more than enough
the wild beds start
exploding open along the berm
of the sea; day after day
you sit near them; day after day
the honey keeps on coming
in the red cups and the bees
like amber drops roll
in the petals: there is no end,
believe me! to the inventions of summer,
to the happiness your body
is willing to bear.

Referencing Format

Galvin, K. T. (2019). Well-being through the poet’s speaking: A reflective analysis of well-being through engagement with poetry underpinned by phenomenological philosophical ideas about language and poetry. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 19(2), 10 pp. doi: 10.1080/20797222.2019.1679434

About the Author

Kathleen T. Galvin
Professor of Nursing Practice
University of Brighton
United Kingdom
E-mail address: K.Galvin@brighton.ac.uk



Kathleen Galvin is Professor of Nursing Practice at the University of Brighton in the UK.

Her work concerns the meaning of care, vulnerability and well-being, and she is currently examining what guides caring practices in marginal situations.

Both as a nurse and as a scholar, Professor Galvin's theoretical work and current empirical research is grounded in a keen interest in philosophy and phenomenology, and their import for health and social care. She is particularly interested in what we can learn from the arts for new insights about the human experience of well-being and its absence, and she aspires to contribute to fields concerned with how we can come to understand human experience both in well-being and in vulnerability.

While she is open to strong interdisciplinary influences, she is particularly interested in mining the breadth and depths of these explorations and research projects in order to bring back into nursing new insights for the meaning of care, relevant research methodologies, and epistemological frameworks that can enhance nursing practice, as well as health and social care practice and education.

Professor Galvin is developing "lifeworld led care", drawing on contributions to health related humanities disciplines and their relevance to practices in human services.

Widely published, she recently edited the *Routledge Handbook of Well-being* (2018).

References

- Baker, J. M., Jr. (2002). Lyric as paradigm: Hegel and the speculative instance of poetry in Gadamer's hermeneutics. In R. J. Dostal (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Gadamer* (pp. 143–166). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Clement, C., & Prendergast, M. (2012). Poetic inquiry: An annotated bibliography: Update, 2007-2012. Victoria, BC: Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Victoria.
- Critchley, P. (2004). *Martin Heidegger: Ontology and ecology* [e-book]. Available at https://www.academia.edu/705387/Martin_Heidegger_Ontology_and_Ecology
- Galvin, K. T., & Prendergast, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Poetic inquiry II – Seeing, caring, understanding: Using poetry as and for inquiry*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Galvin, K. T., & Todres, L. (2010). Research based empathic knowledge for nursing: A translational strategy for disseminating phenomenological research findings to provide evidence for caring practice. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 48(4), 522–530. doi: 10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2010.08.009
- Galvin, K. T., & Todres, L. (2012). *Caring and well-being: A lifeworld approach*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1991). Thinking beyond patterns: Body, language, and situations. In B. den Ouden & M. Moen (Eds.), *The presence of feeling in thought* (pp. 21–151). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1992). The primacy of the body, not the primacy of perception. *Man and World*, 25(3-4), 341–353. doi: 10.1007/BF01252424

- Gendlin, E. T. (1995). Crossing and dipping: Some terms for approaching the interface between natural understanding and logical formulation. *Mind and Machines: Journal for Artificial Intelligence, Philosophy and Cognitive Science*, 5(4), 547–560. doi: 10.1007/BF00974985
- Gendlin, E. T. (1997). How philosophy cannot appeal to experience, and how it can. In D. M. Levin (Ed.), *Language beyond postmodernism: Saying and thinking in Gendlin's philosophy* (pp. 3–41). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Gendlin, E. T. (2004). The new phenomenology of carrying forward. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 37(1) 127–151. doi: 10.1023/B:MAWO.0000049299.81141.ec
- Heaney, S. (1998). Postscript. In *Opened ground: Selected poems 1966-1996* (p. 411). London, UK: Faber. (Original work published 1992)
- Heidegger, M. (1966). Conversation on a country path about thinking. In J. M. Anderson & E. H. Freund (Trans.), *Discourse on thinking* (pp. 58–89). New York, NY: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1959)
- Heidegger, M. (1971a). *On the way to language* (P. D. Hertz, Trans.). New York, NY: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1959)
- Heidegger, M. (1971b). *Poetry, language, thought* (A. Hofstadter, Trans.). New York, NY: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1959)
- Heidegger, M. (1977). *The question concerning technology and other essays* (W. Lovitt, Trans.). New York, NY: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1954)
- Heidegger, M. (1993). Building, dwelling, thinking (A. Hofstadter, Trans.). In D. F. Krell (Ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic writings* (pp. 217–265). London, UK: Routledge. (Original work published 1951)
- Hirshfield, J. (1997). *Nine gates: Entering the mind of poetry*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Husserl, E. (1970). *The crisis of the European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy* (D. Carr, Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1936)
- Krishnamurti, J. (1956). Distraction. In *Commentaries on living: First series* (Chapter 82). Retrieved from <http://jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/commentaries-on-living-series-1/1956-00-00-jiddu-krishnamurti-commentaries-on-living-series-1-82-distraction>
- Mitchell, A. J. (2015). *The fourfold: Reading the late Heidegger*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Nolan, P. E. (1990). *Now through a glass darkly: Spectacular images of being and knowing from Virgil to Chaucer*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Oliver, M. (1983). The roses. In *American Primitive* (p. 67). New York, NY: Back Bay Books.
- Prendergast, M. (2009). Introduction: The phenomena of poetry in research: “Poem is what?” Poetic inquiry in qualitative social science research. In M. Prendergast, C. Leggo, & P. Sameshima (Eds.), *Poetic inquiry: Vibrant voices in the social sciences* (pp. xix–xlii). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Todres, L. (2007). *Embodied enquiry: Phenomenological touchstones for research, psychotherapy and spirituality*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Todres, L., & Galvin, K. T. (2010). “Dwelling-mobility”: An existential theory of well-being. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 5(3), 1–6. doi: 10.3402/qhw.v5i3.5444.
- Vycinas, V. (1969). *Earth and gods: An introduction to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger*. New York, NY: Springer.
- White, D. A. (1978). *Heidegger and the language of poetry*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Young, J. (2000). What is dwelling? The homelessness of modernity and the worlding of the world. In M. A. Wrathall & J. Malpas (Eds.), *Heidegger, authenticity, and modernity: Essays in honour of Hubert L. Dreyfus* (Vol. 1, pp. 187–200). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.