

**MARTIN HEIDEGGER, EMMANUEL LEVINAS, AND THE POLITICS OF
DWELLING**

A Dissertation

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Abstract

The late modern and postmodern theme of homecoming permeates the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who grapples with the topic throughout the various phases of his lifelong meditation on Being. Heidegger continually gave thought to the relationship between Being and the place or site in which it becomes manifest, whether it is a system of references and manipulable entities (*Being and Time*), language (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*), or aesthetic works of art (“The Origin of the Work of Art”). Taking as its point of departure Heidegger’s persistent and dynamic search for home (*Heimat*), this study will examine the political implications of his philosophical sojourn with an eye on the nationalistic tendencies that were exhibited by Heidegger’s rectorship at the University of Freiburg. Moreover, the study will consider the German philosopher’s attempted philosophical homecoming from the perspective of Emmanuel Levinas’s pointed critique of Heidegger’s place-bound view of human existence. Taking aim at the ontological, anti-humanistic, and pagan elements of Heidegger’s thought, Levinas posits an alternative that is ethical in emphasis, humanistic in thrust, and transcendent in scope. Supplementing and correcting Heidegger’s homecoming ethos with a philosophy that stresses hospitality (*l’hospitalité*) towards the Other (*autrui*), Levinas suggests that our ethical responsibility for the stranger, widow, and orphan supercedes our attachment to place. By facilitating a rapprochement between Heideggerian dwelling and Levinasian nomadism, this study will make visible a postmodern relation to home that does not succumb to narrow national particularism nor to rootless, global cosmopolitanism.

Chapter 1: Heidegger, Levinas, and the Problem of the Homeless Spirit

Philosophy is really homesickness,
an urge to be at home everywhere
Where, then, are we going?
Always to our home.

Novalis
Fragments

I. Introduction

The image of home and the experience of homecoming are recurring themes of the world's mythopoetic narratives. According to Joseph Campbell, the adventure of the hero described in such narratives consists of a three-part sequence of departure, initiation, and return. Typically, the mythical sequence begins with the hero responding to a "call" that orders them to depart from home. After the departure from home, the hero journeys into the realm of the unknown and undergoes an initiation process that entails "a succession of trials." Upon completion of the initiation process, the hero then seeks to return back home: "When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy."¹ With the accomplishment of homecoming, the adventure of the hero comes to an end.

The world's mythopoetic narratives are thus suffused with the image of home. In such narratives, the home appears as a place of refuge where the hero is welcomed in its

¹Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 193. For more, see Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988).

embrace. Small wonder, then, that the heroic mood is often one of homesickness. Consider only Homer's *Odyssey*, a poem that has been plausibly described as a poem of homesickness. Like Campbell's archetypal hero, Odysseus departs from his native Ithaca to lay siege to the city of Troy, undergoes an initiation process over the course of his wanderings and adventures, and then seeks to return back home to his wife Penelope. Of the three stages of the heroic sequence, it is the motif of return or homecoming (*nostos*) that is especially pronounced in Homer's work.

Here, it is instructive to consider the sequence of events described in Book 5 of the *Odyssey*. In the midst of his ninth year of wandering, Odysseus finds himself on the island of the nymph Calypso. There, Calypso offers Odysseus her hand in marriage and the promise of eternal life. Odysseus is tempted by Calypso's offer, but because he is so homesick for his native Ithaca, he decides to reject Calypso's proposal: "what I want and all my days pine for is to go back to my house and see my day of homecoming. And if some god batters me far out on the wine-blue water, I will endure it, keeping a stubborn spirit inside me, for already I have suffered much and done much hard work on the waves and in the fighting. So let this adventure follow" (5.219-224).² Hence, Odysseus's desire for homecoming is of such intensity that even the promise of immortality cannot quench it.

Needless to say, the *Odyssey* attests to the fact that the ancient Greeks recognized the importance of having a home. However, in the case of the ancient Hebrews, the image of

²Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richard Lattimore (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965). For a discussion of the political implications of Homer's *Odyssey*, see Patrick Deneen, *The Odyssey of Political Theory: The Politics of Departure and Return* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

home takes on a different cast. To be sure, the Torah is rife with illustrations of the departure and initiation sequences of Campbell's heroic-mythological paradigm. In the Book of Genesis, God commands Abraham to depart from home: "YHWH said to Avram: Go-you-forth from your land, from your kindred, from your father's house, to the land that I will let you see" (Gen. 12:1-2).³ With regards to the initiation process, think only of the "wilderness" that Moses and the Israelites must cross in order to arrive to the promised land of Canaan as described in the Book Exodus. But what of return? It is at this point that we encounter one of the most consequential differences between an "Odyssean" and an "Abrahamic" relationship to place.

Odysseus's sojourn is a journey of return to a place that was once inhabited but which has since been abandoned. For Abraham and Moses, however, there can be no return home because home is not a place of origin. Hence, for Abraham, home is not the "land" of his "kindred" and his "father's house," but is instead a place that God will reveal to him in the future. Similarly, for Moses, home is not Egypt but is rather the Canaanite land that lies beyond the wilderness. In both cases, home is a strange and unfamiliar place rather than an object of historical memory. As Michael Walzer puts it in reference to the Book of Exodus:

The Exodus bears no relation to those ancient tales of voyages that, whatever the adventures they include, begin and end at home. . . . Nor can it be described as an odyssey, a long wandering such as Homer recounted, at the end of which wait wife and child (and ancient servant and faithful dog). According to the biblical story, only

³Everett Fox, trans. *The Five Books of Moses: The Schocken Bible Volume One*, trans. Everett Fox (New York: Schocken Books, 1995). As we will see, Levinas seizes upon this episode as the model of a proper relationship to place. I will re-examine the political implications of this episode in the final chapter.

Joseph's bones return to Canaan; for the living Israelites the promised land is a new home, and no one is waiting there to greet them.⁴

Considered from this perspective, the Abrahamic-Mosaic adventure is capped by the process of *arrival* rather than of return. Obviously, this is a matter of no small consequence, particularly in relation to the question of politics.

I have merely scratched the surface of the lessons that the *Odyssey* and the Hebraic scriptures have to teach us about the question of place. Suffice to say, the ancient Greek and Hebraic traditions are suffused with the image of home and the experience of homecoming. That being said, these motifs are also present in the Western philosophical tradition that originates from ancient Greece. Here, the figure who inspires debate is not Odysseus but Socrates, the personification of Western philosophy. What is Socrates's relationship to home? As it stands, the answer that is given to this question bears decisive implications, not only in relation to Socrates himself but also with respect to the legacy of Western philosophy. Can the philosopher be at home in the world? Or is he condemned to exist in a state of homelessness? In modernity, the thinker who has most fully grappled with this question is Hegel. Because his discussion foreshadows the concern with subjectivity that is a cornerstone of Continental thought, it is instructive to consider Hegel's view of Socrates in some detail.

⁴Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 11-12. For a discussion of the themes of exile and homecoming in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and 2 Isaiah, see Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

II. Hegel's Discussion of the Homeless Spirit

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes the journey of human consciousness by which human beings become self-aware at a certain juncture of their history. In the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel relates this development to the Oriental, Greek, Roman, and German worlds. From the perspective of this study, it is Hegel's discussion of the Greek epoch that is of the most interest. Why? In his discussion of the Greek world, Hegel describes the birth of the homeless spirit in Greek antiquity. On Hegel's account, the person who gives birth to the homeless spirit in the Greek world is Socrates.

Prior to the appearance of Socrates, the Athenian city-state (*polis*) was a unified entity. In the Athenian *polis*, citizens submitted to the laws that governed their communal existence without reflection. On Hegel's account, citizens of Athens readily adhered to the rule of law because laws were viewed as being a product of nature rather than convention. Hence, Athenian citizens obeyed law on the basis of custom rather than out of a consideration of individual freedom or right: "For the concrete vitality found among the Greeks, is customary morality – a life for religion, for the state, without further reflection, and without analysis leading to abstract definitions, which must lead away from the concrete embodiment of them, and occupy an antithetical position to that embodiment."⁵

According to Hegel, the natural and continuous style of the Athenian *polis* was well-suited to a democratic constitution. A democratic constitution was appropriate for Athens because its citizens were unaware of their particular interests. Insofar as Athenian citizens

⁵Georg W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991), 268-269.

were not cognizant of their essential individuality, there was no necessary conflict between the subjective will of the citizenry and the objective will of the state. As Hegel writes, “The democratic constitution is here the only possible one: the citizens are still unconscious of particular interests, and therefore of a corrupting element: the objective will is in their case not disintegrated.”⁶

All of this changed with the appearance of Socrates. What did Socrates do to destroy the homogeneity of the “objective will” of the Athenian state? In Hegel’s view, what is decisive is the fact that Socrates liberated the principle of subjectivity: “And it was in Socrates, at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, that the principle of subjectivity – of the absolute independence of thought – attained free expression.”⁷ Hence, the Socratic liberation of subjectivity effectively shattered the holistic world of the *polis*.

Socrates liberated the principle of subjectivity through the propagation of his teaching. More specifically, Socrates “taught that man has to discover and recognize in himself what is right and good, and that this right and good is in its nature universal.”⁸ Socrates liberated subjectivity by teaching that human beings are compelled to look inward to discover the nature of the right and the good.

⁶Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 252. Hegel’s discussion implies that democracy is essentially incompatible with the emancipation of the individual. In the words of Herbert Marcuse, “Hegel held that a society of emancipated individuals conflicted with democratic homogeneity.” Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 243.

⁷Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 269.

⁸Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 269.

In teaching that the individual is compelled to look inward to be capable of ethical action, Socrates distinguishes himself as the “inventor” of morality: “Socrates is celebrated as a teacher of morality, but we should rather call him *the inventor of morality*.”⁹ Socrates is the inventor of morality because he liberated man’s moral sense from the yoke of custom. In a customary moral schema, a moral individual is one who merely performs just actions. In a Socratic moral schema, however, a moral individual is conscious of the acts that he or she is performing.

By way of inventing morality, Socrates posits the individual as the ultimate locus of moral authority. Whereas earlier moral commands were autocratically issued by the twin authorities of country and custom, Socratic morality posits the individual as the supreme arbiter of ethical action: “Socrates – in assigning to insight, to conviction, the determination of men’s actions – posited the individual as capable of a final moral decision, in contraposition to country and customary morality, and thus made himself an oracle, in the Greek sense.”¹⁰

Moreover, by making himself an “oracle,” Socrates distinguishes himself as a foe of the customary morality that undergirded the world of the Athenian *polis*. To be sure, Socrates did remain outwardly loyal to his native city. Essentially, however, Socrates’s relationship to Athens is one of *estrangement*: “Though Socrates continued to perform his

⁹Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 270.

¹⁰Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 269-270.

duties as a citizen, it was not the actual state and its religion, but the world of thought that was his true home.”¹¹

Perhaps the clearest sign of Socrates’s alienation from the world of the *polis* was his aversion to direct political participation. Of course, Socrates did more than merely abstain from direct political participation but also encouraged his students to disengage themselves from political life and enter into a world of pure thought. Such a development is an unmitigated disaster for the *polis* because the customary morality that governed its communal existence was characterized by the seamless connection between thought and real life. As Hegel writes, “The principle of Socrates manifests a revolutionary aspect towards the Athenian state; for the peculiarity of this state was, the customary morality was the form in which its existence was moulded, viz. – an inseparable connection of thought with actual life.”¹² By teaching his students to avoid the world of politics, Socrates challenges the authority of the customary morality that unites thought and action into a unified whole.

Moreover, Socrates destroys the nexus between thought and action by questioning the everyday opinions of his interlocutors. Through the process of Socratic cross-examination, individuals gradually realize that their opinions lack natural foundation. “When Socrates wishes to induce his friends to reflection, the discourse has always a negative tone; he brings them to the consciousness that they do not know what the right is.”¹³ Because they have come face to face with their essential ignorance, students are unable to act with the

¹¹Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 270.

¹²Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 270.

¹³Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 270.

confidence that flows from moral certainty. Socratic cross-examination is thus inherently destructive of the action-oriented world of the Athenian *polis*.

For Hegel, Socrates's estrangement from the Athenian city-state is evident in his atheistic stance towards the gods of the city. Socrates's hostility towards the traditional religious forms of Athens is exemplified in the thought of his greatest pupil, Plato. In the *Republic*, Plato's Socrates banished the poets from his ideal city. By doing so, Plato effectively exiled the individuals who created the religious foundation of the Athenian *polis*: "The disciple of Socrates, Plato, banished from his ideal state, Homer and Hesiod, the originators of that mode of conceiving of religious objects which prevailed among the Greeks; for he desiderated a higher conception of what was to be revered as divine – one more in harmony with thought."¹⁴ In banishing the gods from his ideal city in speech, however, Plato merely follows the example set by his mentor. Suffice to say, the Platonic banishment of the gods is emblematic of Socrates's alienation from the Greek *polis*.

Given the fact that he challenged the authority of the Athenian state at the deepest level, it was perhaps inevitable that Socrates would be condemned to death. However, for Hegel, the Athenian execution of Socrates was an ambiguous event. As Hegel explains,

But when on account of the giving utterance to that principle which was advancing to recognition, Socrates is therefore condemned to death, the sentence bears on the one hand the aspect of unimpeachable rectitude – inasmuch as the Athenian people condemns its deadliest foe – but on the other hand, that of a deeply tragic character, inasmuch as the Athenians had to make the discovery, that what they reprobated in Socrates had already struck root among themselves, and that they must be pronounced guilty or innocent with them.¹⁵

¹⁴Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 270.

¹⁵Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 270.

On the one hand, the Athenian *polis*'s condemnation of Socrates is eminently justified in that the city condemns its "deadliest foe." By identifying the individual as the locus of moral authority and by encouraging his students to retreat into the realm of thought, Socrates distinguishes himself as an implacable foe of Athens's customary morality and its action-oriented political culture. On the other hand, by sentencing Socrates to death, Athens also condemns itself because the principle of subjectivity had already taken root within its own walls.

Neither the death of Socrates nor the subsequent destruction of Athens put a halt to the spirit of subjectivity that he unleashed in the Greek world, however. As Hegel writes, "In Athens that higher principle which proved the ruin of the Athenian state advanced without intermission."¹⁶ Put in Hegelian parlance, the appearance of Socrates engendered a transformation of the spirit (*Geist*) in the Greek world from complacent non-reflection to searching deliberation: "Spirit had acquired the propensity to gain satisfaction for itself – to reflect."¹⁷ From this point on, there could be no return to the primeval state that preceded the irruption of individual subjectivity.

Hegel's discussion of Socrates illuminates the estrangement that is concomitant with the rise of individual subjectivity. In becoming conscious of its essential selfhood, the individual subject also becomes conscious of its separateness from the tribe. On Hegel's account, Socrates epitomizes this dual structure of consciousness. Socrates's consciousness of self is symbolized by his fidelity to his inner *daimon*: "He said that he had a *daimon*

¹⁶Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 270.

¹⁷Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 270.

within him, which counseled him what to do, and revealed to him what was advantageous to his friends.”¹⁸ However, Socrates’s loyalty to his *daimon* renders him alienated from his native city.

But what of the possibility of return? Is it possible for the individual subject to return the objective community? In the case of Socrates, such a return was manifestly impossible because the holistic world of the *polis* was inherently unable to accommodate the autonomous individual. “That very subjective freedom which constitutes the principle and determines the peculiar form of freedom in *our* world – which forms the absolute basis of our political and religious life, could not manifest itself in Greece otherwise than as a destructive element.”¹⁹ Hence, in the Greek epoch, the individual subject is homeless.

But what of the modern world? For Hegel, the idea of the modern state renders a reconciliation between the subjective individual and the objective community possible. However, the Continental thinkers who followed in Hegel’s footsteps were not merely as sanguine as he about the possibility of a reconciliation between subject and object. For such thinkers, the problem of homelessness is as present in the modern world as it was in post-Socratic Greece. One such thinker was Martin Heidegger. For other thinkers, such as

¹⁸Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 270. Hegel’s statement is incorrect in that the Socratic *daimon* does not counsel Socrates “what to do” but rather tells him what *not* to do: “It began in my early childhood – a sort of voice which comes to me, and what it comes it always dissuades me from what I am proposing to do, and never urges me on.” (*Apology* 31d), in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

¹⁹Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 252.

Emmanuel Levinas, homelessness is not a problem to be solved but is rather an essential aspect of the human condition.

III. Heidegger and Levinas

In the twentieth century, no thinker was more concerned about the problem of homelessness than Heidegger. Like Hegel, Heidegger associates the problem of homelessness with the liberation of subjectivity, and in his later work he traces the development of subjectivity in the thought of Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Schelling, and Nietzsche to the rise of modern technology.²⁰ However, for Heidegger, the liberation of subjectivity and the spread of global technology is a manifestation of a larger problem. More specifically, subjectivity – and the homelessness that flows from its liberation – is a manifestation of what Heidegger calls the “oblivion of Being.” For Heidegger, the oblivion of Being is the ontological estrangement that eventuates when man fails to address the question of Being. Hence, for Heidegger, the problem of homelessness is a byproduct of man’s failure to address the question of existence.

For Heidegger, the origins of the modern oblivion of Being can be traced back to the thought of the ancient Greeks. In this sense, Heidegger follows Hegel. However, the contrast between Hegel and Heidegger is stark: whereas Hegel traces the appearance of the homeless spirit back to Socrates, Heidegger regards Socrates as the “purest thinker of the West.” As Heidegger explains:

Once we are so related and drawn to what withdraws, we are drawing into what withdraws, into the enigmatic and therefore mutable nearness of its appeal.

²⁰For more on the Hegel-Heidegger connection, see Michael Allen Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Whenever man is properly drawing that way, he is thinking – even though the withdrawal may remain as veiled as ever. All through his life and right into his death, Socrates did nothing else than place himself into this draft, this current, and maintain himself in it. This is why he is the purest thinker of the West. This is why he wrote nothing. For anyone who begins to write out of thoughtfulness must inevitably be like those people who seek refuge from any draft too strong for them. An as yet hidden history still keeps the secret why all great Western thinkers after Socrates, with all their greatness, had to be such fugitives.²¹

On this account, Socrates placed himself in the “draft” of Being and did not flinch.

However, the thinkers who followed in Socrates’s footsteps were not as resolute as he. The most important such thinker is, of course, Plato. Plato and the thinkers who followed him composed philosophical treatises that attempted to supply a definitive answer to the question of Being. The end result of their labors is the homelessness that blights the modern age.

Heidegger’s project is to put an end to the problem of homelessness by reopening the forgotten question of Being. Through the sheer force of his thinking, Heidegger seeks to engineer a return to the ground of Being upon which Socrates, as well as the pre-Socratics, originally stood. By effecting a return to the “house of Being” abandoned by Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger attempts to effect a homecoming for Western man. As George Steiner puts it, “Post-Socratic Greek thought, whether in Platonic idealism or Aristotelian substantiality, never returned to this pure and primal ‘ground of Being,’ to this illumination of and through the presentness of the existing. But it is to just this ground that we must strive to come home.”²²

²¹Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), 17.

²²George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 46-47.

Heidegger's philosophy is thus a philosophy of homecoming. But what exactly is the "home" that is the object of Heidegger's homecoming project? For Heidegger, the home is the world in which human beings are existentially embedded. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger identifies the world as a system of "ready-to-hand" entities. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger identifies the world as the communal-historical nexus that spars with the earth and produces the work of art. In later writings such as "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," Heidegger identifies the "fourfold" (*Geviert*) of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals as the world where Being becomes manifest. Needless to say, Heidegger's endeavor to help man rediscover his worldly home was dynamic and ever-changing. However, while Heidegger's concept of the home was prone to a certain flux, his emphasis on the ontological necessity of the home remained constant through all of these various permutations.

In its own way, Heidegger's personal biography reflects this homebound ethos.²³ As is well known, Heidegger spent much time in a cabin that overlooks the small village of Todtnauberg in the Black Forest region of Baden-Wurtemberg. To Heidegger, the cabin was home, a place where the philosopher from Messkirch was at one with his environment. As Heidegger explained in his 1934 radio address entitled "Creative Landscape: Why Do We Stay in the Province," this home was foundational to his own thinking:

The inner relationship of my own work to the Black Forest and its people comes from a centuries-long and irreplaceable rootedness (*Bodenständigkeit*) in the Alemannian-Swabian soil. . . . But my whole work is sustained and guided by the world of these mountains and their people. Lately from time to time my work up there is interrupted

²³For more on Heidegger's life, see Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, trans. Allan Blunden (New York: Basic Books, 1993) and Rudiger Safransky, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Oswald Engers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

by long stretches by conferences, lecture trips, committee meetings, and my teaching work down here in Freiburg. But as soon as I go back up there, even in the first few of hours of being at the cabin (*Hüttendasein*), the whole world of previous questions forces itself upon me in the very form in which I left it. I simply am transported into the work's own rhythm and in a fundamental sense I am not at all in command of its hidden law.²⁴

Considered from this perspective, then, Heidegger's philosophical work is less the product of a free-floating mind than of the "Alemannian-Swabian soil" that produced it. Suffice to say, Heidegger exhibited a personal need for roots that was striking, at times even disconcerting.

The language that Heidegger uses in his philosophical writings mirrors his personal stress on autochthony. Heidegger's propensity to use terms such as "clearing," "earth," "field path," "native ground," "soil on the field" attests to his emphasis on the ontological significance of place. Considered in tandem with his homecoming ethos and his personal attachment to his native soil, Heidegger's "homely" language is revealed to be the proper idiom of a thinker whose concern with rootedness is simply unmatched by any other thinker of comparable stature. As James F. Ward puts it, Heidegger "belongs . . . to the tradition of *völkische* nationalism; a number of texts evoke the *völkische* vision of a homogenous, rural, and pastoral people, deeply rooted in the soil of a place, suspicious of, if not hostile to, industrialism, capitalism, urbanization, and even national unification."²⁵

²⁴Heidegger, *Denkerfahrten*, (Frankfurt, 1983), 9-11.

²⁵James F. Ward, *Heidegger's Political Thinking* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), xix.

Indeed, Heidegger's celebration of *Bodenständigkeit* (rootedness in the soil) can even be considered to be *the* central aspect of his thought.²⁶ Consider the following observation by Leo Strauss:

Heidegger's philosophy has the same structure as Marx and Nietzsche's: the moment in which the final insight is arriving opens the eschatological prospect. But Heidegger is much closer to Nietzsche than to Marx. Both thinkers regard as decisive the nihilism that according to them began in Plato (or before) – Christianity being only Platonism for the people – and whose consequence is the present decay. Hitherto every great age of humanity grew out of *Bodenständigkeit* (rootedness in the soil). Yet the great age of classical Greece gave birth to a way of thinking which in principle endangered *Bodenständigkeit* from the beginning and in its ultimate contemporary consequences is about to destroy the last relics of that condition of human greatness. Heidegger's philosophy belongs to the infinitely dangerous moment when man is in a greater danger than ever before of losing his humanity and therefore – danger and salvation belonging together – philosophy can have the task of contributing toward the recovery or return of *Bodenständigkeit* or rather of preparing an entirely novel kind of *Bodenständigkeit*: a *Bodenständigkeit*, a being at home beyond the most extreme homelessness.²⁷

On Strauss's account, Heidegger argues that *Bodenständigkeit* is the vital precondition for every great historical epoch. However, the fate of *Bodenständigkeit* hangs in the balance because of the influence of the metaphysical approach to reality that began in ancient Greece. The challenge, then, is to create a philosophy that will facilitate a "recovery or return" to *Bodenständigkeit* to help man to become at home in the world. For Strauss, Heidegger's emphasis on *Bodenständigkeit* is the aspect of Heidegger's philosophy of history that serves to differentiate it from the historical frameworks advanced by Marx and Nietzsche.

²⁶In English, *Bodenständigkeit* is usually translated as "rootedness" or "autochthony." In this essay, I will alternate between these three terms in accordance with the context.

²⁷Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 33-34.

No thinker was more disturbed by Heidegger's celebration of *Bodenständigkeit* than Emmanuel Levinas.²⁸ Put simply, Levinas posits himself as a severe critic of Heidegger's stress on autochthony and all that comes with it. Whereas Heidegger celebrates the passing of Western metaphysics, Levinas posits himself as a (qualified) defender of Western metaphysics.²⁹ Whereas the later Heidegger turns towards the "saving power" of art, Levinas declares that aestheticism is a perpetual source of human cruelty. Whereas Heidegger decries the uprooting effect of technology, Levinas celebrates technology because it frees human beings from the "superstition of place." Whereas the later Heidegger looked to the poetry of Hölderlin for guidance, Levinas looks to the Talmud for inspiration.³⁰ Finally, one

²⁸In this respect, Levinas had competition in the form of Theodore Adorno, whose book *The Jargon of Authenticity* is perhaps the most famous critique of Heidegger's emphasis on autochthony ever penned. Consider Fred Dallmayr: "The most vehement attack on Heidegger as a thinker favoring identity and homebound autochthony was launched by Theodore W. Adorno." Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 151. Why, then, choose Levinas over Adorno? Put simply, there is an element of bad faith in Adorno's critique in that it effectively obscures the areas of agreement between Adorno and Heidegger. Like Heidegger, Adorno thought that Western philosophy had exhausted its possibilities in the West. Like Heidegger, Adorno lamented the standardized uniformity of modern civilization. Like Heidegger, Adorno draws on the poetry of Hölderlin, and looks to southern Germany as a "promised land" of sorts. Indeed, in short sketches such as "Amorbach," Adorno waxes nostalgic about the Odenwald village of his youth in the same manner that Heidegger recalled his native Messkirch. While Levinas's thought also bears the imprint of Heidegger's influence, on these and other issues he confronts the German philosopher's thought from a greater distance than Adorno. For more on the relationship between Levinas and Adorno, see Fred C. Alford, *Levinas, The Frankfurt School, and Psychoanalysis* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003).

²⁹It should be noted that Heidegger and Levinas conceptualize metaphysics differently. For Heidegger, metaphysics is the philosophical attempt to comprehend the Being of beings. For Levinas, on the other hand, metaphysics is the movement from sameness to transcendence.

³⁰For more on Levinas's Judaism, see Adrian Peperzek, "Emmanuel Levinas: Jewish Experience and Philosophy," *Philosophy Today* 27 (1983): 297-396; Catherine Chalié, "Emmanuel Levinas: Responsibility and Election," in *Ethics*, ed. Phillips Griffiths

searches in vain for nostalgic ruminations on the town in which Levinas was born and raised, he being a Russian by birth who eventually emigrated to France.³¹ In sum, Levinas criticizes Heidegger's emphasis on *Bodenständigkeit* from a variety of angles.

Writing as a Jew whose entire family had been killed during the Holocaust, Levinas's critique of Heidegger was partly driven by his repugnance at the latter's Nazi political sympathies. However, Levinas's more than understandable antipathy to Heidegger's Nazism did not dampen his recognition of the German philosopher's undeniable brilliance. As Levinas told an interviewer in 1982:

For me, Heidegger is the greatest philosopher of the century, perhaps one of the very great philosophers of the millennium; but I am very pained by that because I can never forget what he was in 1933 . . . he has a very great sense for everything that is part of the landscape, but the place in which man is enrooted. It is absolutely not a philosophy of the emigre! I would even say that it is not a philosophy of the emigrant. To me, being a migrant is not being a nomad. Nothing is more enrooted than the nomad. But he or she who emigrates is wholly human: the migration of man does not destroy, does not demolish the meaning of Being.³²

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Ralph J. Gerber, "Totality and Infinity: Hebraism and Infinity: Hebraism and Hellenism – The Experiential Ontology of Emmanuel Levinas," *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* 7, 3 (1967): 177-188.

³¹For further details on Levinas's life, see the following: Jill Robbins, ed., *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Emmanuel Levinas, "Signature," in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 291; Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philip Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985); Judith Friedlander, *Vilna on the Seine: Jewish Intellectuals in France since 1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) chapter 5; and Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 115-121.

³²Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. M. Smith and B. Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 117.

To Levinas, Heidegger's Nazi political sympathies were fundamentally intertwined with his stress on the ontological significance of place. From a Levinasian perspective, what is needed is a philosophical deconstruction of the Heideggerian sanctification of place.

In various writings, Levinas levels a radical critique of Heidegger's place-bound ontology. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas accuses Heidegger's fundamental ontology of being averse to transcendence and conducive to tyranny. In "The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value," Levinas accuses Heidegger's thought of being anti-humanistic in failing to recognize the inherent dignity of the human person. And in his essay, "Heidegger, Gagarin and Us," Levinas accuses Heidegger's sanctification of place as being a manifestation of latter-day paganism. All in all, Levinas accuses Heidegger's place-bound ontology of ontological supremacy, anti-humanistic animus, and pagan religiosity.

Levinas does not merely level a blistering critique at Heidegger's homecoming project; he also posits an alternative manner of thinking about the home (*la maison*). In Levinas's 1961 book *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas engages in a prolonged discussion of the home in which he identifies the home as a place where wanderers find refuge. For Levinas, the home rises to the fulness of its dignity when it is used as an instrument of welcome (*accueil*). Hence, whereas a Heideggerian relationship to place is one that is characterized by *Bödenständigkeit*, a Levinasian relation to home is characterized by the welcome of otherness.

As with the case of Heidegger, Levinas's use of language in these discussions is instructive. If Heidegger's use of Black Forest imagery provides subtle intimations of his emphasis on autochthony, Levinas's use of household imagery reveals his own stress on

welcome. As Jacques Derrida notes, Levinas is particularly fond of the image of the door (*la porte*), the door representing an opening to infinity. As Derrida puts it,

Is it insignificant that Levinas speaks in this place of a door (*porte*)? Is the place that he designates in this way simply a trope in a rhetoric of hospitality? If the figure of the door, on the threshold that opens the at-home (*chez-soi*), were a “manner (*façon*) of speaking,” this would suggest that speech is a *manner* of speaking, a manner of doing or *managing* (*faire*) with one’s hand held out, addressing oneself to the Other so as to give him something to eat or drink, or allow him to breathe, as Levinas so often recalls elsewhere. The open door, as a manner of speaking, calls for the opening of an exteriority or of a transcendence of the idea of infinity. This idea comes to us through a door, and the door passed through is none other than reason in teaching.³³

For Derrida, the door is hardly an “insignificant” aspect of Levinas’s philosophical thought, but rather symbolizes the “opening” that enables the inhabitant of a particular site to encounter the transcendence wrought by the presence of the Other.

So, in Heidegger and Levinas, we are presented with two philosophical visions that conceptualize the human relationship to place in radically dissimilar terms. On the one side, there is Heidegger, a philosopher whose endeavor to help man to return to the ground of Being led him to emphasize the ontological necessity of rootedness. On the other side, there is Levinas, a thinker whose concern with the ontological meaning of otherness led him to stress the ethical necessity of welcoming strangers. In the debate between Heidegger and Levinas, we are presented with a conflict between ontology and ethics, anti-humanism and

³³Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 26. Derrida also grapples with Levinas in “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79-153, and “At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am,” trans. Ruben Berezdivin, in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 11-48. For a good summary of *Adieu*, see Francois Raffoul, “On Hospitality, between Ethics and Politics,” *Research in Phenomenology* 28 (1998): 274-283.

humanism, paganism and Judaism. But what of the question of politics? In this study, I will attempt to relate the debate between Heidegger and Levinas to the question of politics. Moreover, I shall consider Heidegger's homecoming project as well as Levinas's critique of that project. Furthermore, I will also consider Levinas's alternative vision of how human beings should relate to place. Thus, the central question of this dissertation: what are the political implications of the debate between Heidegger and Levinas on home and homelessness? Moreover, what lessons can we, Westerners poised on the brink of the postmodern age, take away from this debate in an age characterized by the simultaneous spread of globalization and the resurgence of tribalism?

IV. Literature Review

Since the publication of books by Victor Farias, Jacques Derrida, and Hugo Ott detailing the sordid details of Heidegger's involvement with German National Socialism, there has been a plethora of books that seek to assess the German philosopher's significance for politics.³⁴ As of yet, however, no study has been published that engages in a full-length comparison of Heidegger and Levinas on the question of the home. A rare exception is a 1998 article by Peter Tijimes entitled "Home and Homelessness: Heidegger and Levinas on Dwelling." As a whole Tijimes' piece attempts to examine Heidegger and Levinas's debate over the "cultural impact of technology" and the "meaning of the place where we live in."³⁵

³⁴Victor Farias, *Heidegger and National Socialism*, trans. P. Burrell and G. Ricci (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit*, trans. G. Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*.

³⁵Peter Tijimes, "Home and Homelessness: Heidegger and Levinas on Dwelling," *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 2,3 (1998), 201.

Moreover, the essay also endeavors to propose a synthesis of Heidegger and Levinas's contradictory positions by utilizing the theory of eccentricity advanced by Helmuth Plessner. Tijimes's piece is of obvious importance to this dissertation in that it engages in a comparison between Heidegger and Levinas on the question of place. That being said, Tijimes's piece is of limited value because it fails to consider many key sources of Heidegger's and Levinas's corpus and fails to consider the question of politics in any detail. The present study will seek to remedy these deficiencies.

Turning to the secondary literature devoted exclusively to Heidegger, the work that most fully grapples with the question of the German philosopher's emphasis on autochthony is Charles Bambach's book entitled *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism and the Greeks*. Bambach's work attempts to situate Heidegger's philosophy into the historical context of German right-wing thought by examining his language of rootedness as it appears in his 1933-1945 work. In his study, Bambach focuses on two terms from the Heideggerian lexicon: *Bodenständigkeit* and *Selbstbehauptung* (self-assertion). Bambach focuses on these two terms in order to advance the thesis that "Heidegger's writings from 1933 to 1945 constitute a philosophical attempt at a geo-politics, a grand and metaphysical vision of German destiny based on the notion of a singularly German form of autochthony or rootedness in the earth (*Bodenständigkeit*)."³⁶

Although Bambach's book is of obvious relevance, it differs markedly from the present study. Two differences in particular stand out. For one, whereas Bambach's book

³⁶Charles Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism and the Greeks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), xix.

narrowly focuses on Heidegger's 1933-1945 thought, this study will consider the entire body of Heidegger's philosophic work as it stretches from the 1920s to the 1970s. Second, whereas Bambach's book is partly a historical study of Heidegger's significance in the larger context of German mandarin thought, the present study is primarily philosophical in nature.

Bambach's interest in the geo-political implications of Heidegger's thought is mirrored by Stuart Elden. Elden considers the implications of Heidegger's thought for the study of political geography in *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault, and the Project of a Spatial History* and in "Rethinking the *Polis*: Implications of Heidegger's Questioning the Political." In the latter piece, Elden endeavors to "provide a detailed reading of Heidegger's remarks on the *polis* and the nature of the political."³⁷ Elden accomplishes this by considering Heidegger's remarks on the *polis* as they were made in several lecture courses around the time of his rectorship. Elden's piece is valuable because it sheds light on Heidegger's middle-period thought, a period in which Heidegger's homecoming project engendered his disastrous foray into politics.

Another work of uncommon interest is Leslie Paul Thiele's book entitled *Timely Meditations: Martin Heidegger and Postmodern Politics*. As a whole, Thiele's book attempts to relate Heidegger's thought to the question of human freedom. Thiele's book contains a chapter entitled "Saving the Earth: The Plight of Homelessness" that attempts to make Heidegger's thought consonant with "an understanding of home" that "is appropriately embedded within an ecological framework that identifies the earth as the human habitat in

³⁷Stuart Elden, "Rethinking the *Polis*: Implications of Heidegger's Questioning the Political," *Political Geography* 19,4 (2000), 408.

need of caretaking.”³⁸ In seizing on the elements of Heidegger’s homecoming project that complement ecological theory, Thiele’s chapter illuminates an aspect of Heidegger’s thought that would become especially pronounced in his later work.

James F. Ward’s book entitled *Heidegger’s Political Thinking* attempts to come to terms with Heidegger’s political thought. Ward’s book contains a chapter entitled “Poetic Dwelling: Homeland” that endeavors to examine Heidegger’s encounter with Hölderlin. In Ward’s view, “Heidegger uses Hölderlin to show the depth and severity of our present condition, and he shows that the authentic appropriation of the poet by the Germans is precisely what has not happened.”³⁹ Inasmuch as some of Heidegger’s most extended discussions of the home are prompted by his grappings with Hölderlin, Ward’s chapter is of obvious relevance in relation to the present study.

Finally, Fred Dallmayr’s book entitled *The Other Heidegger* is of significant interest. Dallmayr’s book explores “a Heidegger estranged from his contexts and exposed to otherness” in order to “delineate the contours of an alternative political perspective, one quite at odds with the traditional metaphysics and the prevalent issues of his time.”⁴⁰ Dallmayr’s “Homecoming through Otherness” chapter attempts to consider Heidegger’s entire *oeuvre* through the different ways that the German philosopher approaches the topic of estrangement of “alter-ation” (*Veränderung*). Dallmayr’s chapter differentiates Heidegger’s corpus into several distinct phases in relation to the topic of *Veränderung*, dividing it between the war

³⁸Leslie Paul Thiele, *Timely Meditations: Martin Heidegger and Postmodern Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 172.

³⁹Ward, *Heidegger’s Political Thinking*, xxix.

⁴⁰Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, x.

years (the middle-period) and the postwar era (his later period). Needless to say, Dallmayr's focus on *Veranderung* heavily complements the present study's focus on homelessness in Heidegger's thought.

In recent years, there has been an explosion of interest in the philosophy of Levinas. Indeed, Levinas is read not only in philosophy but also in religious studies, sociology, and literary theory. In contrast to Heidegger, however, only a handful of books have been published that examine Levinas's political theory. Donald Averkamp's book entitled *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics and Politics* was the first work to tackle the question of Levinas's politics. Besides providing a valuable overview of the relationship between ethics and politics in Levinas's work, Averkamp's book is important because it contains a discussion of the section of *Totality and Infinity* in which Levinas engages in an extended discussion of the home. However, Averkamp published his book before Levinas wrote his second major work, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* in 1974. Furthermore, Averkamp fails to make adequate use of Levinas's essays, many of which have important implications with regards to Levinas's view of place.

William P. Simmons's book entitled *An-archy and Justice: An Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas's Political Thought* is a more comprehensive overview of Levinas's political thought. As a whole, Simmons's book argues that Levinas "offers a plausible antidote to modern political thought and to the Heideggerian project." Inasmuch as Simmons's book was published in 2003, it considers not only *Otherwise than Being* but also many other works that Averkamp's book did not. Of particular interest to the current study is the chapter entitled "Levinas's Humanism of the Other as a Response to Modern and

Postmodern Anti-Humanisms.” In this chapter, Simmons situates Levinas’s “humanism of the other person, the Other, in the context of the recent debates between humanists and anti-humanists.”⁴¹ Naturally, one of the anti-humanists that Simmons considers is Heidegger. Inasmuch as Levinas’s critique of Heidegger’s anti-humanism was a core component of his critique of Heidegger’s homecoming project, Simmons’s book illuminates an essential component of the Heidegger-Levinas debate.

Also of interest is Bettina Bergo’s book entitled *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth*. Bergo’s book examines the “the nature of the relationship between ethics and justice in Levinas’s philosophy.”⁴² The focus of Bergo’s book is thus similar to Awerkamp’s and Simmons’s. Whatever its merits, however, Bergo’s work touches on questions of home and homelessness only peripherally.

This is also the case with Simon Critchley’s book entitled *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity: Essays on Contemporary French Thought*. Like his earlier book *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, Critchley’s book “brings together essays written in contemporary French thought insofar as they have a common thematic concern with the questions of ethics, politics and subjectivity.”⁴³ By way of doing so, Critchley’s book attempts not only to delineate the relationship between ethics and politics in Levinas’s thought, but also seeks to situate it in the larger context of Continental philosophy.

⁴¹William Paul Simmons, *An-Archy and Justice: The Political Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), 97.

⁴²Bettina Bergo, *Levinas: Between Ethics and Politics* (Dordrecht, Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1999), 4.

⁴³Simon Critchley, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (New York: Verso, 1999), xiv.

Howard Caygill's book entitled *Levinas & the Political* attempts to explicate the problematic nature of politics in Levinas's thought. As Caygill puts it, "The reading of Levinas and the political undertaken in this book proposes to show how the question of the political consistently troubles Levinas's thought."⁴⁴ Considered in relation to the rest of the secondary literature, Caygill's book is perhaps the richest study of Levinas's political thought that has been published thus far. However, Caygill does not focus on Levinas's critique of Heidegger or his concept of welcome in any significant detail. Despite these omissions, however, Caygill's book is an invaluable resource for any serious student of Levinasian politics.

Levinas's concept of the home is examined in Michael Purcell's article entitled "Homelessness as a Theological Motif: Emmanuel Levinas and the Significance of the Home." In this piece, Purcell uses Levinas's concept of the home to re-ground theology in a properly ethical and transcendent foundation: "This article, drawing on the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, attempts to understand the modern-day phenomenon of homelessness as a theological motif which questions theological subjectivism, and re-affirms transcendence as the proper object of theology, ethics as its first act."⁴⁵ Purcell's piece is especially useful for chapter six of this study, a chapter which will fully examine Levinas's concept of the home.

⁴⁴Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

⁴⁵Michael Purcell, "Homelessness as a Theological Motif: Emmanuel Levinas and the Significance of the Home," *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, 16, 2 (1995), 89.

Levinas's discussion of the home emphasizes the ethical necessity of extending hospitality to the Other. One of the few scholars who has examined Levinas's concept of hospitality (*hospitalité*) in any detail is Jacques Derrida. Derrida's book *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* contains the text of a lecture entitled "A Word of Welcome" given in homage to Levinas on the first anniversary of his death. In this lecture, Derrida asks "whether the ethics of hospitality that we will try to analyze in Levinas's thought would be able to found a law and a politics, beyond the familial dwelling, within a nation, State, or Nation-State."⁴⁶ Derrida's essay represents the most fully-realized attempt to come to grips with the political implications of Levinas's concept of hospitality that has been penned thus far. For that reason alone, Derrida's essay merits serious consideration.

V. Conclusion

At this point, it is necessary to say a word about the structure of the dissertation, particularly in relation to Heidegger. Heidegger insisted that his thought is marked by a linear continuity, and that the attempt to distinguish between its various phases is compelled to take proper account of this fact. As Heidegger put it, such a distinction is "justified only on the condition that this is kept constantly in mind: only by way of what Heidegger I has thought does one gain access to what is to-be-thought by Heidegger II."⁴⁷ With this in mind, this study will divide Heidegger's corpus into three phases. The first phase of Heidegger's thought began in the 1920s and culminated with the 1927 publication of *Being and Time*.

⁴⁶Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 20.

⁴⁷Martin Heidegger, preface to William Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), xxii.

The second phase began in 1929 with the onset of the “turn” (*Kehre*) and ended in 1935 or 1936 when Heidegger confronted the thought of Nietzsche. The final phase of Heidegger’s thought officially began with the publication of his 1947 “Letter on Humanism” essay and extended until his death in 1976.

In the case of Levinas, however, the same difficulties do not present themselves with regards to structure. Although there are consequential differences between Levinas’s two major works, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, particularly with regard to the question of language, these differences are not pronounced enough to merit a demarcation between Levinas I and Levinas II. Given that this is the case, this study will approach Levinas’s thought from a more thematic angle by focusing on his critique of Heidegger’s politics of place and his alternative view of a proper relationship to place.

The dissertation will contain seven chapters. The chapters are listed below, followed by a brief description of the contents of each.

- **Chapter 2: Primordial Homelessness: The Politics of Anxiety in Heidegger’s *Being and Time***

Chapter two will analyze Heidegger’s early search for home through the interpretative lens of his discussion of anxiety (*Angst*) in *Being and Time*. Heidegger’s phenomenology of “Being-in-the-world” (*In-der-Welt-Sein*) and “Being-with” (*Mitsein*) represents his early attempt to combat the influence of Cartesian subjectivism. However, Heidegger’s analysis of existential angst illuminate the groundless nature of human existence (*Da-sein*). In the face of this primordial homelessness, *Da-sein* is presented with two basic options: flight (*Flucht*) or resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*). For Heidegger, resolute action necessitates that *Da-sein* merge its identity with that of its “people” or “community” (*Volk*).

- **Chapter 3: Finding a Home in the German *Polis*: Heidegger and the Politics of Aesthetic Nationalism**

Chapter three will examine the politics of aesthetic nationalism in Heidegger's middle-period thought. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger bemoans the presence of a full-blown spiritual crisis in the West. On Heidegger's account, the only way for Germany to offset the spiritual enervation that threatens to overtake Europe is to engender a full-blown metaphysical revolution in the West. The impetus for Heidegger's newfound nationalism can be found in the theory of aesthetics that he advances in his 1935 essay entitled "The Origin of the Work of Art." In that essay, Heidegger argues that the founding of a political state is akin to the creation of work of art. Hence, Heidegger's rectorship represents a self-conscious attempt to participate in a Germanic state-founding that will put an end to the modern crisis of the West.

- **Chapter 4: Homecoming in a Post-Technological Age: Building, Dwelling, and Thinking in the Fourfold**

Chapter four will examine the political implications of Heidegger's postwar homecoming attempt. In the "Letter on Humanism" and the "Memorial Address," Heidegger bemoans the crisis of homelessness that ails the modern West, a crisis exacerbated by the uprooting effect of modern technology. While man does not possess the power to put an end to this ontological crisis, he nonetheless can prepare for its eventual overcoming by building, dwelling, and thinking in the "fourfold" (*Geviert*). Heidegger's later philosophy is as amoral as it is apolitical, steadfastly maintaining that the very attempt to posit an ethics and politics is a contributing factor to the contemporary crisis of the West.

- **Chapter 5: The Violence of Homecoming: Levinas's Critique of Heidegger**

Chapter five will analyze Levinas's critique of Heidegger's place-bound ontology. For Levinas, Heidegger's emphasis on *Bodenständigkeit* is misguided in three respects. For one, Heidegger's thematic focus on Being is objectionable because it totalizes otherness and promotes the freedom of the self. Second, Heidegger's critique of humanism fails to recognize an *arche* capable of grounding human dignity. Third, Heidegger's pagan emphasis on the centrality of place is inherently cruel because it implicitly draws a distinction between natives and foreigners. For Levinas, Heideggerian ontology is as amoral as it is politically pernicious.

- **Chapter 6: Dwelling in the Face of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Hospitality**

Chapter six will examine the political implications of Levinas's concept of welcome. In Levinas's ethical schema, the home achieves its full dignity when the Other is welcomed into it, thereby transforming it from a pagan site to one that illuminates the existence of the transcendent. The presence of the Third (*la tiers*), however, necessitates that the self create political-juridical institutions that are apt vehicles for extending hospitality. In turn, the creation of such institutions necessitates the overcoming of political Caesarism and the embrace of a monotheistic political vision. For Levinas, such a vision emphasizes the ethical necessity of extending welcome to the foreigner.

- **Chapter 7: Conclusion: Towards a Postmodern Politics of Place**

Chapter seven will attempt to engage the thought of Heidegger and Levinas in a critical fashion. In different ways, both Heidegger and Levinas are concerned with the problem of the homeless spirit that preoccupied Hegel. However, whereas Heidegger attempts to

respond to the Hegelian problematic through a reinvigorated stress on autochthony, Levinas calls for an embrace of otherness. At its worst, Heidegger's call for rootedness complements a fascistic political stance, while Levinas's stress on welcome fails to do justice to the human need for rootedness. Hence, the necessity for a politics of place that is ontological and ethical. By attempting to effect a balance between Heideggerian homecoming and Levinasian hospitality, such a politics will successfully navigate between the twin extremes of tribal nationalism and rootless cosmopolitanism.

Chapter 2: Primordial Homelessness: The Politics of Anxiety in Heidegger's *Being and Time*

He who sees me, knows me,
he who knows me, names me
The homeless man.

.
No one may dare
Question me where
My home is.
I am simply not confined
To space and fleeting time.
Friedrich Nietzsche
“Without a Home”

I. Introduction

Published in 1927, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) mirrors the *fin de siècle* mood that characterized Europe in the years following World War I.¹ The first world war called into question the Enlightenment faith in reason and science that had driven European civilization since the early modern era. The carnage of World War I, of course, revealed the vulnerability of the rational and scientific foundations of the modern West. Had rationalism reached a dead end in the West? Or was the contemporary crisis the result of modern, as distinct from pre-modern, rationalism? Such were the questions in the air at the time of *Being and Time*'s publication.

¹As is well known, the publication of *Being and Time* was preceded by a series of lecture courses that Heidegger offered throughout the 1920s that anticipated the 1927 publication of his masterwork. Among the most important was a course that Heidegger offered at the University of Marburg in the summer of 1925 entitled “The History of the Concept of Time.” For more, see Martin Heidegger, *The History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kiesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

Heidegger never explicitly mentions this crisis in *Being and Time*. The fact that Heidegger recognizes the presence of such a crisis, however, becomes immediately apparent in the introduction to the work, where he mentions a pressing problem: the “forgetfulness of Being (*Sein*).” For Heidegger, forgetfulness of Being is forgetfulness of the “question of Being” (*Seinsfrage*). In the modern world, the question of Being “has been forgotten – although our time considers itself progressive in again affirming ‘metaphysics.’”² At the outset, then, Heidegger boldly declares that the modern world has forgotten the question of Being.

The modern age, however, is not unique in its ontological amnesia. On Heidegger’s account, Being was forgotten during the twilight of Greek antiquity. Plato and Aristotle performed “avid research” on the question of Being and produced impressive – if questionable – results. However, these results subsequently hardened into an ontological “dogma” that has so enchanted succeeding thinkers that the question of Being “ceased to be heard as a thematic question of actual investigation.” What is the content of the dogma that has bewitched everyone from St. Thomas Aquinas to Hegel? As elaborated by Heidegger, it is the notion that Being is a *universal, indefinable* and *self-evident* concept. That is to say, Being is assumed to be *universal* in constituting the most general property that gives to entities their sense of quiddity or “whatness,” *indefinable* by virtue of the fact that it cannot

²Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joseph Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 1.

be associated with a particular being that has definable properties, and *self-evident* in the truism that it is seemingly “understandable ‘without further ado.’”³

Such is the nature of the ontological dogma advanced by Plato and Aristotle, and which has dominated the history of Western ontology. For Heidegger, the only thing as obvious as the historic influence of this dogma is its utter questionability. Being is not a *genus*, a point even conceded by Aristotle.⁴ Moreover, the fact that Being is not akin to a particular being does not thereby render it impermeable to thematic investigation. Just as significantly, the fact that Being is comprehensible to the average intellect does not necessarily prove that it is a self-evident concept. In sum, the question of Being has *not* been answered. Indeed, the question of Being itself has not been asked properly: “But a consideration of the prejudices has made it clear at the same time that not only is the *answer* to the question of Being lacking but even the question itself is obscure and without direction.”⁵

For Heidegger, the fact that the question of Being has not been answered is a problem of the greatest magnitude. The question of Being is important because it is the ground of all ontologies, and, as such, is the ultimate source of all human understanding. As Heidegger writes, “*All ontology, no matter how rich and tightly knit a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains fundamentally blind and perverts its innermost intent if it has not previously clarified the meaning of being sufficiently and grasped this clarification as its*

³Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 2, 3.

⁴Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, III.4.1001a21.

⁵Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 3.

fundamental task (italics Heidegger's)."⁶ This is why the fact that "the question today has been forgotten" is such an indictment of modern thought, for it suggests that reason and science are ontologically *groundless*.

This is obviously a fact of no small consequence. But this is not all, for the forgetfulness of Being has affected everyday life in the modern West, on Heidegger's account. As Heidegger complains, the notion that Being is a general, inscrutable, and obvious concept is utilized not only by academic philosophers but by "everybody": "Everybody uses it constantly and also already understands what is meant by it."⁷ Hence, everyday language and thought bear the indelible imprint of the Platonic-Aristotelian ontological dogma that has dictated the course of Western philosophy.

In its introductory chapter, then, *Being and Time* contains an explicit critique of modern thought and an implicit critique of modern life. As it stands, however, it is not the only place in the text where Heidegger casts aspersions on modernity. As I will argue, Heidegger's description of everyday life can, and perhaps should, be read as an incisive critique of the modern world. In Heidegger's description, man's day-to-day existence is dominated by the invisible hegemony of "the they" (*das Man*). The they crushes human singularity via its intrinsic tendency towards "distantiality" (*Abständigkeit*), "averageness" (*Durchschnittlichkeit*) and "levelling down" (*Einebnung*). Encouraged to play the part of the "they-self," man falls into a state of existential inauthenticity by way of being absorbed into

⁶Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 9.

⁷Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1.

the prevailing social order, thereby succumbing to the “idle talk” (*Gerede*), “curiosity” (*Neugier*), and “ambiguity” (*Zweideutigkeit*) that permeates the public space.

On Heidegger’s account, the only time that man becomes conscious of his everyday inauthenticity is when he experiences anxiety (*Angst*). In anxiety, man’s primordial homelessness becomes manifest. That is to say, man comes to realize that his identity and the social order that undergirds that identity are without natural foundation. In the midst of anxiety, man can either flee back into his everyday roles or he can become resolute in facing up to the groundlessness of his everyday existence. For Heidegger, the latter necessitates that the individual struggle to realize the “destiny” (*Geschick*) of its “people” or “community” (*Volk*).

In this chapter, I will consider how *Being and Time* grapples with the problem of modern homelessness. At the outset, I shall examine Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of how human existence is “Being-in-the-world” (*In-der-Welt-Sein*) and “Being-with” (*Mitsein*). Then, I shall analyze Heidegger’s discussion of everydayness (*Alltaglichkeit*), noting how the pejorative tone of his description hints at an incisive critique of modern civil society. Turning to Heidegger’s analysis of existential angst, I will note how this mood singularly illuminates the homeless nature of human existence. After discussing the two responses to anxiety, flight (*Flucht*) and resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*), I will discuss Heidegger’s concept of the *Volk*. I will conclude with some reflections on the political

implications of *Being and Time*, noting how Heidegger's discussion of the *Volk* foreshadows his later call for a metaphysical revolution in the West.⁸

II. Being-in-the-World and Being-with

Decrying the ontological groundlessness of the Western tradition, Heidegger raises the question of the meaning of Being through an analysis of human being, *Da-sein*. As defined by Heidegger, *Da-sein* is "this being which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its being."⁹ *Da-sein*, then, is human being. The statement that *Da-sein* is human being, however, is somewhat misleading in the fact that, in the colloquial German, *Da-sein* can be interpreted to mean "everyday human existence." In order to do justice to the non-subjective connotation of its original German meaning, then, it is more accurate to define *Da-sein* as human existence. Hence, the thematic focus of *Being and Time* is not human beings as such, but their manner of existence. For Heidegger, the difference is crucial.

In Heidegger's view, an investigation of *Da-sein* is the most appropriate way to answer the question of Being. Why? According to Heidegger, *Da-sein* has both ontic and ontological priority over other beings.¹⁰ On an ontic level, *Da-sein* is "ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned about its very being."¹¹ On

⁸For more on the political implications of *Being and Time*, see Mark Blitz, *Being and Time and the Possibility of Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

⁹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 6.

¹⁰By ontic, Heidegger means of, relating to, or having real being. By ontological, Heidegger means ways of being.

¹¹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 10.

an ontological level, *Da-sein* is the only being that is ontological. Both ontically and ontologically, then, the human being has priority because it is the only being that maintains a relationship with its existence (*Existenz*). Additionally, *Da-sein* is the only being that can understand beings unlike itself. For all of these reasons, *Da-sein* is the being most worthy of being “interrogated” with regard to the question of Being.

From the very outset, Heidegger is at pains to demonstrate that *Da-sein* is not merely a conscious subject. As Heidegger writes, “one of our first tasks will be to show that the point of departure from an initially given *ego* and subject totally fails to see the phenomenal content of *Da-sein*.”¹² Here, Heidegger evinces his antipathy to the thought of Descartes, who inaugurates the subjective turn in modern philosophy with his endeavor to prove that the ideas in the human mind correspond to the reality of the external world. But we can also see the subject/object dichotomy at work in the thought of Heidegger’s mentor, Husserl, whose conception of the meaning-giving, transcendental subject bears the unmistakable imprint of the Cartesian tradition. In conceptualizing the human relation to the world as one in which subjects contemplate objects, the Cartesian-Husserlian approach reduces all human experiences to the distinction between perceiver and perceived. Attempting to distance himself from both the Cartesian and Husserlian conceptions, Heidegger argues that *Da-sein* is *not* a subjective ego detached from its worldly surroundings.

Instead, Heidegger argues that human existence is Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*). What is the meaning of this strange, seemingly obvious, contention? In sum, Heidegger is arguing that human beings are ensconced within a nexus of shared social

¹²Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 43.

practices that determines the relations between all beings. These practices determine the manner in which human beings exist because they structure the activities in which they are engaged and the purposes that drive them. And for Heidegger, perhaps the most telling testament to the importance of these social practices is the way in which human beings relate to ontic things. Inasmuch as these “ready-to-hand” (*Zuhanden*) entities exist in an overall system of relevance, the human use of them operates on a pre-rational and pre-cognitive level. In other words, the human relationship to things is, for the most part, *practical* in nature.

Heidegger’s assertion that *Da-sein* is Being-in-the-world is also significant because it cuts against the grain of the Cartesian conception of space. For Descartes, human beings exist in objective space (*res extensa*). For Heidegger, the spatial dimension of human existence is only explainable in terms of *Da-sein*’s concerned Being-in-the-world: “*Da-sein* is ‘in’ the world in the sense of a familiar and heedful association with the beings encountered in the world. Thus when spatiality is attributed to it in some way, this is possible only on the basis of this Being-in.”¹³ Hence, human existence in objective space is derivative of human Being-in-the-world.

Heidegger famously points to the relation between a workman and his workshop as an example of the nonreflective way in which human beings relate to their “thingly” environment. The workman does not give thought to the hammer that he uses to pound in a nail. As Heidegger writes, “Association geared to useful things which show themselves generally only in this association, that is, hammering with the hammer, neither *grasps* these

¹³Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 97.

beings thematically as occurring things nor does it even know of using or the structure of useful things as such.”¹⁴ Nor is such knowledge necessary for the workman’s utilization of the hammer, for what is important is the workman’s manipulation of this particular item-of-gear. It is only when the hammer ceases to fulfill its designated function – when it breaks – that the workman views it as a “present-at-hand” (*Vorhanden*) entity that is theoretically significant.

If the human relationship to the world corresponds to the relation between the workman and his workshop, how do human beings relate to each other in this scheme? Sticking to the above analogy, we might ask how workmen relate to other workmen in the Heideggerian schema. Heidegger addresses this question by way of asserting that human being-in-the-world is also “Being-with” (*Mitsein*). By Being-with, Heidegger means our normal social way of being. Like the nonsocial facets of human existence, human Being-with others mostly operates on a nonsubjective level: “The others are not encountered by grasping and previously discriminating one’s own subject, initially objectively present, from other subjects also present.”¹⁵ Rather, for the most part, we work with and deal with others without having any beliefs about them.

In Heidegger’s view, the presence of other human beings is permanently etched into the fabric of our existential constitution. That is to say, human Being-with is constitutive of *Da-sein*’s way of being. By extension, others are not existentially external to the boundaries that demarcate the boundaries of the self: “The ‘others’ does not mean everyone else but me

¹⁴Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 65.

¹⁵Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 112.

– those from whom the ‘I’ distinguishes itself. They are, rather, those from whom one mostly does not distinguish oneself, those among whom one is too.”¹⁶ Indeed, human Being-with is such a fundamental aspect of human existence that it persists even in the physical absence of other human beings. As such, it makes possible the encountering of *particular* others, others whose way of being Heidegger calls *Mitda-sein*.

On Heidegger’s account, we relate to others through concern (*Fürsorge*): “the other is initially disclosed in the taking care of concern.”¹⁷ Initially, of course, human beings are not subjectively concerned for one another because the with-world is an implicit, rather than explicit, facet of human existence. But simply by way of existing in an inter-subjective world, we are concerned about others even if we are seemingly aloof in our dealings with them. Because we care about our own Being-in-the-world, we are concerned about the being of others.

Heidegger thus nods towards the social facet of human existence. However, one should not go too far in blurring the lines between Heidegger and Aristotle with regard to the question of man’s natural sociability. For Heidegger, human Being-with must be understood as an existential byproduct of human Being-in-the-world. In other words, human existence is Being-with because the world in which *Da-sein* is ensconced is a “with-world”: “On the basis of this *like-with* being-in-the-world, the world is always already the one that I share with the others.”¹⁸ Needless to say, this is not exactly the same thing as Aristotle’s teaching

¹⁶Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 111.

¹⁷Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 116.

¹⁸Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 111-112.

that man is a naturally political animal because of his capacity for speech or reason (*logos*), a capacity that enables him to make moral judgements (1253a7). Nonetheless, Heidegger's conception of Being-with is significant even if his recognition of man's social nature is decidedly halfhearted. That said, Heidegger's description of the everyday consequences that flow from human Being-with depict a decidedly negative picture of human sociability.

III. Everydayness and Publicness

In his self-conscious attempt to understand human existence purely on its own terms, Heidegger focuses on what previous Western ontology had contemptuously shoved aside in favor of an exaggerated focus on theoretical contemplation or ecstatic communion with the divine: the everyday world. A pervasive – if invisible – feature of everydayness (*Alltäglichkeit*) is what Heidegger calls “the they” (*das Man*). What is the they? The they is the mass of ordinary mankind that dictates the conduct of life as it is lived in an everyday context: “The they, which is nothing definite and which all are, although not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness.”¹⁹

In prescribing the “kind of being of everydayness,” the they exercises a “dictatorship” over the individual that is nearly unlimited in scope. Heidegger describes the nature of the they's dictatorship in the following passage:

In utilizing public transportation, in the use of information services such as the newspaper, every other is like the next. This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own *Da-sein* completely into the kind of being of “the others” in such a way that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, disappear more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the they unfolds its true dictatorship. We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way they enjoy ourselves. We read, see, and judge

¹⁹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 119.

literature and art the way they see and judge. But we also withdraw from the “great mass” the way they withdraw, we find “shocking” what they find shocking.²⁰

The above quote is illuminating in that it points to *why* the they is able to exercise unlimited power over the individual. For one, its rule is marked by “inconspicuousness” and “unascertainability” in that its exercise of power operates surreptitiously beneath the surface of everyday life. The deeper reason for its seeming invisibility, though, is that the they is “nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum.” Hence, one cannot point to a specific aggregate of individuals as being the ultimate source of tyranny: the they is everyone and no one. The they is able to dictate the way we ride the bus and read the morning paper because it is the nonspecific – but nonetheless palpable – enforcer of the public norms and social conventions that dictate the course of everyday conduct. Indeed, even when we rail against the vulgarity of mass culture and seek to separate ourselves from the bovine masses, the they’s dictatorship remains unchallenged.

On Heidegger’s account, the they possesses existential characteristics of its own that enable it to turn the individual into an anonymous “they-self.” More specifically, the they’s way of being consists of distantiarity (*Abständigkeit*), averageness (*Durchschnittlichkeit*), and levelling down (*Einebnung*). Distantiarity refers to the manner in which the they induces the individual to measure itself in relation to others with regards to the distance that ontologically separates it from them. As Heidegger puts it, in distantiarity one is encouraged to exercise “constant care as to the way one differs from them, whether this difference is to be equalized, whether one’s own *Da-sein* has lagged behind others and wants to catch up in

²⁰Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 119.

relation to them, whether *Da-sein* in its priority over others is intent on suppressing them.”²¹ Hence, distantiality not only makes one cognizant of human heterogeneity, but also leaves it vaguely disquieted by it.

Complementary to distantiality is what Heidegger calls “averageness” (*Durchschnittlichkeit*). As an existential characteristic of the they, averageness is the way in which *das Man* “maintains itself in what is proper, what is allowed, and what is not.”²² In other words, through averageness the they holds up a particular model of life as “normal.” Such a way of life, the they emphasizes, is not only permissible but is also the most likely to yield societal “success.” Hence, if the they’s distantiality causes the self to become aware of the way in which it is not “normal,” *das Man*’s averageness causes the self to recognize what is “proper” and “allowed” in the everyday world.

“Levelling down” (*Einebnung*) is the third existential characteristic of the they identified by Heidegger, and can be seen as perhaps the most aggressive means by which *das Man* enforces social control. In the process of levelling down, the they attempts to suppress everything that does not conform to its peculiar notion of what is normal. As Heidegger writes:

This averageness, which prescribes what can and may not be ventured, watches over every exception which thrusts itself to the fore. Every priority is noiselessly quashed. Overnight, everything primordial is flattened down as something long since known. Everything gained by a struggle becomes something to be manipulated. Every mystery loses its power.²³

²¹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 118.

²²Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 119.

²³Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 119.

As the above quote demonstrates, this process is all the more effective by virtue of the fact that it operates “noiselessly.” All in all, levelling down invisibly annihilates all traces of what Nietzsche calls the “*pathos* of distance.”

What are we to make of all this? Heidegger’s discussion of the they and its existential characteristics presents a highly unflattering portrait of the “mass man.” Under his rule, individuals are encouraged to hate their singularity. Indeed, they are encouraged to crush their own “eccentricities” in order to be viewed as “normal.” And if by chance one manages to retain one’s individuality, the mass man will see to it that individual differences are not conspicuous enough to challenge the conventions of the social order. It is not difficult to see how Heidegger’s picture of the they-self resonates with Nietzsche’s picture of the Last Man. As Nietzsche puts it, in a world governed by the Last Man there is “No shepherd and *one* herd! Everyone wants the same, everyone is the same: whoever feels they are different goes voluntarily to the madhouse.”²⁴

Obviously, Heidegger is not the first thinker to level a critique of mass society. In painting a bleak picture of mass culture, Heidegger echoes not only conservatives such as Nietzsche but also such liberal thinkers as Tocqueville and Mill. Certainly, it is not difficult to discern in Heidegger’s discussion subtle intimations of the “tyranny of the majority” identified and feared by thinkers on both the Right and the Left. That being said, Heidegger’s analysis of everydayness is not explicitly presented as a critique of modern mass

²⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 128-131. The similarities between Heidegger’s description of everydayness and the world of the Last Man notwithstanding, Heidegger is almost completely silent about Nietzsche in *Being and Time*. Of course, this would change in the mid-1930s.

society, or indeed of any other society. Ostensibly, Heidegger's analysis describes everyday human existence as it is experienced by human beings at all times and in all places. But the pejorative tone of Heidegger's discussion of everydayness is unmistakable. At the very least, if Heidegger is describing everyday life as it is lived in all societies, then it is questionable whether society as such is desirable at all. But if such sections are read as critiques of modern society, then Heidegger's discussion of everydayness can be viewed as complementary to the critique of modern philosophy that he presents in the introduction to *Being and Time*. The fact that the latter interpretation is more likely is evident when Heidegger's discussion of "publicness" (*Öffentlichkeit*) is taken into account.

What is publicness? As a descriptive term, publicness describes the obscuring effect that Being-with has on our attempt to understand ourselves and the world. In the public space, "publicness initially controls every way in which the world and *Da-sein* are interpreted, and it is always right, not because of an eminent and primary relation of being to 'things,' not because it has an explicitly appropriate transparency of *Da-sein* at its disposal, but because it does not get to 'the heart of the matter,' because it is insensitive to every difference of level and genuineness."²⁵ Put differently, the public space is inherently distorting because it is organically incapable of taking into account meaningful differences. Even worse, the public realm presents an illusion of transparency that covers up its true nature. Hence, publicness not only obscures phenomena, but also obscures the fact that it obscures phenomena.

²⁵Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 119.

The distorting effect of publicness manifests itself in the existential tendencies of the individuals who occupy the public space. Heidegger identifies three such tendencies: “idle talk” (*Gerede*), “curiosity” (*Neugier*), and “ambiguity” (*Zweideutigkeit*). With regards to the first of these tendencies, Heidegger insists that “the expression ‘idle talk’ is not to be used here in a disparaging sense,” but rather illuminates “a positive phenomenon which constitutes the mode of being of the understanding and interpretation of everyday *Da-sein*.”²⁶ “Positive phenomenon” or no, idle talk signifies the deterioration of language that occurs in the public realm. Whereas language presupposes a given understanding of the phenomena that is linguistically signified, idle talk is the prattle that results when language becomes disconnected from ordinary experience. When language becomes unhinged from its worldly foundation, it becomes a type of linguistic currency that is thoughtlessly transferred from person to person. “Since this discoursing has lost the primary relation of being to the being talked about, or else never achieved it,” Heidegger writes, “it does not communicate in the mode of a primordial appropriation of this being, but communicates by *gossiping* and *passing the word along*.”²⁷ Moreover, when this linguistic deterioration reaches an advanced enough stage, individuals are effectively uprooted from the world.

Curiosity (*Neugier*) is another existential tendency exhibited by individuals who occupy the public space. For Heidegger, curiosity is characterized by “not-staying” insofar as it ignores “what is nearest” in favor of “restlessness and excitement from continual novelty and changing encounters.” Similarly, curiosity is marked by “distraction” inasmuch

²⁶Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 157.

²⁷Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 158.

as it seeks to know phenomena “just in order to have known.” Just as significantly, however, curiosity is “*never dwelling anywhere.*” That is to say, one who is curious is “everywhere and nowhere” because one’s intense craving for new sights, new experiences, new faces, and untraveled-to places renders one always “on the move.” In sum, curious *Da–sein* “constantly uproots itself.”²⁸

Ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*) is the third characteristic exhibited by individuals who inhabit the public realm. For Heidegger, a person existing in the midst of others will often adhere to the *opinions* that others hold, even about subjects of which they have no immediate knowledge. In a milieu where every topic is accessible to every inquiring mind, one’s ability to distinguish between truth and falsity on the basis of one’s own understanding is severely hampered. “When in everyday being with one another,” Heidegger writes, “we encounter things that are accessible to everybody and about which everybody can say everything, we can soon no longer decide what is disclosed in genuine understanding and what is not.”²⁹ In ambiguity, the line between what is genuinely understood and what is superficially grasped dissolves into a misty haze.

Ambiguity has ontological as well as epistemological effects. That is to say, ambiguity not only affects the way in which we apprehend phenomena, but also affects our existential manner of Being-in-the-world. As Heidegger puts it, “Ambiguity not only affects the way we avail ourselves of what is accessible for use and enjoyment, and the way we manage it, but it has already established itself in understanding as a potentiality for being,

²⁸Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 161.

²⁹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 162.

and in the way *Da-sein* projects itself and presents itself with possibilities.”³⁰ Considered from this vantage point, ambiguity cripples not only the way we think about the world, but also how we act in it.

Heidegger’s discussion of ambiguity – like his discussion of publicness in general – paints a devastating picture of the public space as it exists in the everyday world. Although Heidegger does not simply equate everydayness with inauthenticity, he nonetheless comes close to conflating the two. Seemingly, everydayness encourages human beings to “drift” towards inauthenticity by inducing them to submit to the dictatorship of the they. In the public space, this dictatorship is so extreme that human beings are effectively uprooted from their worldly home and are turned into shallow, nattering Last Men seeking one distraction after another.

As it stands, Heidegger’s discussion of everydayness can be read as a critique of day-to-day life as it is lived in the modern world. Of course, Heidegger outwardly denies this, arguing that his analysis of everydayness applies equally to both modern as well as pre-modern societies: “everydayness is also and precisely the kind of being of *Da-sein*, even when *Da-sein* moves in a highly developed and differentiated culture.”³¹ Perhaps. But later on, Heidegger concedes that the degree to which the they exercises its “dictatorship” in the everyday world varies from epoch to epoch: “The extent to which its (the they’s) dominance becomes penetrating and explicit may change historically.”³² Hence, although the they

³⁰Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 162.

³¹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 47.

³²Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 121.

dominates the they-self in *every* social order, certain orders give it more room to exercise its hegemony than others. The fact that Heidegger regarded the modern order as one such order is evident when we consider how his discussion of everydayness illuminates some of the more negative aspects of modern commercial society.

For one, consider Heidegger's use of the term "publicness" itself. It is arguable that Heidegger's use of this term is revealing in that, as Michael E. Zimmerman notes, the term is often used in conjunction with modern civil society.³³ Is Heidegger's description of the everyday world really a description of modern civil society? Here, it is instructive to consider the thought of the fellow German thinker who had thought the most penetratingly about the nature of modern civil society: Hegel.

For Hegel, civil society is a distinctly modern phenomenon, and is properly understood as the realm where individuals are free to pursue their private desires. Indeed, in civil society, the individual, considered as an autonomous entity, is one of the defining principles of civil society as such: "The concrete person, who is himself the object of his particular aims, is, as a totality of wants and a mixture of caprice and physical necessity, one principle of civil society."³⁴ Hence, civil society is constituted by an aggregate of

³³Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 23. The fact that publicness is often conflated with modern civil society is a reflection of the long-standing tendency of Western thinkers to equate the social with the political. For more, see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 22-38.

³⁴Georg W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 122.

individuals, and is a realm where egoism and individualism runs rampant. As such, it is the realm of individual particularity *par excellence*.³⁵

For Hegel, then, the realm of civil society is one in which the individual is given “free reign in every direction to satisfy its needs, accidental caprices, and subjective desires.”³⁶

For his part, Heidegger paints a devastating picture of what a social realm characterized by the liberation of “subjective desires” concretely looks like. On Heidegger’s account, the liberation of egoism that occurs in civil society results in a world of chattering quasi-humans shuffling from one distraction to another. Cut off from family and community, individuals are transformed into homeless mass men.

My point here should not be misunderstood. In arguing that Heidegger’s picture of everydayness alludes to some of the darker implications of the Hegelian conception of civil society, I am *not* suggesting that Heidegger necessarily had Hegel in mind when he composed *Being and Time*. Rather, I seek to illuminate the anti-modern biases that lurk in the background of Heidegger’s discussion of everydayness. Hegel provides an illustrative counterpoint to Heidegger because he had thought that modern society, whatever its

³⁵Here, a qualification is in order. For Hegel, the realm of civil society cannot be understood apart from the family and the state. Furthermore, civil society is divided into various classes and estates that render the individual a more social animal. As Hegel writes, “in this class system, the ethical frame of mind is rectitude and *esprit de corps*, i.e. the disposition to make oneself a member of one of the moments of civil society by one’s own act, through one’s own energy, industry, skill, to maintain oneself in this position, and to fend for oneself only through this process of mediating oneself with the universal, while in this way gaining recognition both in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of others.” *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 133.

³⁶Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, 133.

shortcomings, constitutes an improvement over pre-modern societies.³⁷ “The Eastern nations knew only that *one* is free; the Greek and Roman world only that *some* are free; while we know that all men absolutely (man as *man*) are free.”³⁸ So goes the Hegelian formulation. For Heidegger, however, in modern society mass taste crushes individuality, trivial chatter about topics of no consequence supplants meaningful discourse, and shallow curiosity about new places, faces, and products replaces sustained inquiry about the nature and meaning of existence.

To those who have succumbed to the temptations offered by modern society, however, the fact that they have fallen into a state of existential inauthenticity is hidden from view. Indeed, the human fall into the abyss of self-alienation is experienced as comfortable self-contentment. Hence, even though idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity have effectively uprooted them from the world, human beings still feel at home. The fact that this feeling of Being-at-home is superficial, however, is revealed by the experience of anxiety.

IV. Heidegger’s Analysis of Anxiety

The human experience of moods (*Stimmung*) or attunements is a core aspect of human Being-in-the-world. Although Heidegger examines various moods, he pays special attention to anxiety (*Angst*). Why? For Heidegger, anxiety is a key mood because it reveals the nature of human existence in its totality. More specifically, anxiety reveals that man’s being is characterized by what Heidegger calls “care” (*Sorge*). *Da-sein*’s being is marked by

³⁷For more on Hegel’s critique of liberalism, see Steven B. Smith, *Hegel’s Critique of Liberalism: Rights in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

³⁸Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 19.

care in the sense that it is continuously concerned with the question of its own being. In illuminating the nature of *Da-sein*'s being, Heidegger's analysis of anxiety serves the same function as Husserl's phenomenological reduction. Much as Husserl's bracketing of the world reveals the transcendental ego, so too does Heidegger's existential reduction reveal *Da-sein*. That being said, exactly *what* anxiety reveals about human existence points to the gap that separates Heideggerian ontology from Husserlian phenomenology. More specifically, as Hubert L. Dreyfus puts it, "while both reductions isolate *Da-sein* as a 'solus ipse,' and both reveal to the natural attitude that takes intelligibility for granted that intelligibility must be produced, Husserl's reduction reveals the transcendental ego as *the absolute source of all intelligibility*, while anxiety reveals *Da-sein* as *dependent upon a public system of significances that it did not produce* (italics Dreyfus's)."³⁹ As we will see, this difference is of no small consequence.

Borrowing from Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*, Heidegger draws a contrast between fear and anxiety.⁴⁰ In sum, fear is marked by specificity: fear is a mood in which we are afraid of being harmed in some *specific* respect by something that approaches us in some *specific* way from some *specific* sector of the environment: "What we fear is always a

³⁹Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 177. The following analysis of anxiety is greatly indebted to Dreyfus's insightful discussion.

⁴⁰Kierkegaard's influence on *Being and Time* generally and on the text's analysis of anxiety in particular is self-evident. For more on the relationship between Heidegger and Kierkegaard, see Calvin O. Schrag, *Existence and Freedom: Towards an Ontology of Human Finitude* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1961); George J. Stack, *Kierkegaard's Existential Ethics* (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1977); and Michael Wyschogrod, *Kierkegaard and Heidegger: Ontology and Existence* (New York: Humanities Press, 1969).

detrimental innerworldly being, approaching nearby from a definite region, which may remain absent.”⁴¹ Hence, we can readily point to the thing that provokes our fear, identify why we fear it, and locate its ultimate point of origin.

Anxiety is radically different. For one, angst is not provoked by anything specific: “What *Angst* is about is not an innerworldly being.” Secondly, anxiety does not threaten us in any specific way: “The threat does not have the character of a definite detrimentality which concerns what is threatened with a definite regard to a particular factual potentiality for being.”⁴² Hence, whereas we can always point to the object of our fear and identify how it threatens us, we are unable to do so in the case of angst.

In anxiety, *no* worldly entity is “relevant.” That is to say, we can neither point to any worldly being as the source of our angst, nor to any such entity as a potential source of solace. By extension, the world itself ceases to seem important. This is not to suggest that the world suddenly disappears, however. Rather, the world has revealed itself as an indifferent place that does not care one iota whether the individual is alienated from it or not. Instead, it goes on precisely as before, seemingly oblivious to the fact that it has lost all intrinsic meaning to the angst-ridden individual. This is why the world “obtrudes” more oppressively than ever in the experience of anxiety: “The utter insignificance which makes itself known in the nothing and nowhere does not signify the absence of world, but means that innerworldly beings are in themselves of so little importance that, on the basis of this

⁴¹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 174.

⁴²Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 174.

insignificance of what is worldly, the world is all that obtrudes itself in its worldliness.”⁴³ In other words, because it has revealed itself to be irrelevant to the experience of anxiety, the world is arguably more “present” than ever, if in a decidedly unpleasant way.

Inasmuch as the world reveals itself to be insignificant to the anxious individual, the roles that one embraces during one’s everyday occupations are likewise revealed to be of no inherent value. Such roles, the individual realizes, can be played by *anyone*. This, on Heidegger’s account, partially accounts for the vaguely threatening nature of anxiety. The world does not appear “absurd,” as Camus would have it, because it lacks any sense of logical coherence. Instead, the world is absurd because the coherence that it possesses has no essential relation to the individual *qua* individual. As Heidegger writes, “the threat does not come from something at hand and objectively present, but rather from the fact that everything at hand and objectively absolutely has nothing more to ‘say’ to us.”⁴⁴

In anxiety, the world appears as alien and other. Hence, it ceases to present itself as a place in which one can be at home. For Heidegger, this is why the experience of existential angst corresponds to an “uncanny” (*unheimlich*) feeling. To feel uncanny is to feel not-at-home. As Heidegger puts it, “in *Angst* one has an ‘uncanny’ feeling. Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that of that which *Da-sein* finds itself involved in with *Angst* initially finds expression: the nothing and nowhere. But uncanniness means at the same time not-Being at

⁴³Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 175.

⁴⁴Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 315.

home.”⁴⁵ In experiencing anxiety, we feel that we are not at home in the world, and experience a foretaste of our inevitable death.

At this point, we come face-to-face with an apparent contradiction that requires addressing. If human existence is Being-in-the-world, how is it possible for human beings to experience the uncanny sensation of not-Being-at-home-in-the-world? Is not such a feeling manifestly impossible in light of the embedded nature of human existence? As if to answer this question, Heidegger argues that his analysis of anxiety does not contradict his earlier analysis of everydayness. In our everyday state, Heidegger suggests, we do indeed enjoy the sensation of Being-at-home when we submit to the dictatorship of the they: “This characteristic of Being-in was then made more concretely visible through the everyday publicness of the they which beings tranquillized self-assurance, ‘Being-at-home’ with all its obviousness, into the average everydayness of *Da-sein*.” However, the experience of anxiety destroys this “tranquillized self-assurance”: “Being-in enters the existential ‘mode’ of *not-Being-at-home*.”⁴⁶ Thus, when human beings experience existential angst, their relationship to worldly place modulates from a feeling of Being-at-home to one of not-Being-at-home.

But if this is the case, then how are we to assess these various modulations with regard to the characteristics of human existence? Is the feeling of Being-at-home to be regarded as more “real” than not-Being-at-home, or vice versa? Or are they to be regarded as equal in existential merit? Heidegger’s answer is as direct as it is unambiguous:

⁴⁵Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 176.

⁴⁶Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 176.

“Tranquillized, familiar being-in-the-world is a mode of the uncanniness of *Da-sein*, not the other way around. *Not Being-at-home must be conceived existentially and ontologically as the more primordial phenomenon* (italics Heidegger’s).”⁴⁷ Hence, the sensation of homelessness disclosed in anxiety is more “primordial,” and hence more real, than the feeling of homeliness that accompanies our inhabitation of the everyday world .

To feel homeless is to feel exiled from the world. But to feel homeless is also to feel displaced from one’s sense of identity. By displacing us from the world, anxiety thereby undermines our very identity. Angst makes the individual cognizant of how the world has no inherent value even as it makes it aware of how the world undergirds its own sense of self. In this sense, anxiety reveals *Da-sein* as “thrown” (*Geworfen*) in a world that it did not produce. But anxiety also makes the individual aware of the “individuated” facet of its being, if only because it illuminates how its “ownmost” identity has been hijacked by the they. All in all, “It (anxiety) brings one back to the pure That of one’s ownmost, individuated thrownness.”⁴⁸

Viewed in light of anxiety, the everyday world is revealed to be a “fallen” place because it mistakenly presents itself as home, as a place where one can be a self without sacrificing one’s integrity. Just as significantly, it is exposed as a place where the painful fact of our primordial homelessness is systematically covered up. This holds especially true for the public space, which can be viewed as a place of refuge where inauthentic individuals gather to avoid facing the disturbing fact that their worldly existence lacks natural

⁴⁷Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 177.

⁴⁸Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 315.

foundation: “Entangled flight *into* the Being-at-home of publicness is flight *from* not-Being-at-home, that is, from the uncanniness which lies in *Da–sein* as thrown, as Being-in-the-world entrusted to its own being.” Understandably, people who inhabit the public space will attempt to insulate themselves from the shock engendered by their encounter with uncanniness by advancing interpretations of it that cover up its true reality. “The everyday world in which *Da–sein* understands uncanniness is the entangled turning away which ‘phases out’ not-Being-at-home.”⁴⁹ Such interpretations obscure the “facticity” of our uncanny Being-in-the-world.

Heidegger’s discussion of anxiety illuminates the homeless nature of our Being-in-the-world. Anxiety reveals that the world is not our home because it is governed by the they. Viewed from this perspective, the experience of anxiety is a profoundly *subversive* experience because it tears off the veil of illusion that covers up the full extent of the they’s dictatorship. But how can individuals build upon the experience of anxiety to liberate themselves from the they’s dictatorship?

V. Flight and Resoluteness

In the face of anxiety, the individual is faced with two basic options. One such option is “flight” (*Flucht*). In flight, one flees into distractions as a means of hiding from the realization that one’s identity and one’s culture is groundless. By fleeing, *Da–sein* voluntarily seeks to become reabsorbed into the everyday world even though it realizes that it is utterly without natural foundation. Moreover, in flight *Da–sein* implicitly renounces its

⁴⁹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 177.

ability to be an authentic self: as Heidegger writes, “*Da–sein* plunges out of itself into itself, into the groundlessness and nothingness of inauthentic everydayness.”⁵⁰

Flight is an intentional act. This aspect distinguishes it from the ordinary “falling” that occurs when one inhabits the everyday world.⁵¹ Whereas falling is essentially a precognitive process that occurs as one’s identity becomes inexorably submerged into the prevailing social order, fleeing is voluntary: “The absorption of *Da–sein* in the they and in the ‘world’ taken care reveals something like a *flight* of *Da–sein* from itself as an authentic potentiality for being itself.” Hence, in fleeing one voluntarily surrenders to the they, effectively choosing “the they for its ‘hero.’”⁵²

Flight, however, represents merely one of two paths that the individual can take in the wake of an anxious episode. The other option is what Heidegger calls “resoluteness” (*Entschlossenheit*). What is resoluteness? The term resoluteness usually means “decisiveness.” In the original German, *Entschlossenheit* derives from the German verb “*schliessen*,” which means to shutter, lock, or latch. Literally translated, *Entschlossenheit* means to un-shutter or un-lock. Stressing this Germanic connotation, Heidegger argues that a resolute individual is someone who un-locks their suppressed potentiality to be a self. Moreover, resolute *Da–sein* un-shutters its authenticity by choosing to “disclose” (*erschliessen*) its own finite existence independently of the they. Hence, whereas flight

⁵⁰Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 167.

⁵¹Heidegger is not always clear on this point. At times, Heidegger conflates falling with fleeing. Needless to say, a passive “drift” into everydayness is not necessarily the same thing as an intentional flight into everydayness.

⁵²Heidegger, *Being and Time* 134, 339.

signifies one's submersion into the they, "resoluteness means letting oneself be summoned out of one's lostness in the they."⁵³ All in all, resoluteness is the means by which *Da-sein* discloses its independence of the they by way of autonomously grappling with the finite nature of its existence.

Like flight, resoluteness is somewhat voluntary in nature. Here, it is instructive to note that, in English, the term "resolution" can refer to an optical image that is clear and well-defined. Heidegger's concept of resoluteness reflects this English connotation by stressing the clarity required for resolute action. Human beings must *attain* clarity about what they resolve to do. In this sense, resoluteness is voluntaristic in nature. That being said, it is also disclosive, a fact evident in Heidegger notion of the "call of conscience."

On Heidegger's account, a resolute individual responds to the call of conscience. The call of conscience is the silent voice of Being telling us that we are "guilty" (*schuldig*) of ontological inauthenticity. More specifically, we are guilty of letting the they dictate our way of being and the way in which we understand our own death. But we are also guilty of naively thinking that our existential options are unlimited. The call of conscience tells us otherwise, making us cognizant of the limited nature of the choices available to us. The call of conscience does not emanate from the ego; it cannot be willed. As Heidegger writes, "The call is precisely something that we ourselves have neither planned nor prepared for nor willfully brought about. 'It' calls against our expectations and even against our will. On the other hand, the call without doubt does not come from someone else who is with me in the

⁵³Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 299.

world. The call comes from me, and yet over me.”⁵⁴ That said, there is a voluntaristic element to the call of conscience in the fact that the individual must want to be summoned by it. Heidegger calls this “wanting-to-have-a-conscience.”

Inasmuch as Heideggerian resoluteness has a voluntaristic element, this element is “anticipatory” in nature. By this, Heidegger means that resolute individuals anticipate the eventuality of their own death, and by doing so disclose their own finitude or “Being-guilty.” Ironically enough, however, by anticipating one’s own death, one is enabled to seize control of one’s own life. It would seem to be the case that the only way in which one can gain freedom for oneself is by “Being-towards-death.” As Heidegger writes, “*Anticipation reveals to Da–sein its lostness in the they-self and brings it face-to-face with the possibility to be itself, primarily unsupported by concern taking care of things, but to be itself in passionate anxious **freedom towards death** which is free of the illusions of the they, factual and certain of itself* (italics and bold Heidegger’s).”⁵⁵ In passages such as these, Heidegger’s prose evinces the existential ecstasy that is experienced in the performance of resolute action. Indeed, Heidegger later writes of the “unshakable joy” that occurs when one liberates oneself from the dictatorship of the they and accepts responsibility for one’s own existence.

Clearly, anticipatory resoluteness entails an inner transformation that, in its intensity, resembles nothing so much as a religious conversion. Heidegger’s notion of the call of conscience certainly supports this impression. For his part, Heidegger stresses the inner dimensions of the existential transformation that occurs in resolute action. It is not so much

⁵⁴Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 254.

⁵⁵Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 245.

that the world itself changes, but the way in which the individual copes with it that undergoes a modulation, on Heidegger's account: "The 'world' at hand does not become different as far as 'content,' the circle of others is not exchanged for a new one, and yet the being toward things at hand which understands and takes care of things, and the concerned Being-with the others is now defined in terms of their ownmost potentiality of Being-a-self."⁵⁶ It would seem to be the case that resoluteness is an "inner-directed" rather than "outer-directed" activity.

But this inward-looking ethos is not the whole story, or even most of it, for that matter. As we shall see, Heidegger is not content to argue that the individual should retreat into the inner sanctum of the self in order to cultivate personal authenticity. As George Steiner writes, "For 'resoluteness' towards authenticity is not solipistic; it does not alienate *Da-sein* from others."⁵⁷ The fact that resoluteness propels human beings towards others is evident in Heidegger's brief yet significant discussion of the means by which *Da-sein* achieves ontological completion in a "people" or "community" (*Volk*).

VI. Heidegger's Discussion of the *Volk*

Heidegger's discussion of the *Volk* occurs in the second section of *Being and Time*, a section where he considers the question of Being in relation to temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*). Why the importance of temporality? As we have seen, for Heidegger the being of *Da-sein* is characterized by care in the sense that "the being of *Da-sein* means Being-ahead-of-oneself-

⁵⁶Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 274.

⁵⁷Steiner, *Martin Heidegger*, 108.

already-in (the world) as Being together-with (innerworldly beings encountered).”⁵⁸ For Heidegger, the fact that *Da-sein* is “ahead-of” itself in a world that it already inhabits in the presence of other beings points to its ecstatic temporal structure. *Da-sein* does not exist in a temporal vacuum but acts in such a way that it opens up the past, present, and future. In light of this truism, an adequate analysis of human existence is compelled to consider man’s status as a temporal being. The second section of the text witnesses Heidegger’s attempt to re-examine the ontological structures of *Da-sein* in light of their temporal meaning.

Heidegger introduces the *Volk* by way of revisiting the concept of resoluteness. As we have seen, resoluteness is the means by which human beings face up to their individual “fate.” In his discussion of the *Volk*, however, Heidegger argues that a resolute individual is someone who accepts their “destiny” (*Geschick*). What is a destiny? For Heidegger, a destiny is “the occurrence of the community, of a people (*Volk*).” But how does a person realize their communal destiny? In Heidegger’s view, *Da-sein* realizes its communal destiny through “communication and in battle”: “in communication and in battle the power of destiny first becomes free.” Seemingly, communicative struggle is the means by *Da-sein* realizes the destiny of a *Volk*.

Obviously, Heidegger’s discussion raises a host of questions. What exactly does it mean to engage in “communication” and “battle”? Heidegger is characteristically vague on this question. In other instances, however, Heidegger gives us some clues as to what such collective action concretely looks like. For one, a resolute individual pursues its destiny by appropriating its cultural “heritage” in constructive fashion. Every culture possesses what

⁵⁸Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 180.

Heidegger calls “possibilities that have-been.” By this phrase, Heidegger means the vestigial remnants of past cultural practices that were once commonplace fixtures of the everyday world but are now largely considered to be dated oddities that have outlived their practical utility. Such remnants remain present – if hidden – in our day-to-day world, even if they have been shoved to the periphery of it. These discarded practices provide the fodder that resolute individuals can seize upon to actualize their latent authenticity. As Heidegger writes, “The resoluteness in which *Da-sein* comes back to itself discloses the actual factual possibilities of authentic existing *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness takes over as thrown.”⁵⁹

In appropriating a pre-given cultural heritage, the resolute individual can model itself after examples. Heidegger refers to this as “the possibility that *Da-sein* may choose its heroes.” Of course, the term “choose” is more than a little misleading in this context, inasmuch as it signifies a passive resignation to fate as much as an active act of the individual will: “The finitude of existence thus seized upon tears one back out of endless multiplicity of possibilities offering themselves nearest by – those of comfort, shirking, and taking things easy – and brings *Da-sein* to the simplicity of its *fate*.”⁶⁰ At any rate, by choosing its hero and taking over an inherited – if forgotten – cultural heritage, *Da-sein* fulfills its individual fate. And by fulfilling one’s fate in this fashion, one also fulfills the destiny of one’s *Volk*.

⁵⁹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 357, 351.

⁶⁰Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 352, 351.

Needless to say, these are provocative words. Provocative as they are, however, Heidegger's discussion of the *Volk* is not without precedent in the context of *Being and Time*. As we have seen, for Heidegger Being-in-the-world is Being-with. Here, he suggests that *Da-sein* has a destiny because it exists in the midst of others: "But if fateful *Da-sein* essentially exists as being-in-the-world in being-with-others, its occurrence is an occurrence-with and is determined as destiny."⁶¹ From this perspective, one can say that Heidegger sneaks his *völkisch* rhetoric through the space or opening provided by his phenomenology of *Mitsein*. Even so, it is not without its difficulties.

For one, Heidegger is frustratingly vague about what the nature of the *Volk* itself. What is the ontological basis of the *Volk* that renders it a coherent community? For Heidegger, what unites the members of the Heideggerian community together is the collective pursuit of a historical destiny. On one level, this metaphysical definition is admirable in that it sets Heidegger's thought apart from other *völkisch* writers who conceptualize the *Volk* in crudely racist and biological terms. On another level, however, it is frustrating in the fact that its essential vagueness fails to address the question of *why* the individual is compelled to act collectively to actualize its latent authenticity. Somehow, the argument that Being-in-the-world is Being-with does not settle this question. Indeed, it is entirely possible to concede the inter-subjective nature of human existence without necessarily maintaining that collective action is necessary to the cultivation of human authenticity. By neglecting to discuss the *Volk* in any significant detail, Heidegger fails to establish its necessity.

⁶¹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 352.

What little we know about the *Volk* is that it is roughly analogous to the individual. Much as individuals have fates, peoples possess historical destinies. In the words of Zimmerman, “the resolute people discloses and acts on its destiny just as the resolute individual discloses and acts on its fate.”⁶² From this perspective, peoples can be just as resolute as individuals. But can they flee from their sense of primordial homelessness as individuals can? Apparently so. However, as we have seen, resoluteness and flight are the two options that individuals are faced with in the wake of an anxious episode. Do peoples too experience anxiety? Indeed, do peoples exist in an everyday state? I indulge in this *reductio ad absurdum* not to ridicule Heidegger, but rather to illuminate some of the more awkward implications of the *Da-sein:Volk* analogy that lurks in the background of his discussion.

As it stands, this represents merely one of several problems that plagues Heidegger’s discussion of the *Volk*. In the first part of *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s discussion of publicness identifies the existential self-alienation that occurs in the public space. In a public space dominated by the they, Heidegger had argued, the individual becomes an anonymous they-self prone to idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. As Dominique Janicauld writes, “In *Being and Time*, there is an especially negative phenomenology of Being-with, which at no point introduces a positive phenomenology of political sociability.”⁶³ Now, Heidegger argues that the individual can *only* become authentic in the context of its community or

⁶²Michael E. Zimmerman, *Eclipse of the Self: The Development of Heidegger’s Concept of Authenticity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981), 172.

⁶³Dominique Janicauld, *The Shadow of that Thought: Heidegger and the Question of Politics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 39-40.

people. Instead of hindering the cultivation of human authenticity, Being-with is downright instrumental to it.

Obviously, Heidegger's transfigured view of being-in raises a host of questions. How, it may be asked, can Being-with facilitate inauthentic idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity in one instance and authentic communication and battle the next? Obviously, for Heidegger to have given a satisfactory answer to this question, it would have been necessary for him to distinguish between the Being-with that occurs in the everyday public space from the *Mitsein* that inheres in a community or people. Such a distinction, unfortunately, is absent from the text of *Being and Time*.

VII. Conclusion

As we have seen, Heidegger's *Being and Time* contains a powerful critique of modernity. Heidegger accuses modern philosophy of failing to address the all-important question of Being, a failure that entails the ontological groundlessness of modern reason and science. As it stands, this groundlessness exacts the severest civilizational consequences, for we live in a world very much shaped by the influence of modern philosophy and its scientific offshoot. We live in, as Max Weber would have it, an "iron cage" governed by procedural rationality.⁶⁴ Heidegger's pejorative description of the everyday world paints a dreary

⁶⁴As Weber memorably puts it, "(The modern economic) order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.' But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage." *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 181.

picture of what a world governed by procedural rationality concretely looks like. Such a world is characterized by the dominance of the mass man, who annihilates every exception to the rule through a soft, numbing tyranny of the majority. This is the real import of Heidegger's discussion of the they and its inherent tendencies towards distanciality, averageness, and levelling down.

Heidegger's description of the public space – and of the idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity that occurs within its confines – stands as a similarly damning indictment of modern civil society. To Heidegger, modern civil society is a place where language is degraded into mindless prattle, where rootless individuals travel to and fro looking to satisfy their curiosity, and where solid convictions melt into ambiguous “shades of grey.” Here, it is instructive to link Heidegger's picture of the rootless nature of contemporary civil society with Marx's description of the uprooting effected by the rule of the modern bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie, Marx recognized, has “pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors,’ and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, callous ‘cash payment.’” Under the rule of the bourgeoisie, “All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.”⁶⁵ Hence, long before Heidegger, Marx

⁶⁵Karl Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1978), 476.

had identified the rootless nature of modern capitalist society. Heidegger shares Marx's diagnosis, but refuses to attribute it to economic factors.

But if Heidegger's discussion of the rootless nature of modern civil society owes a certain debt to Marx, his analysis of anxiety is more indebted to Kierkegaard. While Heidegger follows Marx in leveling a powerful critique of modern society, he also seconds Kierkegaard's contention that no society can be a fitting home for man. Heidegger's argument that man is not truly at home in the world has exerted a powerful influence on the existentialist thinkers who followed in his wake, few of whom held out hope that radical socio-political transfiguration could make man at home in a world that is perpetually strange. Indeed, Heidegger's assertion of man's "primordial homelessness" foreshadows the apolitical tendencies of postmodern thinkers such as Derrida. As Richard Bernstein puts it, "Derrida seeks to show us that we never quite are or can be at home in the world. We are threatened by the uncanniness of what is canny; we are always in exile – even from ourselves. We may long and dream of being at home in the world, to find a 'proper' center, but we never achieve this form of presence or self-presence."⁶⁶ Of course, Derrida has become more political of late, but it is unclear what intrinsic value politics has in the Derridean schema, where the fact of exile is admitted at the outset. So, too, in the thought of the early Heidegger, who understandably has little to say about the conduct of day-to-day politics in an everyday world that, in its "fallenness," is one in which an authentic individual would not want to be at home.

⁶⁶Richard Bernstein, *The Ethico-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 179.

Seemingly, Heidegger's contention that man is essentially homeless implies that a proper relationship with the place in which we live is an apolitical one. In a fallen world, the individual is compelled to retreat back into the inner sanctum of the self, the only place where one can grapple with one's mortality without sacrificing one's authenticity. But, as we have seen, Heidegger's concept of resoluteness propels the individual towards his or her community. On one level, this is an outright contradiction in that Heidegger's discussion of publicness illuminates how communities hinder the individual's attempt to face death. In the presence of the they, Heidegger argues, we are inexorably led to interpret our death in terms of the way that *das Man* does. On another level, however, it perfectly jibes with Heidegger's assertion that *Da-sein* is Being-in-the-world. Human beings do not exist detached from their surroundings but are embedded into their communal environment. And the individual human being always exists in the midst of other human beings, even when none are ontically present. From this perspective, a solitary confrontation with mortality is manifestly impossible. To be sure, in the end we are utterly alone. But the way that we grapple with that end is conditioned by others.

Such is the significance of Heidegger's discussion of the *Volk*. In sum, the *Volk* is a community where the individual can face death free from the obfuscating effects of Being-with. Is such a community possible, given Heidegger's discernible animus towards the public realm? If we interpret Heidegger's discussion of publicness as a critique of modern civil society rather than Being-with as such, then it certainly is. Considered from this vantage point, it is only in modern society that Being-with necessarily engenders inauthenticity. By extension, alternative social orders can make a more authentic Being-with

possible. Arguably, Heidegger's discussion of the *Volk* represents the German philosopher's early attempt to envision a social order that is not tainted by the pathologies endemic to everydayness. To be sure, Heidegger's attempt is underdeveloped and is riddled with undeniable contradictions. This, however, does not render it any less significant.

On this reading, Heidegger's discussion of how the resolute individual takes over a pre-given cultural heritage appears in a different light. More specifically, the collective re-appropriation of a common heritage is revealed to be the means by which the public space is transformed from an inauthentic to an authentic place. By acting in concert to take over their common heritage, individuals take over the much-ridiculed conservative aspects of that culture that have fallen into disrepute and infuse them with new life and vitality. In so doing, such individuals effectively combat the slide towards decadence that occurs in a society characterized by individualism.

Obviously, we can detect in Heidegger's discussion of the *Volk* certain echoes of the collectivistic tendencies that were later exhibited in his 1933 rectorship at the University of Freiburg. That being said, these tendencies are decidedly muted in *Being and Time*. As noted earlier, Heidegger's discussion of the *Volk* is as brief as it is vague. Moreover, while Heidegger looks towards a potential reinvigoration of the public space, such a reinvigoration is not necessarily synonymous with a full-blown metaphysical revolution in the West. Suffice to say, in 1927, Heidegger was not yet ready to counsel full-fledged political action as a remedy to the ills of modernity. At this point, his thought was still characterized by an inward-looking ethos that has more in common with Kierkegaard than with the other *völkisch*

philosophers who populated the late-1920s German intellectual landscape. A few years later, this would change radically.

Chapter 3: Finding a Home in the German *Polis*: Heidegger and the Politics of Aesthetic Nationalism

Every myth is a myth of origin.
Paul Tillich
The Socialist Decision

I. Introduction

The 1927 publication of *Being and Time* did not put an end to Heidegger's investigation of the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*). When viewed from the holistic perspective of his lifelong investigation of the question of Being, Heidegger's *magnum opus* is the concrete manifestation of the first phase of a three-part career trajectory, and an incomplete manifestation at that. As is well known, Heidegger had originally planned for *Being and Time* to be comprised of two parts, both of which were to consist of three divisions. With regards to part one, Heidegger failed to complete the third division ("Time and Being") by the time that *Being and Time* was published in 1927. Furthermore, Heidegger failed to complete *any* sections of the second part of the text, a part which would have effected a "destructuring" (*Destruktion*) of the history of Western ontology. To be sure, Heidegger did eventually accomplish this destructuring in his 1929 work *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, his 1938 lecture "The Age of the World Picture," and his 1930s lectures on Aristotle. However, in 1929, Heidegger experienced a "turn" (*Kehre*) that was of such importance that it marks the onset of a new phase of his thinking.¹

¹Heidegger's turn is documented in the collection entitled *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

What is the turn? Ironically, Heidegger speaks to the turn that characterized his middle-period thought in the essay that initiates the third phase of his thought. In the “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger wrote the following:

The adequate execution and completion of this other thinking that abandons subjectivity is surely made more difficult by the fact that in the publication of *Being and Time* the third division of the first part, “Time and Being,” was held back (cf. *Being and Time*, p. 87, above). Here everything is reversed. The division in question was held back because thinking failed in the adequate saying of this turning (*Kehre*) and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics. The lecture “On the Essence of Truth,” thought out and delivered in 1930 but not printed until 1943, provides a certain insight into the thinking from “Being and Time” to “Time and Being.” This turning is not a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*, but in it the thinking that was sought first arrives at the location of that dimension out of which *Being and Time* is experienced, that is to say, experienced from the fundamental experience of the oblivion of Being.²

On this account, the onset of Heidegger’s turn was precipitated by his failure to complete the third section of part one of *Being and Time*. Heidegger failed to complete the third section because the traditional language of metaphysics was ill-suited to the task of delineating the relationship between Being and time. Because he was unable to do justice to the temporal dimension of human existence, Heidegger was unable to break out of the subjective tradition of modern thought.

Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” essay was published in 1947, more than a decade after his turn had come to an end. Hence, by the time that he wrote the aforementioned passage, Heidegger was in a better position to assess the significance of what happened to his thinking in 1929. What, then, is the turn? On the basis of Heidegger’s 1947 account, the turn is characterized by four aspects: the abandonment of subjectivity; a rejection of the

²Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1977), 231-232.

language of Western metaphysics; a more thoroughgoing attempt to delineate Being's temporal nature; and an experience of the contemporary oblivion of Being.

In the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger defines modern homelessness as the experience of the oblivion of Being. Inasmuch as the turn caused Heidegger to experience the oblivion of Being, the *Kehre* saw the German philosopher fully coming to grips with the experience of homelessness. To say that Heidegger experienced this homelessness intensely is an understatement. As Michael E. Zimmerman puts it,

Heidegger experienced this homesickness profoundly, so much so that his very sanity seems to have been threatened by the loss of familiarity and meaning in a world devoid of God. . . . Heidegger's thought was motivated in part by his profound homesickness, by his yearning to overcome isolation, alienation and meaninglessness. Here, his proximity to *völkisch* authors was very close indeed. He believed that his task as a philosopher was to help the German *Volk* find a home for itself, although this was an uphill task.³

Indeed, Heidegger's experience of homelessness was of such intensity that it colored his view of what philosophy is. In a 1929-1930 lecture course entitled "The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics," Heidegger declared:

Novalis on one occasion says in a fragment: 'Philosophy is really homesickness, an urge to be at home everywhere.' A strange definition, romantic of course. Homesickness – does such a thing still exist today at all? Has it not become an incomprehensible word, even in everyday life? Has not contemporary city man, the ape of civilization, long since eradicated homesickness? And homesickness as the very determination of philosophy!⁴

Adhering to Novalis's definition of philosophy, Heidegger's middle-period thought bears the imprint of the experience of homesickness that is attendant with the oblivion of Being.

³Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, 5.

⁴Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 5.

It is during this middle-period that Heidegger's experience of homesickness would lead to a brief and disastrous foray into the world of politics. As is well known, in 1933 Heidegger assumed the position of rector at Freiburg University. By becoming rector, Heidegger effectively threw his support behind the German National Socialist movement that had seized control of the German nation. As rector, Heidegger hoped to revolutionize the German university, an intention signaled by his inaugural address entitled "The Self-Assertion of the German University."⁵ Apparently, Heidegger thought that a spiritual reformation of the German university would engender a spiritual rejuvenation of the German nation. Needless to say, Heidegger's attempt to reform the university was a failure. Faculty colleagues at Freiburg University resisted his attempts at reform. Even worse, the Nazis themselves came to view Heidegger as a suspicious figure because of his unwillingness to dismiss Jewish faculty members, and he resigned from his position in 1934, his term as rector lasting approximately one year.

Heidegger's feeling of homesickness thus engendered his ill-fated attempt to reform the German university system. As it stands, Heidegger's rectorship can be linked to his theory of aesthetics. For Heidegger, the work of art is the place in which Being becomes unconcealed.⁶ Moreover, the founding of a political state is a way in which truth rises to

⁵For a transcript of Heidegger's rectoral address, see Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 29-39.

⁶"Art work" is a word that reeks of the objectification that Heidegger associates with the modern art industry: "The whole art industry, even if it carried to the extreme and exercised in every way for the sake of works themselves, extends only to the object-being of the works." Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 41. Insofar as the

unconcealment. Furthermore, the *polis* is the place that underlies the works of art that attest to the existence of a historical people. Putting all of this together, the founding of a *polis* is an act of matchless ontological significance. By founding a new home, the founder creates a place conducive to creative action.

In this chapter, therefore, I shall examine the politics of aesthetic nationalism in Heidegger's middle-period thought. I will begin by analyzing Heidegger's discussion of the contemporary spiritual crisis of the West in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Then, I shall consider Heidegger's call for the German nation to engender a full-blown metaphysical revolution in the Occident that will put an end to modern homesickness. Turning to Heidegger's 1935 essay entitled "The Origin of the Work of Art," I will analyze Heidegger's discussion of the work of art. I shall conclude with an examination of Heidegger's brief yet significant discussion of the founding of the *polis* in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. For Heidegger, the founding of the *polis* is the act by which the place that undergirds man's historical existence is established.

II. The Spiritual Crisis of the West

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's critique of modernity was ambiguous. On the one hand, Heidegger had argued that the everyday world as such engenders existential self-alienation. On the other hand, Heidegger's description of the everyday world resonated with conservative criticisms of modern commercial society. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*,

phrase "work of art" more harmoniously comports with Heidegger's endeavor to distance his view of aesthetics from the tenets of artistic modernism, I will use it throughout this chapter.

Heidegger eliminates this ambiguity by identifying the presence of a full-blown spiritual crisis in the West. Heidegger speaks to the nature of this crisis in the following passage:

This Europe, in its ruinous blindness forever on the point of cutting its own throat, lies today in a great pincers, squeezed between Russia on the one side and America on the other. From a metaphysical point of view, Russia and America are the same: the same dreary technological frenzy, the same unrestricted organization of the average man. At a time when the farthest corner of the globe has been conquered by technology and opened to economic exploitation; when any incident whatever, regardless of where or when it occurs, can be communicated to the rest of the world at any desired speed; when the assassination of a king in France and a symphony concert in Tokyo can be ‘experienced’ simultaneously; when time has ceased to be anything other than velocity, instantaneousness, and simultaneity, and time as history has vanished from the lives of all peoples; when a boxer is regarded as a nation’s great man; when mass meetings attended by millions are looked upon as a triumph – then, yes then, through all this turmoil a question still haunts us like a specter: What for? – Whither? – And what then?⁷

On Heidegger’s account, Europe stands poised on the brink of cultural suicide. Russia and America threaten to transform Europe into a place characterized by technological “progress” and social standardization. This is not to say that Russia and America are the ultimate *sources* of danger, however. Rather, Russia and America are merely symptomatic of an age characterized by the growth of global technology and mass communications, economic exploitation, experiential overload, historical amnesia, and mass spectacle.

Heidegger continues in the same vein:

The spiritual decline of the earth is so far advanced that the nations are in danger of losing the last bit of spiritual energy that makes it possible to see the decline (taken in relation to the history of ‘Being’), and to appraise it as such. This simple observation has nothing to do with *Kulterpessimismus*, and of course it has nothing to do with any sort of optimism either; for the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the transformation of men into a mass, the hatred and suspicion of everything free and creative, have assumed such proportions throughout

⁷Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 37-38.

the world that such childish categories as pessimism and optimism have long since become absurd.⁸

According to this passage, *all* of the nations in the world are in danger of succumbing to nihilism. So much so, in fact, that they are scarcely able to recognize that they are threatened at all. Hence, the worldly disenchantment, environmental destruction, growth of mass society, conformism, and philistinism that threatens to snuff out the last bit of spiritual vitality in Europe also threatens the world as a whole.

In this passage, Heidegger uses the phrase “darkening of the world” to describe the spiritual crisis that faces Europe and the world. What is the darkening of the world? “Darkening of the world means emasculation of the spirit, wasting away, repression, and misinterpretation of the spirit.”⁹ The “emasculation” of the spirit has four aspects. The first and most important aspect is the interpretation of spirit as intelligence. Second, the interpretation of spirit as intelligence engenders the corresponding illusion that spirit is a ready-to-hand tool that can be readily manipulated. Third, with spirit degraded to the level of a piece of equipment, all spiritual activities – poetry, art, politics, religion – are divided up into autonomous spheres where they become objects of conscious planning. Finally, spirit is situated into the realm of what moderns call “culture.” As Heidegger memorably writes, “In the end the spirit as utilitarian intelligence and the spirit as culture become holiday ornaments cultivated along with many other things.”¹⁰

⁸Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 38.

⁹Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 45.

¹⁰Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 49.

For Heidegger, the decline of the spirit is reflected in two views of philosophy that characterize the modern intellectual landscape. One such view is the notion that philosophy should be the foundational aspect of a nation's culture. The second view is that philosophy is "a cultural force, whether because it gives us an overall, systematic view of what is, supplying a useful chart by which we may find our way around the various possible things and realms of things, or because it relieves the sciences of their work by reflecting on their premises, basic concepts, and principles."¹¹ For Heidegger, both of these views are fundamentally mistaken. The first view fails to recognize the fact that philosophy is essentially an elitist endeavor, a concern of the few and not the vulgar. The second view glosses over the fact that philosophy is an inherently obtrusive activity. Hence, while the first view overestimates the value of philosophy by asking it to be the foundational aspect of a nation's culture, the second reduces it to the status of a schematic chart designed to help the modern mind to glide more effortlessly through the various spheres that characterize contemporary life.

In and of itself, the fact that these two "misinterpretations" of philosophy are so influential is indicative of the presence of a discernible spiritual crisis. Philosophy, after all, is itself a spiritual endeavor. Arguably, philosophy is the spiritual activity *par excellence* in that "philosophy is one of the few autonomous creative possibilities and at times necessities of man's historical being-there."¹² Thus, the fact that philosophy is misinterpreted by moderns says something about the nature of modern existence.

¹¹Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 10-11.

¹²Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 9.

On Heidegger's account, the process of spiritual emasculation began in the first half of the nineteenth century. At that time:

The lives of men began to slide into a world which lacked that depth from out of which the essential always comes to man and comes back to man, so compelling him to become superior and making him act in conformity to a rank. All things sank to the same level, a surface resembling a blind mirror that no longer reflects, that casts nothing back. The prevailing dimension became that of extension and number. Intelligence no longer meant a wealth of talent, lavishly spent, and the command of energies, but only what could be learned by everyone, the practice of a routine, always associated with a certain amount of sweat and a certain amount of show.¹³

That is to say, in the late nineteenth century, a flattening of the spiritual realm occurred that precluded the possibility of full human striving. Consequently, the worldly horizon within which men live took on a flat quality as well, resulting in a spiritual sterility. Into this spiritual vacuum steps science. The calculating and measuring spirit that characterizes the scientific world-view achieves such hegemony that it casts its shadow over everyone and everything. In this milieu, intelligence ceases being a quality cultivated in order to facilitate individual flourishing and instead becomes a universalized, routinized, and transparent quality inculcated into everyone by mass education.

Not surprisingly, it is in Russia and America where this development reaches its apex. Heidegger continues:

In America and in Russia this development grew into a boundless etcetera of indifference and always-the-sameness, so much so that the quantity took on a quality of its own. Since then the domination in those countries of a cross section of the indifferent mass has become something more than a dreary accident. It has become an active onslaught that threatens to destroy all rank and every world-creating

¹³Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 46.

impulse of the spirit, and calls it a lie. This is the onslaught of what we call the demonic (in the sense of destructive evil).¹⁴

Hence, in America and Russia, the decline of the spirit manifests itself in the indifference and uniformity that permeates the social whole. More recently, these tendencies have become so pronounced that all traces of nobility and spiritual vitality have become comprehensively destroyed. In America and Russia, the “demonic” process of spiritual flattening and egalitarian leveling is a phenomenon that reduces these countries to a spiritual vacuum.

The spiritual crisis that faces Europe in the form of America and Russia is a manifestation of the oblivion of Being. It was Nietzsche who had illuminated the oblivion of Being when he labeled such “highest concepts” as Being “the last cloudy streak of evaporating reality.” By this, Nietzsche meant that Being is “no more than an empty word. It means nothing real, tangible, material. Its meaning is an unreal vapor.” For Heidegger, Nietzsche is correct in the sense that, in the modern world, Being indeed has been reduced to the status of an “unreal vapor.” But whereas Nietzsche had welcomed the fact that “the error of Being” would no longer distract man from coming to grips with the true nature of his condition, Heidegger regards it as tragic. For Heidegger, Being is “the spiritual destiny of the Western world”¹⁵ The fact that Being has become an “unreal vapor” is thus a tragic reflection of the impending arrival of Western nihilism.

For Heidegger, the fate of the word Being is not atypical. In Heidegger’s view, all current language is characterized by the same vapidness. In sum, the modern use of language

¹⁴Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 46.

¹⁵Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 35, 137.

operates on the assumption that language is an indifferent means of communication.

Language “in general is worn out and used up – an indispensable but masterless means of communication that may be used as one pleases, as indifferent as a means of public transport, as a street car in which everyone rides in.”¹⁶ In Heidegger’s view, the fact that language is “worn and used up” is the final result of a lengthy process of linguistic deterioration.

This process of linguistic deterioration began after the twilight of Greek antiquity. For the ancient Greeks, Being was called *physis*. “In the age of the earliest and crucial unfolding of Western philosophy among the Greeks, who first raised the authentic question of the essent as such in its entirety, the essent was called *physis*.” The term *physis* is usually translated as “nature.” For Heidegger, this translation completely misses the essence of *physis*. *Physis* “denotes self-blossoming emergence (e.g. the blossoming of a rose), opening up, unfolding that which manifests itself in such unfolding and perseveres and endures in it; in short the realm of things that emerge and linger on.”¹⁷ The ontological power of the Greek concept of *physis* was destroyed by the Latin translation of *physis* into *natura*, which means “to be born” or “birth.” Hence, with the Latin translation, the real meaning of *physis* is cast into oblivion.

In Heidegger’s view, the example of *physis* is emblematic of the way in which the Roman translation of the Greek language destroyed the latter’s metaphysical power: “What happened in this translation from the Greek into the Latin is not accidental and harmless; it marks the first stage in the process by which we cut ourselves off and alienated ourselves

¹⁶Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 51.

¹⁷Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 13, 14.

from the original essence of Greek philosophy.”¹⁸ Subsequent historical developments only further served to cement this process of linguistic ossification. The Roman translation of the Greek language was passed on to the Christian Middle Ages. The Middle Ages passed on the Roman translation to the modern world. In sum, each historical epoch merely gives its own stamp of approval to the Roman destruction of the Greek language and passes it on to succeeding generations in essentially unaltered form.

Why is the Latin translation of *physis* to *natura* so important for Heidegger? The reason is that the Latin translation stands as a linguistic barrier between modern man and the Greek language. For Heidegger, this is a source of regret because of the metaphysical superiority of the Greek language: “For along with German the Greek language is (in regard to its possibilities for thought) at once the most powerful and spiritual of languages.”¹⁹ Considered from this perspective, the Latin translation of the Greek language is the decisive event whereby the spiritual heft of the Greek language is lost to posterity. But there is a notable exception to this linguistic decline: the German language.²⁰ Heidegger’s attempt to draw a linkage between the Greek and German languages will prove to be a gesture of no small importance, as we shall see. In the meantime, it will suffice to note the tragic nature of

¹⁸Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 13.

¹⁹Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 57.

²⁰Heidegger is not the only thinker to note the spiritual *gravitas* of the German language. Milan Kundera, hardly a proponent of German nationalism, opined that “In Kant’s language, even ‘Good morning,’ suitably pronounced, can take the shape of a metaphysical thesis. German is a language of *heavy* words.” Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984), 195. Of course, unlike Heidegger, Kundera did not draw any conclusions about the spiritual superiority of the German nation on this basis.

the process by which the original meaning of words such as *physis* are obscured by subsequent translations. For Heidegger, this is especially catastrophic because “it is in words and language that things first come into being and are.”²¹ Hence, the decay of language is an existentially significant phenomenon because it effects a corresponding distortion of the human relationship to reality.

As it stands, the end result of this process of linguistic decline is the spiritual crisis that faces Europe. “When the creators vanish from the nation, when they are barely tolerated as an irrelevant curiosity, an ornament, as eccentrics having nothing to do with real life; when authentic conflict ceases, converted into mere polemics, into the machinations and intrigues of man within the realm of the given,” then the nation in question sadly exhibits the symptoms of spiritual decline.²² What is a nation to do in the face of this decline? In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger gives an answer of sorts by way of imploring his own nation, the German nation, to actively offset the spiritual enervation that threatens to overtake not only the West but the entire globe.

III. The Destiny of the German Nation Revealed

At this point, it is useful to recall Heidegger’s discussion of the “people” (*Volk*) in *Being and Time*. In that discussion, Heidegger had argued that the full attainment of individual authenticity necessitates that *Da-sein* pursue the “destiny” (*Geschick*) of one’s *Volk*. That said, Heidegger fails to identify what the *Volk*’s pursuit of a destiny concretely entails. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, however, Heidegger argues that the destiny of

²¹Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 13.

²²Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 63.

the German nation is to engender a full-blown metaphysical revolution in the West that will put an end to the oblivion of Being.

In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes,

We are caught in a pincers. Situated in the center, our nation incurs the severest pressure. It is the nation with the most neighbors and hence the most endangered. With all this, it is the most metaphysical of nations. We are certain of this vocation, but our people will only be able to wrest a destiny from it if *within itself* it creates a resonance, a possibility of resonance for this vocation, and takes a creative view of its tradition. All this implies that this nation, as a historical nation, must move itself and thereby the history of the West beyond the center of their future 'happening' and into the primordial realm of the powers of Being. If the great decision regarding Europe is not to bring annihilation, that decision must be made in terms of new spiritual energies unfolding historically from out of the center.²³

This densely-written passage requires some careful examination. At the outset, it is necessary to address the following question: who, exactly, is “we”? Here, it is instructive to note the larger context within which these comments were made. Heidegger’s *An Introduction to Metaphysics* is based on the text of a lecture course that Heidegger gave in the summer semester of 1935 at the University of Freiburg in Breisgau. Hence, the “we” referred to here is Heidegger and his student listeners, all of whom are presumed to be representatives of the German nation.

Heidegger begins with a startling pronouncement: the German nation is caught in a “pincers.” The pincers that apply pressure on the German nation are the same pincers that apply pressure to the European continent: Russia and America. Indeed, all of Germany’s European “neighbors” are similarly threatened by the Russo-American axis. Centrally

²³Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 38-39.

located within Europe, Germany is pressured with singular intensity; it is “endangered” by its European neighbors as well as by Russia and America.

“With all this,” Heidegger declares, Germany is “the most metaphysical of nations.” Why is Germany more “metaphysical” than its European neighbors? It would seem to be the case that Germany is more metaphysical because of the spiritual profundity of its language. But in this passage, Germany’s status as the metaphysical nation *par excellence* is the result of the fact that it is the nation that is the most “endangered.” Seemingly, the experience of existential danger enables Germany to achieve a metaphysical depth that a more secure existence would render impossible. All in all, Germany’s metaphysical depth is the consequence of its spiritually-rich language as well as its experience of existential danger.

Germany’s singularly metaphysical nature propels what Heidegger calls its “vocation.” According to Heidegger, Germany pursues its vocation when the German nation takes “a creative view of its tradition.” Considered from this perspective, Germany must be both revolutionary *and* conservative if its people are to be able to accomplish the vocation that will enable it to achieve its destiny. Furthermore, if the German nation is to accomplish its vocation, it must do so “*within itself*.” In order to move into the “primordial realm of the powers of being,” the German nation must look inward and tap into its own spiritual energies that unfold “historically from out of the center” of itself.

As it turns out, tapping into the spiritual energies that lie at the heart of the German nation necessitates a return to the Greek origins of the Western world. Why the necessity of return? For Heidegger, the ancient Greeks existed in a state of proximity to Being that is unmatched in the history of the West. Hence, they experienced the struggle between Being

and appearance with unrivaled intensity. Because of this, the ancient Greeks were enabled to create works that enabled Being to become unconcealed. “Solely in the enduring struggle between Being and appearance did they wrest being from the essent, did they carry the essent to permanence and unconcealment: the gods and the state, the temples and the tragedy, the games and philosophy; all this in the midst of appearance, beset by appearance, but also knowing of its power.”²⁴

Considered in this light, in order for the German nation to accomplish its vocation, it must experience the struggle between Being and appearance previously experienced by the ancient Greeks. On Heidegger’s account, the German nation does this by merely asking “How does it stand with Being?” When contemporary Germans ask this question in a suitably serious manner, they effect a return to the epoch of ancient Greece: “To ask ‘How does it stand with Being?’ means nothing less than to recapture, to repeat (*wieder-holen*) the beginning of historical-spiritual existence.”²⁵

The return to the origins of Western existence is no mere exercise in historical nostalgia, however. Germany does not recapture the beginning of Western existence by merely emulating the example of the ancient Greeks. Rather, an authentic return to the beginnings of Western existence necessitates a return to the ground of Being that produced the golden age of ancient Greece. As Heidegger writes, “But we do not repeat a beginning by reducing it to something past and now known, which need merely be imitated; no, the

²⁴Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 106.

²⁵Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 39.

beginning must be begun again, more radically, with all the strangeness, darkness, insecurity that attend a true beginning.”²⁶

Germany’s return to the origins of Western existence is necessary to forestall the prospect of its own “annihilation.” Indeed, a German return to the origins of Western existence is necessary to forestall Europe’s annihilation at the hands of the American-Russian techno-economic behemoths. And Germany saves itself and Europe by asking the question of Being:

Thus the inquiry into the essent as such and as a whole, the asking of the question of Being, is one of the essential and fundamental conditions for an awakening of the spirit and hence for an original world of historical being-there. It is indispensable if the peril of world darkening is to be forestalled and if our nation in the center of the Western world is to take on its historical mission.²⁷

Hence, serious inquiry into the question of Being is the impetus to a spiritual rejuvenation of the Western world.

What conclusions can be drawn about Heidegger’s call for a German national uprising? The least that can be said is that Heidegger’s middle-period thought is tainted by nationalistic, chauvinistic, and xenophobic enthusiasms. If Heidegger’s nationalism is evident in his attempt to meld his identity with that of the German nation, his chauvinism is manifest in his conviction that the German nation is singularly chosen to save Europe from the threat of nihilism. As for the question of xenophobia, it will suffice to note Heidegger’s call for the German nation to look “*within itself*” to pursue its vocation. Seemingly, the “foreign” elements that fall outside of the scope of German culture are superfluous influences

²⁶Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 39.

²⁷Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 50.

that hinder Germany's attempt to realize its destiny. The fact that Heidegger's middle-period thought is sporadically prone to nationalistic, chauvinistic, and xenophobic outbursts is self-evident, as is the influence of Hellenism on the thought of the middle-period.

In its mood of longing for the world of the Greek *polis*, Heidegger's thought serves as a decisive confirmation of an observation made by Nietzsche in the *Will to Power*:

German philosophy as a whole . . . is the most fundamental form of romanticism and homesickness that has ever been. . . . One is no longer at home anywhere, at last one longs back for that place in which alone one can be at home, because it is the only place in which one would want to be at home: the Greek world! But it is precisely in that direction that all bridges are broken – except the rainbow bridges of concepts! . . . concepts! . . . To be sure, one must be very subtle, very light, very thin to step across these bridges! But what happiness there is already in this will to spirituality, to ghostliness almost. . . . One wants to go back through the Church Fathers to the Greeks. . . . German philosophy . . . is at least will to Renaissance . . . the digging up of ancient philosophy, above all of the pre-Socratics – the most deeply buried of all Greek temples! . . . We are growing more Greek by the day; at first, as is only fair, in concepts and evaluations, as Hellenizing ghosts as it were; but one day, let us hope, also in our bodies!²⁸

From a Nietzschean perspective, Heideggerian ontology uses the question of Being in order to build a “rainbow bridge of concepts” back to the Greek world, a rainbow that will enable Heidegger's fellow Germans to assert themselves as modern day Greeks in both mind and body.

So, Heidegger aims to recreate the ancient Greek *polis* on modern Germanic terms. But what is the deeper reason for the nationalistic tendencies in Heidegger's thought? On the basis of the aforementioned passages, Heidegger's concern with the question of Being provides the impetus for his nationalism: “That is why we have related the question of being

²⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), 225-226.

to the destiny of Europe, where the destiny of the earth is being decided – while our own historical being-there proves to be the center for Europe itself.”²⁹ When the German nation asks the question of Being, Heidegger argues, it is enabled to summon the spiritual will to power to pursue its vocation. And, of course, Heidegger’s chauvinism is interconnected with his emphasis on the ontological significance of language. Language conditions the way in which man relates to Being, and the spiritual strength of the German language seemingly enables the German nation to achieve a proximity to Being that was only achieved by the ancient Greeks.

However, in and of itself, this does not explain why Heidegger would identify the collective entity of the *nation* as an ontologically significant entity. Why the “we”? Heidegger’s attempt to merge his identity with the German nation is especially striking when considered in light of the fact that, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger had identified the individual human being (*Da-sein*) as the place in which Being becomes temporally unconcealed. What accounts for Heidegger’s leap from the individual to the collective? The answer lies in Heidegger’s discussion of the work of art.

IV. Heidegger’s Concept of the Work of Art

During the same time in which he delivered the lectures that would subsequently be published as *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger delivered a lecture entitled “The Origin of the Work of Art” (*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*).³⁰ In this essay, Heidegger

²⁹Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 42.

³⁰For more on Heidegger’s “Origin” essay, see Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

advances a bold new theory of aesthetics. According to Heidegger, the Western mind typically views the work of art as the union of matter and form: “The distinction between matter and form is the conceptual schema which is used, in the greatest variety of ways, quite generally for all art theory and aesthetics.”³¹ In this conceptual schema, the work of art is essentially formed matter shaped by the hand of the artist. However, for Heidegger, the form-matter schema is an entirely inappropriate way of viewing the work of art because it is only appropriate in reference to equipment. Given the obvious inadequacy of the form-matter distinction, then, how should we view the work of art? Heidegger’s answer is that the work of art is the place where the truth of an entity comes to stand in the light of its being: “In the work of art the truth of an entity has set itself to work.”³²

Heidegger points to a painting by Van Gogh of a pair of peasant shoes to elucidate his point. At first glance, Van Gogh’s painting merely depicts an empty, unused pair of peasant shoes that exists within an undefined space. To Heidegger, however, Van Gogh’s painting illuminates something much more. Heidegger’s phenomenological description is worth quoting in full:

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrate the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the

³¹Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 27.

³²Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 36.

impending childhood and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-without-itself.³³

On this account, the Van Gogh painting illuminates not only a pair of peasant shoes but also the earth and the world of the peasant woman who uses them. In this sense, the Van Gogh painting is a place that reveals the peasant shoes in the sense of the Greek word *alētheia*, the “un-concealment” of Being.

So, the Van Gogh painting reveals the earth and the world of the peasant shoes. But what is the earth? “Earth is that which comes forth and shelters. Earth, self-dependent, is effortless, and untiring. Upon the earth and in it, the historical man grounds his dwelling in the world.”³⁴ In this highly poetic description, the multifaceted nature of the earth is apparent. In it, at least three meanings are apparent. For one, the earth is the self-concealing dimension of the peasant shoes. Second, the earth is the autonomous aspect of the peasant shoes that exists independently of human making. Third, the earth is the ground upon which the peasant woman stands. These three definitions of the earth permeate Heidegger’s discussion of the work of art.

What is the world? For Heidegger, “the world is the self-secluding openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people. Wherever those decisions of our history that relate to our very being are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world

³³Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 33-34.

³⁴Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 46.

worlds.”³⁵ Hence, the world is not the individual world of the peasant woman, but is rather the collective world of the people of which she is a part. In other words, the world is the historico-communal whole in which the peasant shoes are embedded.

Given the fact that the work of art is characterized by the simultaneous presence of the earth and the world of an entity, it would seem to be the case that the earth and the world are static in nature. This, however, is not the case. There is a battle that occurs between the earth and the world that facilitates the ontological revelation that occurs in the work of art. The battle between the earth and the world is the natural consequence of their dissimilar natures. In the work of art, the world strives to surmount the earth. For its part, the earth passively resists the world’s attempt to dominate it: “The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening, it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world to itself and keep it there.”³⁶ However, there is no ultimate victor in this agonistic struggle, for both parties require the continued existence of the other. The earth requires the world to disclose its self-secluding nature even as the world requires the earth to be its solid foundation.

For Heidegger, the battle between the earth and the world is the essence of the work of art. In this sense, one can say that the battle between the earth and the world is the “work-being” of the work of art: “The work-being of the work consists in the fighting of the battle between world and earth.”³⁷ Thus, the work of art is characterized by the battle between the

³⁵Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 48.

³⁶Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 49.

³⁷Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 49.

earth and the world, a battle that engenders the ontological unconcealment of an entity that occurs in the work of art.

Heidegger's "Origin" essay is one of the most celebrated pieces of Heidegger's entire *oeuvre*. As it stands, Heidegger's discussion of the work of art serves to illuminate the changes wrought by Heidegger's turn. For one, it evinces Heidegger's newfound interest in the ontological significance of language. The work of art, after all, is a linguistic phenomenon inasmuch as "All art, as the advent of truth of what is, is, as such, *essentially poetry*."³⁸ Similarly, by emphasizing the key role that the world of a historical people plays in the work of art, Heidegger exhibits his determination to elucidate the temporal nature of Being. Moreover, Heidegger's attempt to distance himself from the form-content schema that characterizes traditional Western aesthetics, in its own way, manifests his cognizance of the oblivion of Being. But how does Heidegger's discussion of the work of art relate to the Germanic nationalism exhibited in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to consider a particular passage from the text of Heidegger's "Origin" essay. At a later point in the essay, Heidegger lists the various ways in which truth becomes manifest: "One essential way in which truth establishes itself in the beings it has opened up is truth setting itself into work. Another way in which truth occurs is the act that founds a political state."³⁹ From the standpoint of this study, of course, it is Heidegger's almost casual mention of political founding that is the most interest. To Heidegger, the act by which a political state is founded is an act of ontological

³⁸Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 72.

³⁹Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 61-62.

significance. Hence, truth “happens” not only in Van Gogh paintings and other works that appeal to the aesthetic palate, but in political states as well. The state is akin to a work of art.

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of this particular passage. Heidegger’s notion that the founding of a political state is an act of ontological revelation has the ultimate effect of opening a space for Heidegger’s collectivistic tendencies. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger used his phenomenology of “Being-with” (*Mitsein*) to justify his movement from individualism to collectivism. In the “Origin” essay, however, Heidegger uses his aesthetic theory to justify his embrace of collectivism. In a single sentence, Heidegger’s “Origin” essay completes the process, already begun in *Being and Time*, of substituting the collective for the individual as the locus of ontological unconcealment.

Unfortunately, Heidegger does not explore this particular manifestation of ontological truth in any particular detail in his “Origin” essay. However, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* contains a brief but illuminating discussion of political founding. Here, Heidegger argues that the establishment and consolidation of the *polis* is performed by exceptional individuals whose experience of *pathos* propels creative action.

V. The Founding of the *Polis*

Heidegger’s discussion of the founding of the *polis* occurs in the context of a meditation on the choral “ode to man” in Sophocles’s *Antigone*. Heidegger consults Sophocles’s *Antigone* in order to flesh out the definition of human existence advanced by Parmenides. The lines of the choral ode that arouse Heidegger’s discussion of political founding are the following: “Rising high above his place, he for the sake of adventure takes

the essent for essent loses his place in the end.” For Heidegger, what is key about this sentence is the fact that it speaks of man’s “place,” the *polis*.

Heidegger’s definition of the *polis* gives a wholly new twist to a familiar concept.⁴⁰

When translated from the original Greek, *polis* is conventionally translated as “city” or “city-state.” For Heidegger, this translation fails to capture the real meaning of the word.

Heidegger’s definition of the *polis* is worth quoting in full:

Polis means, rather, the place, the there, wherein and as which historical being-there. The *polis* is the historical place, the there *in* which, *out of* which, and *for* which history happens. To this place and scene of history belong the gods, the temples, the priests, the festivals, the games, the poets, the thinker, the ruler, the council of elders, the assembly of the people, the army and the fleet.⁴¹

The *polis*, then, is the place in which man’s historical existence attains concreteness. Hence, the *polis* is the place in which man experiences the flow of history. Indeed, the *polis* can be viewed as the source of man’s history because it is the place that gives meaning to man’s existence as a historical being. All in all, the *polis* is the center stage in which man acts out the history of Being.

In defining the *polis* as site rather than city-state, Heidegger attempts to recover the ancient Greek concept of space. For moderns, space is defined by extension. However, the ancient Greeks had no word for space. Rather, space was subsumed under the rubric of the

⁴⁰Heidegger’s 1935 *Metaphysics* lecture would not be the last time that he would address the question of the *polis*. In his 1942 lecture on Holderlin’s hymn “The Ister,” Heidegger argues that the translation of *polis* as “city-state” or “state” needlessly confuses it with modern state formations. For Heidegger, “the *polis* is the realm and the place around which everything question-worthy and uncanny (*Unheimliche*) turns in an exceptional sense.” Heidegger, *Holderlin’s Hymn ‘The Ister,’* trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 80-81.

⁴¹Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 152.

Greek term *topos* (place): “they experienced the spatial on the basis not of extension but of place (*topos*).” However, even the term *topos* does not fully capture how the ancient Greeks experienced space. As Heidegger argues, the ancient Greeks experienced space as “*chōra*, which signifies neither place nor space but that which is occupied by what stands there. The place belongs to the thing itself. Each of all the various things has its place. That which becomes is placed in the local ‘space’ and emerges from it.”⁴² Hence, rather than viewing space as an extended medium that contains things, the ancient Greeks regarded space as the product of the things themselves.⁴³

Viewed in light of the Greek concept of *chōra*, the *polis* cannot be regarded as an anonymous piece of territory but as the space created by the things that exist within its purview. As described by Heidegger, the *polis* is constituted by everything from supernatural entities (the gods) to buildings (the temples) to various classes of individuals (the priests, the poets, the thinkers, the ruler) to rituals (the festivals, the games) to political institutions (the council of elders, the assembly of the people) to military institutions (the army and the fleet). As the “foundation and scene of man’s being-there,” the *polis* is the “point” at which supernatural deities, classes of individuals, rituals, military and political institutions “meet” at the site of history.⁴⁴

⁴²Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 66.

⁴³For Heidegger, the transformation of the Greek concept of *chōra* into the modern notion of extension was inaugurated by Platonic philosophy: “the transformation of the barely apprehended essence of place (*topos*) and of *chōra* into a ‘space’ defined by extension was initiated by Platonic philosophy, i.e., in the interpretation of Being as idea.” Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 66.

⁴⁴Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 152.

So, the *polis* is the historical site where various things converge. But in what sense is the *polis* a political place? Moderns would be inclined to argue that the *polis* is political because its inhabitants, whether they be citizen or non-citizen, maintain a certain relationship with the “state.” For his part, Heidegger agrees that the *polis* is a political entity of sorts. That being said, Heidegger’s explanation of *why* the *polis* is political radically departs from the modern concept of the political. From a Heideggerian perspective, the *polis* is political because it is the “site of history.” As Heidegger explains, “All this does not first belong to the *polis*, does not become political by entering into a relation with a statesman and a general and the business of the state. No, it is political, i.e. at the site of history provided there be (for example) poets *alone*, but then really poets, priests *alone*, but then really priests, rulers *alone*, but then really rulers.”⁴⁵ The *polis*, then, is not political because it is characterized by a “social contract” between the individual and the state. Rather, the *polis* is political because it is the site of history where isolated individuals meet in a communal context.

Needless to say, this is an exceedingly strange concept of the political. The gap that separates Heidegger’s concept of the political from the modern conception is readily apparent in Heidegger’s account of the process by which man founds the site of history.

Again, Heidegger:

Be, but this means: as violent men to use power, to become pre-eminent in historical being as creators, as men of action. Pre-eminent in the historical place, they become at the same time *apolis*, without city and place, lonely strange and alien, without issue amid the essent as a whole, at the same time without statute and limit, without structure and order, because they themselves must first create all this.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 152.

⁴⁶Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 152-153.

Individuals facilitate their entrance into the realm of the *polis* by creating it; thanks to the constructive activity of “violent men,” the *polis* comes into existence. By asserting themselves as “creators” adept at the utilization of “power,” “men of action” create the “statute and limit” and “structure and order” that characterizes *polis*-life. Furthermore, by asserting themselves as the creators of the *polis*, they concomitantly realize themselves as the “pre-eminent” individuals of the “historical place” that they actively construct. All in all, the creation of the *polis* is accomplished by singular individuals whose aesthetic-creative activity marks them as the superior few who tower over the historical place that they effectively create.

For Heidegger, man is primordially homeless prior to his entrance into the *polis*. In this sense, one can say that man is uncanny at the most primeval level of his existence. As Heidegger writes, “We are taking the strange, the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*), as that which casts us out of the “homely,” i.e. the customary, familiar, secure. The unhomely (*Unheimische*) prevents us from making ourselves at home and therein it is overpowering.”⁴⁷ Man is thus unhomely because it is his nature to break out of the “customary, familiar, secure.” Considered from this viewpoint, the notion that man is naturally at home, and that the experience of uncanniness is a mere derivation from the normal state of affairs, is revealed to be a fallacy.

For Heidegger, this fallacious idea is interconnected with the notion that man himself is the sole master of the powers that lie at his disposal. “How far man is from being at home in his own essence is revealed by his opinion of himself as he who invented and could have

⁴⁷Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 151.

invented language and understanding, building and poetry.”⁴⁸ Man’s capacity to create “language and understanding, building and poetry” is the result of his receptivity to the uncanny powers that seize him rather than any power he has over them. In sum, man does not create the overpowering forces that propel his greatest artistic achievements but is rather the medium through which these forces work their magic.

Still, Heidegger argues that the *polis* is founded by “violent men.” This is a provocative claim, to say the least. What does Heidegger mean when he contends that the founding of the *polis* is performed by “violent men”? Heidegger insists that the “violence” spoken of here is not necessarily synonymous with physical violence: “Here we use the word violence in an essential sense extending beyond the common usage of arbitrary brutality.”⁴⁹ Thus, Heidegger is at pains to suggest that ontological violence is not to be confused with mere “arbitrary brutality.”

Furthermore, Heidegger insists that the violent man is not violent by virtue of the power that he subjectively wields over his adversaries, but by virtue of his ability to channel the powers that seize him. As Heidegger writes, “The violence of poetic speech, of thinking projection, of building configuration, of the action that creates states is not a function of faculties that man has, but a taming and ordering of powers by virtue of which the essent opens up as such when man moves into it.”⁵⁰ Hence, the ontological violence that occurs when man founds the *polis* is not subjectively created by the state-founder, but rather is a

⁴⁸Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 156.

⁴⁹Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 150.

⁵⁰Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 29.

manifestation of the founder's attempt to tame and order the powers that assail him.

So, the violence that accompanies the founding of the *polis* is neither synonymous with ontic violence nor subjective in nature. However, Heidegger's notion of violence certainly does not preclude the possibility of ontic brutality. As Gregory Fried notes, "But while this violence is not mere 'brutality and arbitrariness,' Heidegger makes no attempt to deny that the ontological catastrophe (in the sense of its Greek roots as upheaval and overturning) wrought by the *apolis* (sic) creators has ontic repercussions."⁵¹ This much is evident in Heidegger's other pronouncements on the founding process.

We can see the more ominous implications of Heidegger's view of the founding process in several key passages. One such passage is the following:

The violent one, the creative man, who sets forth into the un-said, who breaks into the un-thought, compels the unhappened to happen and the unseen appear – this violent one stands at all times in venture (*tolma*, line 371). In venturing to master being, he must risk dispersion, in-stability, disorder, mischief. The higher the summit of historical being-there, the deeper will be the abyss, the more abrupt the fall into the unhistorical, which merely thrashes about in issueless and placeless confusion.⁵²

Considered in relation to the act of political founding, this passage is disturbing indeed. For what it highlights is the highly dangerous and precarious nature of the founding act. The act of founding is prone to "dispersion, instability, mischief." Such an insight would not have surprised Machiavelli, to be sure. However, the type of grandiose experimentation alluded to in this passage occurs in a realm far removed from the realm of Machiavellian *raison d'état*. The founding act is an aesthetic endeavor, the side effects of which are "political." The

⁵¹Gregory Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos: From Being to Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 142-148.

⁵²Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 161.

political founder attempts to “master Being,” not secure a monopoly of violence over a given territory. Because the ultimate aims of founding are ontological rather than political, the process of founding is marked by a radical indeterminacy. By alluding to the “abyss” that lurks beneath the feet of the “violent men” who found the *polis*, Heidegger advances a political vision that is more Nietzschean than Machiavellian.⁵³

Heidegger points to the ominous implications of the founding act in another passage.

There, Heidegger writes the following:

Being itself hurls man into this breaking-away, which drives him beyond himself to venture toward being, to accomplish being, to stabilize it in the work, and so open the essent as a whole. Therefore the violent one knows no kindness and conciliation (*Güte und Begütigung*) (in the usual sense); he cannot be mollified or appeased by success or prestige. In all this the violent, creative man sees only the semblance of fulfillment, and this he despises. In willing the unprecedented, he casts aside all help. To him disaster is the deepest and broadest affirmation of the overpowering. In the shattering of the wrought work, in the knowledge that it is mischief (*Unfug*) and *sarma* (a dunghill), he leaves the overpowering to its order (*Fug*).⁵⁴

Here, Heidegger argues that the founders exist entirely beyond the realm of social convention and morality. That is to say, the founding creator’s attempt to consolidate the *polis* is

⁵³Besides the Nietzschean overman (*Übermensch*), Heidegger’s notion of the political founder recalls Rousseau’s notion of the legislator in the *Social Contract*. Like Heidegger’s “violent man,” Rousseau’s founding legislator is entrusted with the Herculean task of creating a political community *ex nihilo*: “One who dares to undertake the founding of a people should feel that he is capable of changing human nature, so to speak; of transforming each individual, who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole, into a part of a larger whole from which this individual receives, in a sense, his life and his being, of altering man’s constitution in order to strengthen it; of substituting a partial and moral existence for the physical and independent existence we have all received from nature.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Judith D. Masters (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978), 68. Of course, Heidegger would find Rousseau’s description of political founding to be entirely too subjective. For Heidegger, the founding act is as disclosive as it is actively constructive.

⁵⁴Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 163.

performed in a social and ethical vacuum. The approval or disapproval conferred by the founder's fellows is of absolutely no consequence because the founder "cannot be mollified by success or prestige." Nor do demands for ethical compassion and practical restraint factor into the equation because "the violent one knows no kindness or conciliation." All that matters is the endeavor to stabilize Being in the site. Thus, the founder need not be troubled by the potential for disaster. Indeed, to such an individual, the potential for disaster is a salutary reminder of the authentically creative nature of the founding act: "to him disaster is the deepest and broadest affirmation of the overpowering."⁵⁵ Thus, in embarking upon dangerous experimentation, the founding creator affirms the truth of his confrontation with the overpowering.

VI. Conclusion

As we have seen, Heidegger's 1929 turn witnessed a turn away from subjectivity, a turn towards a greater attentiveness to the ontological significance of language, a more thoroughgoing grappling with the temporal dimension of human existence, and an intensified cognizance of the contemporary oblivion of Being. Heidegger's *pathos* over the contemporary oblivion of Being informs his diagnosis of the contemporary crisis of the West. For Heidegger, this crisis is manifest in the fact that Europe is caught between the twin pincers of Russia and America, two countries that threaten to transform the Continent into a place characterized by economic hustle and bustle, the disappearance of historical memory, the degradation of heroism, and mass spectacle. Hence, for Heidegger, the Russian/American axis epitomizes a social order in which worldly disenchantment,

⁵⁵Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 163.

ecological devastation, the growing dominance of the mass man and mindless conformity are the norm. Russia and American represent the nightmare that awaits Europe and the world if its present course continues unabated.

Heidegger's scathing critique of Russian communism and American corporate capitalism represents one of the most powerful critiques of these two ideological systems penned by any thinker of the twentieth century. Heidegger brazenly declares that Russia and America are "metaphysically the same": "We have said, Europe lies in a pincers between Russia and America, which are metaphysically the same, namely in regard to their world character and relation to the spirit."⁵⁶ Russia and America both have the same "world character" because both seek to achieve global hegemony. Moreover, Russia and American both have the same "relationship to the spirit" because both countries are characterized by technological *libido dominandi* and social standardization. In making these assertions, Heidegger effectively undermines the self-understanding of both systems. After all, both Russia and America viewed themselves as alternatives to the other. For his part, Heidegger boldly declares that their philosophical presuppositions are essentially identical. Both systems are technological in their essence and seek to remake the world in their image. Perceived differences notwithstanding, Russia and America are two sides of the same coin.

Heidegger's conflation of Russianism and Americanism is nothing short of breathtaking. That being said, Heidegger's response to the modern crisis of the West is perhaps even more startling. For Heidegger, a spiritual rejuvenation of the German homeland is the panacea to the crisis of the modern West. Implicit in this call is the specter

⁵⁶Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 45.

of nationalism, chauvinism, and xenophobia. Heidegger exhibits a profound sense of German national consciousness in his diagnosis of the crisis that threatens the German nation and in his call for it to realize its world-historic destiny. Heidegger's notion that the German language is the most spiritual of languages and his corresponding conviction that Germany is the most metaphysical of nations pushes his nationalistic tendencies to chauvinistic extremes. And Heidegger's contention that the realization of Germany's destiny necessitates that it creatively appropriate its tradition evinces a certain xenophobia as well in that it exhibits an apparent suspicion of the external cultural influences that stand outside of the realm of German culture.

Clearly, Heidegger's middle-period work exhibits tendencies that can only be described as nationalistic and chauvinistic. The impetus for Heidegger's nationalism lies in his theory of aesthetics. Heidegger's concept of the work of art identifies how the work of art is the place in which the truth of an entity sets itself to work; and for Heidegger, the work of art rises to unconcealment in the founding of the *polis*: "Unconcealment occurs only when it is achieved by work: the work of the word in poetry, the work of stone in temple and statue, the work of the word in thought, the work of the *polis* in which all this is grounded and preserved."⁵⁷ Indeed, considered from the perspective of this statement, the *polis* is of supreme importance because it grounds and preserves all of the other works of a historical *Volk*.

In Heidegger's description, the founding of the *polis* is accomplished by "violent men" whose confrontation with the "overpowering" fuels the founding process. Heidegger's

⁵⁷Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 191.

apparent willingness to sanction grandiose experimentation and his seeming obliviousness to the human costs of such experimentation is ominous indeed. To the founder, the more beautiful and elevated the *polis*, the better. Furthermore, the more dangerous the nature of the experiment involved, the more justified the founder is in styling himself as an authentic creator.

This political irresponsibility is rendered even more toxic by the utter vagueness of the Heideggerian political vision. To be sure, Heidegger is hardly the only thinker to be frustratingly vague about political matters. For example, the “realm of freedom” that will follow the communist revolution is only described in the vaguest terms by Marx: “in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner.”⁵⁸ The same is true of Nietzsche’s description of the planetary aristocracy that will step into the vacuum created by the death of God and steer humanity towards a new goal. But Heidegger outdoes both Heidegger and Marx in conceptual fuzziness. As Eric Voegelin puts it, “Gone are the ludicrous images of positivist, socialist, and super man. In their place, Heidegger puts Being itself, emptied of all content, to whose approaching power we must submit.”⁵⁹ Whereas

⁵⁸Karl Marx, “The German Ideology,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 160.

⁵⁹Eric Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, ed. Manfred Henningsen (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 276. Like Heidegger, Voegelin’s thought bears the imprint of the influence of Husserl. For a good discussion of the Voegelin-Husserl relationship see, “Europe, Truth, and History: Husserl and Voegelin on Philosophy and the

Marx and Nietzsche's Gnostic visions of the future possessed limited content, Heidegger's eschatological vision of the future is content-free. Seemingly, the home that is created by the founder's creative endeavor is defined by its very indeterminacy.

In his middle-period thought, Heidegger diagnosed the crisis of homelessness in the West and argued that a spiritual rejuvenation of the Western world is the cure. For Heidegger, such a rejuvenation does not require a mere conservation of the *status quo*, but rather the founding of wholly new structures. As Thomas L. Pangle puts it, "Heidegger never ceased indicating his loathing for every kind of mere conservatism, his anguish at the contemporary 'world-night,' his fear of an increasingly mechanized, comfortable future, and his radical hopes and longings for a shattering new age of either transformation or debacle (*Untergang*)."⁶⁰ In an age in which Being has been reduced to the status of a mere "vapor," the only authentic options are "transformation" or "debacle." For the middle-period Heidegger, it is up to select individuals to effect such a "transformation" of the Western world by founding the *polis* that enables a historical people to exist in a state of proximity to Being. In his "Origin" essay, Heidegger argues that the founding of a political state is a process by which "truth establishes itself in the beings it has opened up." Arguably,

Identity of Europe," in *International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Eric Voegelin*, ed. Stephen A. McKnight and Geoffrey L. Price (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997). For a discussion of the relationship between Heidegger and Voegelin, see Michael Henry, "Voegelin and Heidegger as Critics of Modernity," Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Eric Voegelin Society, 2000.

⁶⁰Thomas L. Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 47.

Heidegger's rectorship represents the German philosopher's attempt to contribute to such a truth-establishing event in the modern world.⁶¹

Needless to say, the founding that occurred in Germany in 1933 was more of a “debacle” than a “transformation.” Far from establishing a political home for the German *Volk*, the German National Socialist movement left millions of Germans and neighboring Europeans literally homeless. By participating in the German National Socialist movement, Heidegger exacerbated the disease that he meant to cure. As damning as it is, however, Heidegger's rectorship debacle does not exhaust his significance for politics. For in the mid-1930s, Heidegger's turn would come to a conclusion, and his thought about the proper response to the contemporary oblivion of Being would once again undergo a fundamental change. This Heidegger, as it turns out, offers a more restrained and less politically ambitious tone than the Heidegger of 1933. This kinder, gentler Heidegger is the subject of the following chapter.

⁶¹In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger exhibits an ambiguous attitude towards German National Socialism. In that work, Heidegger observes that “The works that are being peddled about nowadays as the philosophy of National Socialism but have nothing to do whatever with the inner truth and greatness of this movement (namely the encounter between global technology and modern man) – have all been written by men fishing in the troubled waters of ‘values’ and ‘totalities.’” Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 199. Hence, to the Heidegger of 1935, the Nazi movement still possesses an “inner truth and greatness” worthy of commendation. What accounts for the “inner truth and greatness” of German National Socialism? Seemingly, it is because the Nazi movement facilitates “the encounter between global technology and modern man.” However, this addendum is wholly foreign to the text of the original lecture. Rather, it represents the view of German National Socialism that Heidegger held in 1953, the year that *An Introduction to Metaphysics* was published. So the ultimate source of Heidegger's continuing support for German National Socialism lies elsewhere. At the same time, Heidegger's critique of the “works” of the “unnamed men” who supposedly “fish” in the waters of “values” and “totalities” signals his disappointment with the movement's apparent failure to live up to its potential.

Chapter 4: Homecoming in a Post-Technological Age: Building, Dwelling, and Thinking in the Fourfold

Cordial greetings to the new honorary citizen
of their common hometown Messkirch –
Bernhard Welte – from an older one . . . May
this feastday of homage be joyful and life-giving.
May the contemplative spirit of all participants
be unanimous. For there is need for contemplation
whether and how, in the age of uniform technological
world civilization, there can still be such a thing as
home.

Martin Heidegger
Thought Experiences

I. Introduction

Heidegger's 1929 "turn" (*Kehre*) came to an end in the mid-1930s when he confronted the thought of Nietzsche.¹ Of course, Heidegger had been aware of Nietzsche prior to the mid-1930s, and it is not difficult to discern the influence of Nietzsche on Heidegger's early thought. Why, then, the sudden importance of Nietzsche? In the early 1930s, Heidegger attempted to carve out a niche for his own philosophical project, and Nietzsche posed a special problem. In Nietzsche, Heidegger encountered a kindred spirit, a thinker who had leveled a critique of Western rationalism as radical as Heidegger's own "destructuring" (*Destruktion*) of the Occidental metaphysical tradition. Hence, the confrontation with Nietzsche compelled Heidegger to distinguish his own thought from that of a close rival. In

¹For more on the relationship between Heidegger and Nietzsche, see Gregory Bruce Smith, *Nietzsche, Heidegger and the Transition to Postmodernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

so doing, Heidegger cleared a path for the third phase of his philosophy, a phase that would begin in 1947 with the publication of his “Letter on Humanism” essay.

What Heidegger would take away from his encounter with Nietzsche would leave an indelible imprint on his later thought. With regards to Nietzsche himself, Heidegger came to the conclusion that his German forebear had failed in his attempt to break free from the grip of Western metaphysics. More specifically, Nietzsche’s attempt failed because his endeavor to reverse Platonism is itself an expression of Platonism. “As a mere countermovement,” Heidegger writes, Nietzsche’s anti-Platonist project “remains, as does everything ‘anti,’ held fast in the essence of that over against which it moves.”² Instead, Nietzsche’s philosophy brings Platonism to its final consummation.

Prior to Nietzsche, Western metaphysicians thought about Being (*Sein*) in relation to beings. In Nietzsche’s thought, however, Being is just another among a myriad of dissimilar beings. Because Being disappears completely in Nietzsche’s philosophy, future metaphysical thinking about the Being of beings is manifestly impossible. “For inasmuch as through Nietzsche metaphysics has in a certain sense divested itself of its own essential possibility,” Heidegger declares, “other possibilities of metaphysics can no longer appear.”³ Indeed, inasmuch as the West itself has been defined by metaphysics, one can say that in Nietzsche’s philosophy the West itself has exhausted its own possibility.

²Martin Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche ‘God is Dead,’” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, ed. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 61.

³Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche,” 53.

I have merely scratched the surface of Heidegger's provocative interpretation of Nietzsche's thought. Needless to say, Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche has aroused much criticism, and this is not the place to explore the reading or the critique. Still, the preceding summary is useful in the fact that it illuminates Heidegger's conclusion that Nietzsche's thought brings the Western metaphysical tradition to an end. Heidegger does not argue that philosophy will cease to make its presence felt, however. Rather, for Heidegger metaphysics lives on in the form of modern technology.

In Heidegger's view, technology is the logical outgrowth of Western philosophy and its scientific offshoot. Philosophy engenders modern science, and modern science gives birth to technology: "Philosophy turns into the empirical science of man, of all that can become for man the experiential object of his technology, the technology by which he establishes himself in the world by working on it in the manifold modes of making and shaping."⁴ And lying at the heart of modern technology is Nietzsche's will to power doctrine, the final manifestation of Western metaphysics. Viewed from this perspective, Heidegger's encounter with Nietzsche brought him face-to-face with the metaphysical essence of technology.

After his confrontation with Nietzsche, Heidegger would proceed to level a powerful critique of modern technology, a critique that was greatly assisted by the work of another German thinker, Ernst Jünger. For Heidegger, Jünger's 1932 book *The Worker (Der Arbeiter)* illuminates how the worker is the paradigmatic figure of the modern technological

⁴Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers), 434.

world.⁵ According to Jünger, in the modern world “each individual life becomes, ever more unambiguously, the life of a worker; and that, following the wars of knights, kings, and citizens, we now have wars of *workers*.”⁶ However, whereas Jünger affirmed the arrival of a world “stamped” by the “form” (*Gestalt*) of the worker, Heidegger took a more negative view.

In his writings on technology, Heidegger identified numerous dangers that are concomitant with the rise of modern technology. Such dangers include technological dehumanization and increased conflict, among others. However, for Heidegger one of the most disturbing aspects of modern technology is the way in which it uproots human beings from the earth. As he put it in the famous *Der Spiegel* interview:

Everything is functioning. This is exactly what is so uncanny, that everything is functioning and that the functioning drives us more and more to even further functioning, and that technology tears men loose from the earth and uproots them. I do not know whether you were frightened, but I at any rate was frightened when I saw pictures coming from the moon to the earth. We don't need any atom bomb. The uprooting of man has already taken place. The only thing we have left is purely technological relationships. This is no longer the earth on which man lives. As you know, I recently had a long conversation with Rene Char of the Provence, the poet and resistance fighter. Rocket bases are being built in the Provence and the country is being devastated in an incredible way. This poet, who certainly cannot be suspected of sentimentality and of glorification of the idyllic, tells me that the uprooting of man

⁵Heidegger's view of Jünger's work is considerably more complex than this summary would seem to suggest. It should also be recognized that Heidegger's appropriation of Jünger pre-dates the mid-1930s. Indeed, Jünger's work was very much on Heidegger's mind when he embarked upon his rectorship adventure in 1933. At that time, Heidegger thought that the German National Socialist movement would create a more authentic nation of worker-soldiers. With the disappointment of these hopes, Heidegger resigned himself to the thought that political action was powerless to forestall the technological dystopia described by Jünger

⁶Ernst Jünger, “Total Mobilization,” in *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. Richard Wolin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 128.

which is taking place there will be the end, if poetry and thought do not once more succeed to a position of might without force.⁷

For Heidegger and Char, this uprooting is not a future prospect, but a given fact. Man no longer dwells on the earth. Moreover, the human connection to other human beings has been destroyed in a world where “the only thing we have left is purely technological relationships.”⁸

What can be done? In Heidegger’s view, little can be done because the technological uprooting of man is the result of the history of Being. Hence, human thought and action cannot change what has already been decreed by Being itself. As Heidegger declares, “philosophy will not be able to effect an immediate transformation of the present condition of the world. This is not only true of philosophy, but of all merely human thought and

⁷Martin Heidegger, “‘Only a God Can Save Us’: *Der Spiegel*’s Interview with Martin Heidegger,” in *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. Richard Wolin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 105-106. Hannah Arendt also alludes to the uprooting effect of aeronautic technology in *The Human Condition*: “This event, second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom, would have been greeted with unmitigated joy if it had not been for the uncomfortable military and political circumstances attending it. But curiously enough, this joy was not triumphal, it was not pride or awe of the tremendousness of human power and mastery which filled the hearts of men, who now, when they looked up from the earth towards the skies, could behold there a thing of their own making. The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first ‘step toward escape from men’s imprisonment to the earth.’ And this strange statement, far from being the accidental slip of some American reporter, unwittingly echoed the extraordinary line which, more than twenty years ago, had carved on the funeral obelisk for one of Russia’s great scientist: ‘Mankind will not remain bound to the earth forever.’” Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1. Emmanuel Levinas’s essay “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), considers aeronautic technology from a more optimistic perspective. I will examine Levinas’s essay in detail in the following chapter.

⁸Heidegger, “‘Only a God Can Save Us,’” 105-106.

endeavor. Only a god can save us.”⁹ That being said, human beings can comport themselves in such a way as to prepare for the return of the absent “god.” This they do by building, dwelling, and thinking within the “fourfold” (*Geviert*) of earth, sky, divinity, and mortals.

In this chapter, I shall examine the political implications of Heidegger’s counsel for mortals to build, dwell, and think within the fourfold. I will begin by examining Heidegger’s analysis of the plight of homelessness as it is presented in two essays in particular: the “Letter on Humanism” and the “Memorial Address.” Then, I shall discuss Heidegger’s critique of modern technology before launching into a discussion of building, dwelling, and thinking. After considering the ethical implications of Heidegger’s later philosophy, I shall conclude with some reflections on its political consequences. In sum, Heidegger’s late thought points to the inadequacy of modern political regimes even as it fails to posit an identifiable alternative to them. Hence, Heidegger’s later philosophy is essentially apolitical, counseling radical withdrawal from the political realm and personal spiritual preparation for a post-technological dispensation of Being.

II. The Plight of Modern Homelessness

In Heidegger’s late thought, his career-long concern with the problem of modern homelessness becomes explicit. Undoubtedly, Heidegger’s most famous pronouncement on the plight of modern homelessness occurs in the “Letter on Humanism.” In that essay, Heidegger argues that homelessness “consists in the abandonment of Being by beings. Homelessness is the symptom of oblivion of Being. Because of it the truth of Being remains unthought. The oblivion of Being makes itself known indirectly through the fact that man

⁹Heidegger, ““Only a God Can Save Us,” 107.

always observes and handles only beings.”¹⁰ On this account, modern homelessness is essentially a “symptom” of the oblivion of Being. But it is also a symptom that prevents man from addressing the root cause of his homelessness. Man attempts to deal with his homelessness by focusing on beings. However, because he ignores Being, man fails to come to grips with the real cause of his homelessness. Viewed from this angle, modern homelessness is both a cause and an effect of the abandonment of Being by beings.

Who or what is to blame for the oblivion of Being? Certainly not Nietzsche, who was “the last to experience this homelessness.” Nor can one fault the long line of metaphysicians who preceded Nietzsche for the disappearance of Being in the modern world. Rather, the oblivion of Being at the root of modern homelessness is the result of the history of Being itself. In this sense, homelessness is the destiny of Being. As Heidegger puts it,

Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world. Hence it is necessary to think that destiny in terms of the history of Being. What Marx recognized in an essential and significant sense, though derived from Hegel, as the estrangement of man has its roots in the homelessness of modern man. This homelessness is specifically evoked in the form of metaphysics, and through metaphysics is simultaneously entrenched and covered up as such.¹¹

In other words, homelessness is engendered, entrenched, and obscured by metaphysics, and metaphysics itself is a manifestation of the destiny of Being.

Such is Heidegger’s most famous pronouncement on the plight of modern homelessness. However, Heidegger’s most *eloquent* statement about the problem of modern homelessness occurs not in the “Letter on Humanism” but in the “Memorial Address.” On

¹⁰Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 242.

¹¹Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 241, 243.

October 30, 1955, Heidegger delivered a speech to his hometown of Messkirch to commemorate the 175th birthday of the composer Conradin Kreutzer.¹² In this address, Heidegger identifies the symptoms of modern homelessness in uncharacteristically lucid fashion.

At the beginning of the address, Heidegger says a few words about Kreutzer. Kreutzer, Heidegger emphasizes, was a native son of the Swabian homeland (*Heimat*). Indeed, Kreutzer is one of a long line of distinguished artists and thinkers who come from the Swabian homeland. “As we hold this simple fact in mind,” Heidegger declares, “we cannot help remembering at once that during the last two centuries great poets and thinkers have been brought forth from the Swabian land.”¹³ Inasmuch as Kreutzer’s origin is the homeland, the homeland is also the ultimate origin of the musical compositions for which Kreutzer was renowned.

For Heidegger, the example of Kreutzer is emblematic: Kreutzer’s artistic achievements flow from the fact that the Swabian composer was rooted in his native soil. So too with all great works of art, all of which depend upon the existence of a homeland that the artist can call home. “For a truly joyous and salutary human work to flourish,” Heidegger declares, “man must be able to mount from the depth of his home ground up into the ether.”¹⁴

That being said, the ability of man to “mount from the depth of his home ground into

¹²Conradin Kreutzer (1780-1849) was a German conductor and composer who was prolific in concert, church and chamber music, musical plays and operas, songs and choruses.

¹³Martin Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” in *Discourse on Thinking* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1959), 47.

¹⁴Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 47.

the ether” is endangered in the modern world. For Heidegger, the most damning evidence of this fact is the behavior of his fellow Germans. As Heidegger complains,

Many Germans have lost their homeland, have had to leave their villages and towns, have been driven from their native soil. Countless others whose homeland was saved, have yet wandered off. They have been caught up in the turmoil of the big cities, and have resettled in the waste lands of industrial districts. They are strangers now in their former homeland.¹⁵

Whereas Kreutzer was solidly anchored in his native homeland, many contemporary Germans are homeless. Why? In the case of some, their villages have been destroyed outright. For others, circumstances have compelled them to leave their towns and migrate towards large urban areas where they are promptly resettled into the indifferent space of the modern industrial city. These Germans are effectively reduced to the status of strangers even as they remain within the borders of the German homeland itself.

What is the ultimate cause of this alarming development? Seemingly, it is industrialization and urbanization that is ultimately to blame for the plight of homelessness that afflicts Heidegger’s German compatriots. But there is more to homelessness than this. Consider the state of those Germans who have remained in their native villages. As Heidegger laments,

And those who *have* stayed on in their homeland? Often they are more homeless than those who have been driven from their homeland. Hourly and daily they are chained to radio and television. Week after week the movies carry them off into uncommon, but merely common, realms of the imagination, and give the illusion of a world that is no world. Picture magazines are everywhere available. All that with which modern techniques of communication stimulate, assail, and drive man – all that is already much closer to man than his fields around his farmstead, closer than the sky over the

¹⁵Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 48.

earth, closer than the change from night to day, closer than the conventions and customs of his village, than the tradition of his native world.¹⁶

Considered from this angle, the Germans who remain within the confines of their native villages are no less displaced than their urban compatriots. Indeed, they are “more homeless.” If the lure of the big city renders the modern urbanite homeless, the villager is effectively displaced by technological devices (radio, television, movies) and products of the mass media (picture magazines). In sum, technological contraptions and mass media displace villagers by transporting them into an illusory world that is seemingly more concrete than the rural, tradition-based world that they actually inhabit.

For Heidegger, the homelessness that plagues his fellow Germans is representative of the plight of homelessness that afflicts modern man as a whole. In sum, the problem is that “the *rootedness (Bodenständigkeit)*, the autochthony, of man is threatened today at its core!”¹⁷ The ultimate cause of the loss of autochthony in modernity is not the result of contingent historical circumstances, or even of individual inauthenticity: “The loss of rootedness is caused not merely by circumstance and fortune, nor does it stem from the negligence and superficiality of man’s way of life.” Rather, it is a reflection of “the spirit of the age.” And for Heidegger the spirit of the age is technological: “The power concealed in modern technology determines the relation of man to that which exists.”¹⁸ Hence, modern homelessness is a manifestation of the technological spirit of the modern age.

¹⁶Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 48.

¹⁷Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 48-49.

¹⁸Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 49-50.

III. Heidegger's Critique of Modern Technology

In the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger argues that the plight of modern homelessness is precipitated – and obscured – by metaphysics. In the "Memorial Address," however, Heidegger attributes it to the technological *Zeitgeist*. It would seem to be the case that modern homelessness is caused both by metaphysics and technology. How can this be so? For Heidegger, the answer lies in the nature of technology itself. In sum, modern technology is a *metaphysical* phenomenon: "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological."¹⁹ Hence, one cannot properly understand how modern technology uproots man from the earth without taking note of its metaphysical, non-technological essence.

As noted earlier, Nietzsche's will to power doctrine lies at the heart of modern technology. Nietzsche's will to power doctrine did not arise *ex nihilo* but was anticipated by the earlier metaphysical doctrines of Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel. Hence, precursors to the Nietzschean will to power doctrine include Descartes's *cogito ergo sum*, Leibniz's notion of self-actualizing "monads," Kant's categorical imperative, and Hegel's concept of the world-spirit. But although modern subjectivity begins with the thought of Descartes, the origins of modern technology can be traced as far back as Plato.²⁰

How did Plato inaugurate the history of productionist metaphysics? An illustrative example is the Platonic twist on the Greek term *eidōs*. Before Plato, *eidōs* referred to the

¹⁹Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1977), 311.

²⁰At times, Heidegger argues that the history of productionist metaphysics begins *before* Plato in the thought of Heraclitus and Parmenides.

outward aspect (*Ansicht*) of phenomena. “Plato, exacts of this word, however, something utterly extraordinary: that it name what precisely what is not and never will be perceivable with physical eyes.”²¹ By conceptualizing *eidōs* as eternal presence, Plato enhances man’s role in the process by which truth becomes undisclosed. From this point on, it would only be a matter of time before man would assert himself as the source and ground of all truth.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delineate Heidegger’s history of productionist metaphysics in detail. Suffice to say, this history witnesses various changes in the way that man conceptualizes Being, truth, and substance.²² More specifically, the history of Western metaphysics is marked by the transformation of Being from Aristotelian existence (*energeia*) to actuality; of truth from Greek *alēthia* to certainty; and of substance from *hypokeimenon* to *subjectum*. In Heidegger’s narrative, all of these developments culminate in Nietzsche’s will to power doctrine, which conflates Being with actuality, equates truth with certainty, and posits the human subject as the source and ground of all substance.

The connective link between Nietzsche’s will to power doctrine and modern technology was provided by the birth of modern physics in the seventeenth century. Modern physics orders natural phenomena to present itself in a pre-determined manner that is amenable to calculation and categorization. This, for Heidegger, is the essential aspect of physics: “Hence, physics, in its retreat from the kind of representation that turns only to

²¹Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 325.

²²Heidegger’s notion that various historical epochs are defined by the way in which they answer the question of Being bears a certain affinity with Thomas Kuhn’s theory that the history of science is characterized by a series of paradigm shifts. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

objects, which has been the sole standard until recently, will never be able to renounce this one thing: that nature report itself in some way or other that is identifiable through calculation and that it remain orderable as a system of information.”²³ With the birth of machine-power technology in the second half of the eighteenth century, modern man is provided with the technological tools necessary to enforce the scientific conquest of nature in earnest.

The essence of modern technology is what Heidegger calls “enframing” (*Gestell*). Enframing is “the gathering together of the setting-upon that sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the actual, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve.”²⁴ That is to say, enframing is the process by which man endeavors to impose a framework upon nature in order to force it to produce consumable material. Hence, in enframing, man does not allow nature to present itself of its own accord, but rather forces it to appear in a manner dictated by the framework itself. Thus, in enframing, man assumes an adversarial posture towards nature. Indeed, it is so adversarial that it amounts to a type of violence against nature.

Heidegger points to the difference between a windmill and a hydroelectric plant to elucidate his point. A windmill harnesses the earth’s natural processes in a harmonious fashion because it lets the wind “be.” The windmills’ sails are propelled by the wind: “Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind’s blowing.”²⁵ Hence, the windmill harnesses nature’s natural processes in a cooperative and non-intrusive fashion. A

²³Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 328.

²⁴Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 325.

²⁵Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 320.

simple device that cooperates with nature's natural rhythms, such a windmill would not be out of place in a poetic work.

Now picture a hydroelectric power plant in the Rhine river. The hydroelectric plant dams up the Rhine so that it can supply the hydraulic pressure that powers the machines that produce electricity. In other words, the hydroelectric plant turns the Rhine into a "water-power supplier." "In order that we may even remotely consider the monstrosity that reigns here," Heidegger memorably writes, "let us ponder for a moment the contrast that is spoken by the two titles: 'The Rhine,' as dammed up into the *power* works, and the 'The Rhine,' as uttered by the *art*-work, in Holderlin's hymn by that name."²⁶ Poets do not compose hymns about rivers that are dammed up into power works.

Heidegger paints this startling image in order to highlight the way in which modern technology assaults nature. In Heidegger's example, the Rhine is "set upon" by man who "challenges" it to reveal itself as a "water-power supplier." For Heidegger, the example of the hydroelectric plant is emblematic of the "challenging-forth" that characterizes the technological manner of revealing reality: "The revealing that rules throughout modern technology has the character of a setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging forth."²⁷

The example of the hydroelectric plant is illustrative in an additional sense. By challenging the Rhine to reveal itself as an energy source, the hydroelectric plant transforms it into what Heidegger calls "standing-reserve" (*Bestand*). Standing-reserve is something that "is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it

²⁶Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 321.

²⁷Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 321.

may be on call for a further ordering.”²⁸ In other words, standing-reserve is a supply or store of resources ready for human use. Because standing-reserve is created in order to satisfy human consumption, it exists solely at the mercy of the human “consumer.” Inasmuch as standing-reserve is nonautonomous *vis a vis* human beings, it lacks the dignity of an “object.”

The technological annihilation of objectivity renders modern technology the “supreme danger” of our time, in Heidegger’s view. Hence, the danger of technological dehumanization. Enframing transfigures all objects into sources of standing-reserve. In an “objectless” milieu, even man himself lacks objective presence inasmuch as his sole value is as an “orderer” of the standing-reserve: “As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then man comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve.”²⁹

For Heidegger, this represents one of two ways in which enframing manifests itself as the preeminent danger. The other danger is that man succumbs to the illusion that he is the “lord of the earth,” that everything that man encounters exists only insofar as it is his creation. For Heidegger, this illusion is deadly in that it covers up man’s essence as the one who is spoken to by Being: “Man is the shepherd of Being.”³⁰ Hence, in styling himself the

²⁸Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 322.

²⁹Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 332.

³⁰Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 234.

unchallenged master of the earth, man fails to come to grips with the true nature of his *Existenz*.

On Heidegger's account, this anthropocentric delusion causes conflict. More specifically, what engenders conflict is what Heidegger calls "the conquest of the world as picture." A picture is the "structured image (*Gebild*) that is the creature of man's producing which represents and sets before."³¹ The conquest of the world as picture is the process by which man attempts to make the world conform to his "world picture." Why does this tendency engender conflict? The answer relates to the liberation of subjectivity: in a milieu characterized by unleashed subjectivity, no single subject's picture takes precedence. Hence, a multiplicity of subjects will compete for a position of ultimate supremacy.

In Heidegger's view, the competition that ensues will not be a mere free-for-all contest of random participants. Rather, the contest will involve subjects who are the most able to enforce their particular world-view. As Heidegger puts it,

In such producing, man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is. Because this position secures, organizes and articulates itself as a world view, the modern relationship to that which is, is one that becomes, in its decisive unfolding, a confrontation of world views; and indeed not of random world views, but only of those that have already taken up the fundamental position of man that is most extreme, and have done so with the utmost resoluteness.³²

Hence, only the subjects that have the most "resoluteness" will be able to compete in this agonistic contest. And the surest indicator of resoluteness is *size*. Hence, the modern

³¹Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 134.

³²Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," 134.

tendency towards the gigantic: “A sign of this event is that everywhere and in the most varied forms and disguises the gigantic is making its appearance.”³³ Considered from this angle, the formation of ever larger organizational entities is a predictable consequence of the modern liberation of subjectivity. And of course, such entities will be comprised of anonymous workers. Hence, the importance of Junger, who had identified the rise of the worker with striking perspicacity.

All in all, Heidegger’s critique of technology paints a strikingly dark picture of the technological epoch. Heidegger depicts a world of creeping dehumanization, arrogant anthropocentrism, and bureaucratic-organizational largesse. But darkest of all is Heidegger’s pronouncement that man is essentially powerless to stop the technological danger that threatens his very humanity. “Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it.”³⁴ Why? Because the technological manner of disclosing reality is a legitimate mode of ontological disclosure. In other words, the tendency to disclose entities in the mode of enframing is a result of a dispensation of Being.

This fact notwithstanding, man can comport his being in a certain way so as to foster the growth of the “saving power.” In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger argues that the saving power is fostered when man rediscovers the aesthetic connotations of the Greek term *technē* (art). To the modern mind, *technē* conjures up the image of technology. To the ancient Greeks, *technē* connoted poetic revealing (*poēsis*). Hence, man fosters the growth of the saving power by rediscovering the capacity for *poēsis* hidden

³³Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” 135.

³⁴Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 339.

within *technē* itself. “Could it be that revealing lays claim to the arts most primally, so that they for their part may expressly foster the growth of the saving power, may awaken and found anew our vision of, and trust in, that which grants?”³⁵ The answer, of course, is yes.

In the “Memorial Address,” Heidegger gives yet another answer. In that essay, Heidegger calls for man to embrace a non-technological manner of experiencing reality. This is not done by rejecting technological things outright but by refusing to be dominated by them: “We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is, let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher.” Heidegger calls such a comportment “releasement toward things” (*Gelassenheit*). In Heidegger’s view, releasement toward things necessitates a corresponding “openness to the mystery” of Being that is hidden within the essence of technology itself.³⁶

Hence, poetic revealing and releasement toward things are two ways in which man can foster the growth of the saving power. To Heidegger, man actualizes his capacity for poetic revelation and releasement toward things by building, dwelling, and thinking in the fourfold (*Geviert*) of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals.

IV. Building, Dwelling, and Thinking in the Fourfold

Heidegger relates the plight of modern homelessness to dwelling in his 1951 essay entitled “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (*Bauen Wohnen Denken*).³⁷ In this essay, Heidegger contends that man’s homelessness is a consequence of the fact that man does not *think* about

³⁵Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 338.

³⁶Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 54.

³⁷Heidegger’s “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” essay was originally presented as a lecture to Darmstadt Symposium on *Man and Space* on August 5, 1951.

the plight of dwelling: “What if man’s homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not think of the *proper* plight of dwelling as *the* plight?” Note the peculiar phraseology here: homelessness is not necessarily synonymous with the plight of dwelling, but is rather the result of man’s failure to *think* about the plight of dwelling. Hence, the proper response to the plight of modern homelessness is to think about homelessness. As Heidegger writes, “Yet as soon as man gives thought to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer.”³⁸

The importance of thinking (*Denken*) is continuously reiterated by the late Heidegger. By thinking, Heidegger does not mean calculative thinking. Calculative thinking is a type of thinking that plans, investigates, and computes on “ever new, ever more promising and at the same time economical possibilities.” In contrast, meditative thinking “dwells on what lies close and meditates on what is closest; upon that which concerns us, each one of us, here and now; here, on this patch of home ground; now, in the present hour of history.”³⁹ In other words, meditative thinking thinks about Being. And for Heidegger, meditative thinking about “what is closest” inexorably leads man to ponder the fact of his homelessness.

What does meditative thinking reveal about the plight of modern homelessness? To the modern mind, such a plight is nothing more than a mere “housing shortage.” Such a view is fundamentally mistaken. As Heidegger explains,

however hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the proper plight of dwelling does not merely lie in a lack of houses. The proper plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older than the increase of the earth’s population and the condition of the industrial

³⁸Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1977), 363.

³⁹Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 47.

workers. The proper dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell.⁴⁰

Thus, the plight of dwelling lies in the fact that mortals do not know how to dwell. By extension, learning to dwell is the proper response to the plight of dwelling.

What is dwelling? At the outset, it is necessary to recognize the significance of Hölderlin to this question, a pivotal source of inspiration to the late Heidegger. It was Hölderlin who declared that “poetically man dwells on this earth.” Clearly, Hölderlin possessed keen insight into the nature of dwelling. But Hölderlin’s notion of dwelling has been cast into oblivion: “The proper meaning of the verb *bauen*, namely, to dwell, has been lost to us.”⁴¹ Hence, it is necessary to rediscover the real meaning of dwelling as understood by Hölderlin.

Heidegger attempts to disclose the true nature of dwelling by investigating the etymological origin of the word dwell (*bauen*) itself. The word dwelling derives from the Old Saxon *wuon* and the Gothic *wunian*. The Old Saxon term *wuon* means to remain in a place, while the Gothic term *wunian* means to remain in peace. Of these two terms, it is the latter that illuminates the real meaning of dwelling. More specifically, *wunian* means “to dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its essence.”⁴² Considered in light of *wunian*, the essential aspect of dwelling is sparing.

⁴⁰Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 363.

⁴¹Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 348.

⁴²Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 351.

To dwell is to spare. But even this seemingly straightforward proposition is more complex than it first appears. Usually, sparing has a negative connotation: we spare something when we refrain from inflicting harm on it. But, for Heidegger, sparing also implies the positive act of restoring a being to its full potentiality: “Real sparing is something *positive* and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own essence, when we return it specifically to its essential being, when we ‘free’ it in the proper sense of the word into a preserve of peace.”⁴³ Thus, sparing is both passive and active in nature.

But *what* do human beings passively and actively spare when they dwell? When human beings dwell, they safeguard the fourfold (*Geviert*) of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals: “Mortals dwell in the way they safeguard the fourfold in its essential unfolding.” As for the fourfold itself, it is necessary to recognize that the term “fourfold” is somewhat misleading in that it is really a *unity*: “By a *primal* oneness the four – earth, sky, divinities and mortals – belong together in one.”⁴⁴ Hence, rather than being four discrete components, the various elements of the fourfold exist in a state of primordial oneness.

The four elements of the fourfold are earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. The first element of the fourfold is the earth, “the saving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal.” The second element is the sky, “the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year’s seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether.”

⁴³Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 351.

⁴⁴Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 352, 351.

The third element is the divinities, “the beckoning messengers of the godhead. Out of the holy sway of the godhead, the god appears in his presence or withdraws into concealment.”

The fourth element is the mortals, the human beings. Heidegger calls human beings “mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies, and indeed continually, as long as he remains on the earth, under the sky, before the divinities.”⁴⁵

Human beings dwell when they safeguard the various elements of the fourfold. First, human beings dwell when they “save the earth” by setting the earth free into its own essence. Second, mortals dwell when they receive “the sky as sky. They leave to the sun and moon their journey, to the stars their courses, to the seasons their blessing and inclemency; they do not turn night into day nor day into a harassed unrest.” Third, human beings dwell when they “await the divinities as divinities” by “hold(ing) up to the divinities what is un hoped for. They wait for intimations of their coming and do not mistake the signs of their absence.” Finally, “Mortals dwell in that they initiate their own essential being – their being capable of death as death – into the use and practice of this capacity, so that there may be a good death.”⁴⁶

Such are the various facets of the dwelling act. But what is the ultimate *significance* of Heidegger’s concept of dwelling? For one, it is instructive to note that Heidegger’s concept of dwelling reiterates his career-long emphasis on the embedded nature of human existence. Thus, Heidegger’s pronouncement that mortals dwell in the fourfold roughly corresponds to his earlier contention that *Da-sein* is Being-in-the-world. Second, it is

⁴⁵Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 352.

⁴⁶Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 352.

instructive to note how the poetic tone of Heidegger's discussion implicitly rejects the authority of calculative rationality. Calculative thinking has uprooted man from the world. Seemingly, poetry is necessitated to help man to rediscover his worldly home.

Consider Heidegger's call for mortals to await the divinities.⁴⁷ In this call, one can detect Heidegger's disdain for the secular cast of modern life. However, one can also discern Heidegger's rejection of the legacy of monotheism.⁴⁸ Here, it is useful to recall the process by which Socrates banishes the pagan gods from the ideal city in speech described in Plato's *Republic*. In book two, Plato's Socrates decrees that the poets in his ideal city can only depict gods that cause good and not evil, do not change shape, and do not lie. In this discussion, Plato's Socrates sets the tone for the rationalist bent of Greek philosophy and Christian monotheism, particularly in its scholastic manifestation. Following Hölderlin, Heidegger longs for the return of the gods that were banished from the world by Plato's Socrates. In its longing for religious reinvigoration and its pronounced suspicion of monotheism, Heidegger's call for mortal man to await the divinities can be viewed as a decisive confirmation of an observation earlier made by Nietzsche: "This is what I have found at the bottom of the decline of European theism, on the basis of many conversations, asking and listening. It seems to me that the religious instinct is indeed in the process of

⁴⁷Heidegger's call for mortals to await the divinities is a later manifestation of the German philosopher's long-standing penchant for religious *pathos*. For more on the revelatory aspect of Heidegger's political vision, see Christopher Rickey, *Revolutionary Saints: Heidegger, National Socialism, and Antinomian Politics* (University Parks: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

⁴⁸For more on Heidegger's view of monotheism, see George Kovacs, *The Question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990).

growing powerfully – but precisely the theistic satisfaction it refuses with deep mistrust.”⁴⁹

In summation, dwelling necessitates that human beings safeguard the fourfold by saving the earth, receiving the sky, awaiting divinities, and initiating mortals. On the basis of this description, it would seem that the act of dwelling is highly abstract. However, Heidegger insists that the dwelling act is not accomplished abstractly, but in our concrete relationship with things. Indeed, Heidegger argues that the human relationship to things is the principal means by which mortals safeguard the fourfold: “staying with things is the only way in which the fourfold stay within the fourfold is accomplished at any time in simple unity.”⁵⁰

What does it mean to “stay with things”? In Heidegger’s view, staying with things is accomplished when mortals “nurse and nurture the things that grow, and specially construct the things that do not grow” in an appropriate manner. Heidegger calls the nursing and nurturing of organic things and the construction of artificial things *building*. Building is the means by which mortals stay with things, a “staying” that is concomitant with the act of dwelling itself. In other words, dwelling is inextricably connected with building: “*Dwelling*, inasmuch as it keeps the fourfold in things is, as this keeping, a *building*.”⁵¹

In Heidegger’s view, our ability to build and dwell is endangered in the modern world. In sum, the problem is that moderns adhere to an impoverished notion of what constitutes a thing: “Our thinking has of course long been accustomed to *understate* the

⁴⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 66.

⁵⁰Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 353.

⁵¹Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 353.

essence of the thing.” More specifically, the modern mind typically regards things as entities that contain various properties. For Heidegger, this concept of the essence of things is so reductionist that it affects the ability of mortals to dwell.

This barren conception of things is interconnected with a distorted view of space (*Raum*). To the ancient Greeks, space “is something that has been made room for, something that has been freed, namely, within a boundary, Greek *peras*.”⁵² However, subsequent Western conceptions of space have moved farther and farther away from the Greek concept of *peras*. In the Roman world, space was viewed in the sense of the Latin word *spatium*, as interval or intervening space. Space as interval was gradually replaced by the notion that space is mere extension (*extensio*) between three dimensions. Subsequently, space as extension was supplanted by an analytic-algebraic conception of space. With every progressive step, the Greek concept of *peras* becomes progressively more distant.

In his “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” essay, Heidegger uses the example of a bridge to elucidate the various ways of conceptualizing space. To the modern mind, a bridge is an entity that occupies a specific physical location. As Heidegger writes, “In a space that is represented purely as *spatium*, the bridge now appears as a mere something at some position, which can be occupied at any time by something else or replaced by a mere marker.”⁵³ To moderns, the bridge is an anonymous entity that occupies a random place in a spatial continuum. Such a bridge is not special in any significant sense: a million other things can readily take its place. As for the location that the bridge occupies, this too is utterly

⁵²Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 356.

⁵³Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 357.

anonymous. It makes absolutely no difference whether the bridge exists against the backdrop of an urban ghetto or a picturesque landscape.

Needless to say, such a bridge certainly does not point toward the presence of the divine, or to anything else remotely astonishing or wonder-inducing. Things that are built with this aesthetic sensibility take on the quality of the “empty indifferent things, sham things, *dummies of life*” noted by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke in a letter written in 1925:

To our grandparents, a “house,” a “well,” a familial steeple, even their own clothes, their cloak *still* meant something more, were infinitely more intimate – almost everything a vessel in which they found something already there, and added to its store. Now there are intruding, from America, empty indifferent things, sham things, *dummies of life*. . . . A house, as the Americans understand it, an American apple or a winestock from over there, have *nothing* in common with the house, the fruit, the grape into which the hope and thoughtfulness of our forefathers had entered.⁵⁴

For Heidegger, the mass-produced rubbish lamented by Rilke is the natural result of the modern view of how things exist in space.

How, then, should we view the bridge? Appealing to the Greek conception of *peras*, Heidegger argues that the bridge should be viewed as the location where the fourfold is gathered in its ontological luminosity. The bridge “gathers the earth as landscape around the stream.” The bridge gathers the sky by holding “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 gathers the divinities in that it “*visibly give(s) thanks for*, their presence, as in the figure of the saint of the bridge.” And the bridge gathers mortals by virtue of the fact that it “initiates the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks and in

⁵⁴Quoted by Martin Heidegger, “What are Poets For?” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 113.

the end, as mortals, to the other side.”⁵⁵ All in all, the bridge points to its natural surroundings, illuminates the presence of the divine, and reminds mortals of their essential mortality.

When things are viewed as gathering (*Versammlung*) sites of the fourfold, the process of building takes on a different cast. Building ceases to be the construction of anonymous entities in indifferent spaces and instead becomes the “founding and joining of spaces” that admit and install the fourfold: “Building takes over from the fourfold the standard for all the traversing and measuring of the spaces that in each case are provided for by the locales that have been founded.”⁵⁶

Heidegger is no doubt advancing a bold – even revolutionary – theory of architecture here, but the reader may be left confused as to what all this has to do with dwelling.⁵⁷ To Heidegger, everything. Mortals dwell when they spare the fourfold, and sparing the fourfold is accomplished by building things that enable the fourfold to attain ontological presence. Hence, a more appropriate theory of building will enable mortals to build things which enable them to dwell. Human dwelling necessitates proper building, and vice versa: “*Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build.*”⁵⁸

⁵⁵Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 354, 355.

⁵⁶Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 360.

⁵⁷Heidegger’s “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” essay has exerted considerable influence on contemporary architectural theory. See Clive Dilnot’s “The Decisive Text: On Beginning to Read Heidegger’s Building Dwelling Thinking,” *Harvard Architectural Review*, 8 (1992): 160-187.

⁵⁸Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 361.

In the concluding section of his “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” essay, Heidegger gives an example of the type of building that complements an authentic dwelling.

Heidegger’s description is worth quoting in full,

Let us think for a while of a farmhouse in the Black Forest, which was built some two hundred years ago by the dwelling of peasants. Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities and mortals enter *in simple oneness* into things, ordered the house. It placed a farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it to the wide overhanging shingle roof of whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and which, reaching deep down, shields, the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in the chamber for the hallowed places of children and ‘tree of the dead’ – for that is what they call a coffin there: the *Totenbaum* – and in that way it designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time. A craft itself sprung from dwelling, still uses its tools and frames as things, built the farmhouse.⁵⁹

Obviously, Heidegger is indulging in a bit of “sentimental glorification of the idyllic” here, and even many contemporary Heideggerians find such passages to be a constant source of embarrassment. Still, the passage suffices to make Heidegger’s larger point. A farmhouse built by Black Forest peasants effectively gathers the fourfold. Because it does so, the peasants who live within its walls are able to dwell.

The challenge for modern man is to reproduce their mode of building in a contemporary historical context. Such building is not the mere erecting of architectural edifices, but is rather a poetic endeavor. Poetry is the process by which human beings “take measure” of their existence within the fourfold. Viewed from this perspective, an authentic builder will poetically survey man’s “ek-sistence” on the earth, under the expanse of the sky, as a mortal who lives in the company of other mortals, and in the presence of the divinities.

⁵⁹Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 361, 362.

Hence, building necessitates the existence of poetry: “Poetry is what really lets us dwell.”⁶⁰

The aforementioned Black Forest peasants had this poetic sensibility. Modern man must rediscover his capacity for poetry if he is to learn how to dwell.

V. The Question of Ethics

As we have seen, Heidegger’s notion of dwelling entails a transformation of the relationship between human beings and the things that they encounter over the course of their lives. In order to dwell, modern man must learn to view things as “locales” that house the fourfold. But what are the implications of Heidegger’s late philosophy on the relationships that human beings have with each other? In the “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger gives an answer of sorts.

In the essay, Heidegger notes an episode that occurred shortly after the publication of *Being and Time*. More specifically, a “young friend” asked Heidegger when he was going to publish an ethics. Such a question is eminently understandable for several reasons. For one, it is understandable in relation to Heidegger’s own philosophy, which calls for man to live in light of the “truth of Being.” The perplexity that is entailed whenever the question of Being is asked with a requisite degree of seriousness makes the demand for an adequate design for living that much more acute. Secondly, the question is understandable in a time when the hegemony of modern technology has transformed human relationships to an unprecedented extent: “The greatest care must be fostered upon the ethical bond at a time when technological man, delivered over to mass society, can be kept reliably on call only by

⁶⁰Martin Heidegger, “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 215.

gathering and ordering all his plans and activities in a way that corresponds to technology.”⁶¹
For these reasons, the “young friend(’s)” question is pertinent indeed.

Nonetheless, Heidegger declines to write an ethics. Heidegger does not deny that society as such relies on the maintenance of ethical bonds, even if such bonds are revealed to be utterly without natural foundation. “Should we not safeguard and secure the existing ethical bonds even if they hold human beings together ever so tenuously and merely for the present. Certainly.”⁶² But even if existing ethical bonds must be safeguarded, ethics as such is more of a problem than a solution to our present predicament. More specifically, it is a problem because thinking about ethics as a specific realm of inquiry is a symptom of intellectual decline.

For Heidegger, this truism is evident whenever the Greek origins of ethical philosophy are taken into account. Like other academic disciplines such as logic and physics, ethics was created when thinking was being transformed into an academic activity pursued by specialists of the various scholarly disciplines: “These disciplines arose at a time when thinking was becoming ‘philosophy,’ philosophy *epistēmē* (science) and science itself a matter for schools and academic pursuits.”⁶³ Like logic and physics, ethics is the result of intellectual ossification and academic specialization.

By contrast, the pre-Socratic thinkers and poets did not have an ethics. Nor did they have a logic, physics, or any other academic discipline: “Thinkers prior to this period knew

⁶¹Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 255.

⁶²Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 255.

⁶³Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 256.

neither a ‘logic’ nor an ‘ethics’ nor ‘physics.’” This is not to say that their thinking is immoral, illogical, or generally less rigorous, however. Indeed, from the perspective of the sheer primordial power of their thought, the pre-Socratic thinkers and poets towers over the thinkers who followed after them. As Heidegger writes, “The tragedies of Sophocles – provided such a comparison is at all permissible – preserve the *ēthos* in their sagas more primordially than Aristotle’s lectures on ‘ethics.’”⁶⁴ And perhaps the greatest ethical thinker of them all is Heraclitus.⁶⁵

In Heidegger’s view, Fragment 119 of Heraclitus powerfully captures the primordial essence of ethical phenomena. As Heidegger writes, “A saying of Heraclitus which consists of only three words says something so simply that from it the essence of the *ēthos* immediately comes to light.” In this fragment, Heraclitus says *ēthos anthrōpōi daimōn*, a saying that is usually translated as “A man’s character is his *daimōn*.” For Heidegger, however, this translation is essentially incorrect in that it mistranslates *ēthos*. Understood in its proper Greek sense, *ēthos* means “abode, dwelling place” or “the open region in which man dwells.” Translating *ēthos* in light of its proper Greek meaning, Heidegger translates it as “Man dwells, insofar as he is man, in the nearness of god.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 256.

⁶⁵For more on Heidegger’s idiosyncratic reading of Heraclitus, see Kenneth Maly and Parvis Emad, ed., *Heidegger on Heraclitus: A New Reading* (Leuven: E. Mellen Press, 1986). Besides Heraclitus, Heidegger also devotes significant attention to Anaximander. For a discussion of Heidegger’s reading of Anaximander, see Manfred S. Frings, “Protagoras Re-Discovered: Heidegger’s Explication of Protagoras’ Fragment,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 8, 2 (Summer 1974): 112-123.

⁶⁶Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 256. Heidegger points to a story reported by Aristotle as a means of buttressing his case for his idiosyncratic translation of the Heraclitean fragment: “The story is told of something Heraclitus said to some strangers who wanted to

For Heidegger, Heraclitus's saying suggests that man's dwelling place is the primordial ground that enables man to discover his true essence. As Heidegger writes, "The open region of this abode allows what pertains to man's essence, and what in thus arriving resides in nearness to him, to appear." Indeed, it is for this reason that man's abode is necessary if man is to realize what is truly essential about himself: "The abode of man contains and preserves the advent of what belongs to man in his essence."⁶⁷ Hence, the Heraclitean fragment points to the pivotal importance of man's abode.

But what does this have to do with "ethics"? For Heidegger, everything. In Heidegger's view, what is decisive about the Heraclitean fragment is the mere fact that it ponders man's abode, the underlying ground that man stands upon whenever he endeavors to posit an ethics. Viewed from this angle, Heraclitus's three-word saying can be viewed as the example of an "original ethics." As Heidegger puts it, "If the name 'ethics,' in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ēthos*, should now say that 'ethics' ponders the abode of man, then that thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who ek-sists, is in itself the original ethics."⁶⁸

Obviously, Heraclitus's original ethics is a far cry from the tradition of ethical philosophy that stretches from Aristotle to Kant. Seemingly, it is more akin to ontology in the fact that it "thinks the truth of Being." But even the term ontology misses the mark;

come visit him. Having arrived, they saw him warming himself at a stove. Surprised, they stood there in consternation – above all because he encouraged them, the astounded ones, and called for them to come in, with the words, 'For here too the gods are present'" Aristotle, *De Partibus animalium*, I.5.645a17.

⁶⁷Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 256.

⁶⁸Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 258.

Heraclitus's thinking is really too primordial for ontology: "The thinking that inquires into the truth of Being and so defines man's essential abode from Being is neither ethics nor ontology."⁶⁹ Hence, Heraclitus's saying cannot be categorized as either ethics or ontology because it is the manifestation of a type of thinking that underlies both.

The Heraclitean endeavor to ponder man's abode represents the Heideggerian ethical imperative. Needless to say, such a notion appears vacuous to those looking for a detailed set of moral precepts. Certainly, it fails to speak to the questions that human beings face with regard to what is good and bad and just and unjust. By elevating Heraclitus over the ethical philosophers who followed in his footsteps, Heidegger effectively performs a *tabula rasa* on the entire Western tradition of ethical philosophy. Viewed from this angle, Heidegger not only refuses to posit a philosophical ethics, he cuts the ground out from those who do.

Thus, Heidegger's answer to his young friend's request to provide an ethics reveals him to be a thinker radically estranged from the Western ethical tradition. But is Heidegger's thought *amoral*? Here, we are compelled to turn our attention away from the "Letter on Humanism" and towards "The Question Concerning Technology." In the original manuscript of the "Question" essay, Heidegger wrote the following passage: "Agriculture is now motorized food industry – in essence the same as the manufacturing of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as blockading and starving of nations, the same

⁶⁹Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 258.

as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.”⁷⁰ In other words, the production of food is “the same as” the production of corpses, and hydrogen bombs. Modern agribusiness is the same as Auschwitz!

What can one possibly say about this startling passage? Obviously, it is to Heidegger’s credit that he deleted this sentence from the final version of the lecture that he delivered in 1949. This fact, however, hardly renders it any more palatable: as Emmanuel Levinas memorably puts it, “This stylistic turn of phrase, this analogy, this progression, are beyond commentary.”⁷¹ Its callous nature notwithstanding, however, there is nothing in this sentence that contravenes the strictures of Heidegger’s thinking. After all, the task of Heideggerian thinking is to meditate on man’s abode, not issue moral judgements. To condemn the technological production of corpses outright would be to fall prey to the temptation to issue “a peremptory directive and for rules that say how man . . . ought to live in a fitting manner.”⁷² Here, as elsewhere, Heidegger refrains from doing so.

VI. Conclusion

Heidegger’s late philosophy is driven by his conviction that human autochthony is the necessary pre-condition for full human flourishing. “According to our human experience and history, at least as far as I see it,” Heidegger declares, “I know that everything essential and

⁷⁰Cited in Wolfgang Schirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit* (Freiburg: Alber, 1983), 25.

⁷¹Emmanuel Levinas, “As if Consenting to Horror,” 487. For other reactions, see Thomas Sheehan’s “Heidegger and the Nazis,” *New York Review of Books* 35,10 (June 16, 1988): 48-57 and Jürgen Habermas, “Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective,” *Critical Inquiry* 15,2 (Winter 1989): 431-436.

⁷²Heidegger, Letter on Humanism,” 255.

everything great originated from the fact that man had a home and was rooted in a tradition.”⁷³ This conviction inspires Heidegger’s concern about the uprooting effect of modern technology. By extension, it propels his powerful critique of the modern political systems that sanction the hegemony of modern technology.⁷⁴

For Heidegger, *all* existing political systems in the Western world are in the grip of modern technology. This is as much true of liberalism and socialism as it is of modern democracy. Modern democracy operates on the assumption that technology is susceptible to human control. In Heidegger’s view, this assumption is fundamentally mistaken in the fact that modern technology is the result of the destiny of Being. This is why democracy, like “the political expression of the Christian worldview” and the “idea of a constitutional state,” is a “half truth.” As Heidegger explains, “I would characterize them as half truths because I do not see in them a genuine confrontation with the technological world, because behind them there is in my view a notion that technology is in its essence something over which man has control. In my opinion, that is not possible. Technology is in its essence that which man cannot control by himself.”⁷⁵ Hence, modern democracy is deficient because it adheres to the illusion that technology is a ready-to-hand tool that is subject to human mastery.

⁷³Heidegger, “Only a God Can Save Us,” 106.

⁷⁴For a critique of Heidegger’s view of technology, see Jerry Weinberger’s essay entitled “Politics and the Problem of Technology: An Essay on Heidegger and the Tradition of Political Philosophy,” *American Political Science Review* 86, 1 (1992): 112-127. A more sympathetic treatment of Heidegger’s critique is contained in Gregory Bruce Smith’s article “Heidegger, Technology, and Postmodernity,” *Social Science Journal* 28, 3 (1991): 369-389. A brief discussion of Heidegger’s view of technology can also be found in George Kateb, “Technology and Philosophy,” *Social Research* 64, 3: 1225-1246.

⁷⁵“Only a God Can Save Us,” 105.

In the view of the late Heidegger, the political system that existed in Germany from 1933 to 1945 harbored similar illusions. However, here a qualification is in order. Whatever its shortcomings, the German National Socialist movement possessed an “inner truth and greatness” because it moved in the direction of facilitating a confrontation between modern man and global technology. Again, the *Der Spiegel* interview,

On the contrary, I see the task of thought to consist in helping man in general, within the limits allowed to thought, to achieve an adequate relationship to the essence of technology. National Socialism, to be sure, moved in this direction. But those people were far too limited to acquire an explicit relationship to what is really happening today and has been underway for three centuries.⁷⁶

In the final analysis, then, the German National Socialist movement is best regarded as a noble failure, a movement that tried and failed to help man find a home in a post-technological age. Why did German National Socialism fail? In the above quote, Heidegger attributes its failure to the intellectual limitations of its leading lights. Presumably, if its leading theorists were less “limited,” German National Socialism could have achieved “an adequate relationship to the essence of technology.” But this was not to be.

If the “Letter on Humanism” is any guide, the nationalistic impulse at the heart of German National Socialism frustrated its attempt to achieve such a relationship. For Heidegger, the problem with nationalism is that it is inherently subjective. What links nationalism with subjectivity is “anthropologism.” As Heidegger writes, “Every nationalism is metaphysically an anthropologism, and as such subjectivism.”⁷⁷ Which is to say that nationalism is predicated on an anthropological conception of man as a truth-establishing

⁷⁶“Only a God Can Save Us,” 111.

⁷⁷Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 244.

subject. Much as the Cartesian subject asserts itself as the ground of all truth, a national people asserts itself as the autonomous source of its historical destiny. Considered from this vantage point, the nationalistic thrust of German National Socialism is yet another manifestation of modern subjectivity.⁷⁸ The same can be said of the German National Socialism's collectivistic tendencies, tendencies which complete – rather than reverse – individual subjectivity.

Nationalistic self-assertion and mass collectivism prevented the German National Socialist movement from arriving at a satisfactory relationship to the essence of modern technology. But what of the German National Socialist celebration of the homeland? Seemingly, Heidegger himself echoes the German National Socialist obsession with the homeland in his 1943 lecture on Hölderlin's elegy "Homecoming." In the "Letter on Humanism," however, Heidegger argues that the homeland referred to there means "nearness to Being": "the word (homeland) is thought here in an essential sense, not patriotically or nationalistically, but in terms of the history of Being." Thus, Hölderlin's call for homecoming is sounded so that his fellow Germans can find their essence in the "destiny of the West" rather than the "egoism of his nation."⁷⁹ Hence, Hölderlin and Heidegger's concept of the homeland is distinct from the *Heimat* celebrated by the Nazis.

⁷⁸This is not to suggest that nationalism is the final manifestation of modern subjectivity. Rather, that dubious distinction belongs to internationalism, which radicalizes subjectivism even further: "Nationalism is not overcome through mere internationalism; it is rather expanded and elevated thereby into a system. Nationalism is as little brought and raised to *humanitas* by internationalism as individualism is by ahistorical collectivism." Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 244.

⁷⁹Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 242, 241, 241.

No doubt, Heidegger's attempt to purify the concept of the homeland of its nationalistic connotations is problematic. Here, it is instructive to note that Heidegger never relinquished his view of the ontological specialness of the German language. In 1966, Heidegger declared that, "I have in mind especially the inner relationship of the German language with the language of the Greeks and with their thought. This has been confirmed for me today by the French. When they begin to think, they speak German, being sure that they could not make it with their own language."⁸⁰ It is evident that Heidegger only has a problem with nationalism inasmuch as it is subjective in nature. Conceivably, if nationalism could be cleansed of its anthropocentric and subjective aspects, the attempt to preserve a sense of national consciousness is an entirely legitimate endeavor.

But even if Heidegger's view of nationalism is ambiguous, his negative view of *self-assertive* nationalism is not. Here, it is useful to reiterate the importance of Heidegger's mid-1930s encounter with Nietzsche, an encounter that illuminated the continuity of Nietzsche's will to power doctrine with the modern metaphysical tradition. From the perspective afforded by Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche, the Nazi emphasis on will is revealed to be yet another manifestation of the modernism that the German National Socialist movement professed to abhor. His chauvinistic view of the German language notwithstanding, the later Heidegger came to the conclusion that modern homelessness cannot be resolutely willed out of existence by a historical *Volk*.

Hence, Heidegger's call for mortals to build, dwell, and think in the fourfold of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals is restrained in tone. As it stands, the attempt to identify the

⁸⁰“Only a God Can Save Us,” 113.

political implications of building, dwelling, and thinking is a futile endeavor. The Heideggerian imperative to build things in which the fourfold can attain ontological presence is more aesthetic than political. The same goes for Heidegger's dwelling ethos. Although the call for mortals to "save the earth" anticipates Green politics and its focus on environmental stewardship, Heidegger is silent about which political system is most likely to facilitate this undertaking.⁸¹ This is also the case with Heidegger's advice for mortals to await the divinities. And while Heidegger's counsel for mortals to initiate their mortality evinces an implicit disdain for modern liberal politics – which is founded on the fear of an untimely death – it fails to tell us which political system can best help mortals to face up to their mortality. Indeed, to think about such a question is to eschew the meditative thinking that is needed above all else.

So, Heidegger's call for mortals to build, think, and dwell in the fourfold tells us very little about how we should organize ourselves politically. Heidegger's refusal to speak about politics is more than understandable in light of the 1933 debacle, of course. But this is not the only reason for Heidegger's silence about political matters. For Heidegger, the mere attempt to delineate a coherent political philosophy is a manifestation of the metaphysical impulse that exacerbates modern homelessness. This is why there is little room for political philosophy in Heidegger's late philosophy. In the words of Strauss,

A dialogue between the most profound thinkers of the Orient and in particular East Asia may lead to the consummation prepared, accompanied or followed by a return of

⁸¹For Zimmerman, Heidegger can be regarded as a deep ecological theorist of sorts. See Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, 243. Zimmerman would subsequently qualify this view in "Rethinking the Heidegger-Deep Ecology Relationship," *Environmental Ethics* 15 (Fall 1993): 195-224.

the gods. That dialogue and everything that it entails, but surely not political action of any kind, is perhaps the way. Heidegger severs the connection of the vision with politics more radically than either Marx or Nietzsche. One is inclined to say that Heidegger has learned the lesson of 1933 more thoroughly than any other man. Surely he leaves no place whatever for political philosophy.⁸²

Strauss is surely correct. I would only add that Heidegger's severing of the bond between philosophy and politics is particularly destructive of modern political orders that are constructed on theoretical foundations.

As it turns out, Heidegger's alienation from politics is at one with his estrangement from ethics. For Heidegger, ethical philosophy is the product of intellectual *decline* in the fact that it is a product of the transformation from pre-Socratic thinking into academic philosophy. Hence, the issuing of ethical judgements is pernicious in that it obstructs man's ability to ponder his abode. Heidegger himself signals his reluctance to issue ethical judgements when he brazenly asserts that the production of food is the same as the production of corpses. Viewed from this perspective, Heidegger's late philosophy is not only apolitical, but also amoral.

All in all, then, Heidegger's dynamic search for home culminates in an ethical-political impasse. His attempt to help his fellow Germans rediscover their homeland ends with the concession that modern homelessness cannot be addressed politically. Nor can modern homelessness be addressed ethically. All that mortals can do to remedy the plight of homelessness is to build, dwell, and think in a way that prepares the way for the future truth-disclosing event (*Ereignis*). Only when the absent gods return of their own accord will mortals finally be enabled to achieve homecoming in a technological age.

⁸²Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, 34.

The fatalism implicit in Heidegger's dwelling ethos has aroused much criticism. Jürgen Habermas, for example, complains that Heidegger's personal failure to acknowledge his culpability in the German National Socialist debacle is inextricably linked with the fatalism of his post-turn philosophy: "he (Heidegger) did not understand the so-called *Kehre* as the outcome of an effort of thought to solve problems, the result of a process of investigation, but always as the objective event of an anonymous overcoming of metaphysics staged by Being itself." To Habermas, the fatalism of Heidegger's later thought is a manifestation of the German philosopher's failure to break with the philosophy of the subject. Like other parties to the philosophical discourse of modernity – Nietzsche, Horkheimer and Adorno, Derrida, Bataille, Foucault – Heidegger had struggled to break free of the tradition of Western subjectivity. Alas, Heidegger's attempt had failed because he had failed to consider the possibility that "there are other paths leading out of the philosophy of the subject" besides impotent mysticism.⁸³

Emmanuel Levinas, another critic of Heidegger, agrees with Habermas, at least up to a point. To Levinas, Heidegger's ethical and political failures are a byproduct of his anti-subjective ethos. However, Levinas takes Heidegger to task from a different perspective. For Levinas, the problems attendant to Heidegger's attempt to transcend the boundaries of Western subjectivity are manifestations of deeper problems that pervade all varieties of Western ontology. In Levinas's view, the ontological search for home that drives the

⁸³Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ed. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 156, 137.

Heideggerian project is ethically problematic because it is oblivious to the needs of strangers.

It is to Levinas that this study now turns.

Chapter 5: The Violence of Homecoming: Levinas's Critique of Heidegger

It is impossible to be stinting in our admiration for the intellectual vigor of *Sein und Zeit*, particularly in light of the immense output this extraordinary book of 1927 inspired. Its extreme steadfastness will mark it forever. Can we be assured, however, that there was never any echo of Evil in it?

Emmanuel Levinas
"As if Consenting to Horror"

I. Introduction

Of the numerous thinkers who benefitted from Heidegger's tutelage, the Franco-Russian thinker Emmanuel Levinas is singular in personifying the encounter between philosophy and the Holocaust or *Shoah*. In an autobiographical sketch entitled "Signature," Levinas accurately describes his life as a "disparate inventory . . . dominated by the presentiment and memory of the Nazi horror."¹ If Heidegger's biography witnesses the twentieth century's most notorious confrontation between philosophy and politics, Levinas's life story is comparable in occasioning philosophy's self-examination of its role in the rise of political evil.

At an early point in his career, Levinas confronted Heidegger, the thinker who had authored "one of the finest books in the history of philosophy. . . . One of the finest among four or five others."² At the same time, Levinas also encountered the thinker whose name

¹Levinas, "Signature," 291

²Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 37.

was – to a certain extent – marred by his association with the political movement that perpetrated the atrocity of atrocities. Alternately attracted to the power of Heidegger’s intellect and repulsed by his German National Socialist political sympathies, Levinas’s ambiguous attitude towards Heidegger would leave an indelible imprint on the cast of his philosophy.

Levinas first encountered Heidegger in 1929, two years after the German philosopher had published *Being and Time*. Heidegger’s effect on Levinas was as immediate as it was profound. What particularly impressed Levinas was Heidegger’s contention that philosophy, like every other human endeavor, proceeds from a stance of active engagement with the world rather than Archimedean detachment. However, shortly thereafter, Levinas learned from Alexander Koyré of Heidegger’s allegiance to German National Socialism, a fact that was later confirmed by Heidegger’s 1933 rectoral address. Like so many others, Levinas was scandalized by Heidegger’s capitulation to Germanic fascism. From this point on, Levinas’s “firm confidence that an unbridgeable distance forever separated the delirious and criminal hatred voiced by evil on the pages of *Mein Kampf* from the intellectual virtuosity displayed in *Sein und Zeit*” was decisively shattered.³

Heidegger’s subsequent behavior further alienated his former pupil. In the postwar period, Heidegger had – aside from a handful of evasive and scandalously equivocal remarks – remained silent about the *Shoah*. Perhaps more than the rectoral address itself, Heidegger’s silence hinted at the presence of a discernible ethical insensitivity. As Levinas put it,

³Emmanuel Levinas, “As If Consenting to Horror,” *Critical Inquiry* 15 (Winter 1989): 485.

“Doesn’t this silence, in time of peace, on the gas chambers and death camps lie beyond the realm of feeble excuses and reveal a soul completely cut off from any sensitivity, in which can be perceived a kind of consent to the horror?”⁴ This silence, even more than the rectorship and the posthumous *Der Spiegel* interview, confirmed the questionability of Heidegger’s personal character.

Long before Victor Farias revealed the sordid details of Heidegger’s involvement with German National Socialism, however, Levinas leveled a pointed critique at Heidegger’s philosophy. For Levinas, the problem with Heideggerian fundamental ontology is that it effectively subordinates ethics to ontology. For Levinas, this ontological supremacy works in tandem with the anti-humanistic elements of Heidegger’s thought to render it ethically pernicious. Moreover, Heidegger’s thought contains another element that is equally, if not more, disturbing: paganism. For Levinas, Heidegger’s philosophy in general, and his later thought in particular, is essentially pagan in calling for the sanctification of worldly place. In Levinas’s view, the Heideggerian consecration of place exercises pernicious political consequences in that it implicitly sanctions the distinction between native inhabitants of the sacred hearth and outsiders. This dichotomy, with its inherent capacity to facilitate nationalistic, chauvinistic, and xenophobic political sentiments, renders Heidegger’s emphasis on the ontological importance of place decidedly sinister. It also represents one of several reasons why Heideggerian ontology necessarily engenders tyrannical political consequences.

⁴Levinas, “As If Consenting to Horror,” 487.

In this chapter, I shall analyze Levinas's critique of Heidegger's place-bound ethos by analyzing his critique of the ontological, anti-humanistic, and pagan elements of the latter's thought. I shall begin by examining Levinas's critique of the ontological cast of Heidegger's philosophy. In Levinas's view, Heidegger's thematic focus on Being is objectionable in that it totalizes otherness and promotes egoism. Subsequently, I will examine Levinas's critique of modern anti-humanism – and its Heideggerian strand – before considering his critique of Heidegger's paganism. For Levinas, Heidegger's pagan emphasis on the centrality of place is inherently "cruel" in that it implicitly draws a distinction between natives and foreigners. I shall conclude by considering Levinas's view of the political implications of Heideggerian ontology. For Levinas, Heideggerian ontology inevitably leads to "imperialist domination" and "tyranny," and is thus to be regarded as an especially pernicious temptation of the postmodern age.

II. The Violence of Heideggerian Ontology

Levinas's incisive critique of Heideggerian ontology is a byproduct of his radical critique of the entire Western tradition. For Levinas, most of the Western tradition is ontological in nature: "Western philosophy has most often been an ontology." When Levinas identifies the majority of the Western tradition as ontological in nature, he has in mind a particular notion of what defines ontology as such. Conventionally, of course, ontology is the philosophical attempt to comprehend the nature of Being. For Levinas, however, ontology is a "reduction of the other to the same by the interposition of a middle

and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of Being.”⁵ In this light, ontological comprehension, by virtue of its insertion of a “middle and neutral” term such as reason, spirit, and history, is inherently totalizing in that it effectively eliminates the alterity, or otherness, of the comprehended being. The use of a neutral term – an *arche* – as a means of eliminating alterity is thus not merely a peripheral aspect of ontological thought but is rather its defining feature. In Levinas’s view, most of the Western tradition is characterized by this totalizing tendency.

The *telos* that drives the ontological nullification of otherness is the promotion of the autonomy of the self. As Levinas writes, “Ontology, which reduces the Other (sic) to the same, promotes freedom – the freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other.”⁶ Insofar as ontology effectively annihilates alterity, it also enables the knowing being to maintain its identity as an autonomous self. To a self that can readily comprehend every single being that it encounters, there is nothing to fear from the unknown. In such a milieu, the self is free to pursue its own egoistic imperatives, unhindered either by the encounter with otherness (*autre*) generally or with other people – what Levinas calls “the Other” (*autrui*) – more concretely.⁷

What is the Other? Much as the question of Being occupies a position of central position in Heideggerian ontology, what might be called the question of the Other represents

⁵Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquense University Press, 1961), 43.

⁶Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42.

⁷As a means of conveying the transcendental import of Levinas’s notion of the Other, this term will be consistently capitalized throughout the essay, even when Levinas and his translators have neglected to consistently do so in the original translation.

the core concern of Levinasian ethics. In the Levinasian ethical schema, the Other refers to other people, and the human relationship with the Other is the medium through which human beings experience reality. Hence, whereas Heidegger finds that the human relationship to things is the predominant means by which man encounters Being, Levinas contends that the human relationship with other humans is the medium through which humans confront the Other.

The face of the Other expresses infinitude. For Levinas, this fact renders the human attempt to comprehend the Other decidedly futile. This futility marks the Other as the source of transcendence, a transcendence that elevates it beyond the purview of ontological thought. “If ontology – the comprehension of Being – is impossible, it is not because every definition of Being already presupposes the knowledge of Being, as Pascal had said, it is because the comprehension of Being cannot *dominate* the relationship with the Other.”⁸

Even if they cannot completely totalize the Other, Western ontologists make the attempt to do so nonetheless. The approach of the Other has a vaguely disquieting effect on the ego. As Levinas puts it, the approach of the “stranger” (*l'étranger*) disturbs the being-at-home with oneself (*le chez-soi*)” because the stranger is the “free one” who “escapes my grasp by an essential dimension, even if I have him at my disposal.”⁹ Viewed from this angle, ontology is the means by which the ego’s encounter with transcendence is rendered less jarring.

⁸Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 47.

⁹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

Inasmuch as most of Western philosophy is ontological, most of the thinkers that comprise the Western tradition are not engaged in an exploration of reality as much as an appropriation of it. Insofar as Western ontologists remain mired in a dialogue centered around the notion of the autonomous self, the proper metaphor for their speculative endeavors is that of a homecoming journey. “For the transcendence of thought remains closed in itself despite all its adventures – which in the last analysis are purely imaginary, or are adventures traversed by Ulysses: on the way home.”¹⁰ To be sure, past philosophical sojourners have encountered many unfamiliar and exotic sights over the course of their ontological *Odyssey*. However, much like their Odyssean prototype, these wayfarers encounter alterity in the context of a metaphorical journey homeward, alternately assimilating or removing the obtrusive Other which stands in the way of their quest to return to Ithaca. Such is the history of Western ontology from Parmenides to Heidegger.

If Western ontology represents a lengthy Odyssean journey homeward, then Heidegger represents the ontological tradition’s latest sojourner. Like every other Western ontologist, Heidegger’s encounter with difference is buffered by a particular intermediary term: Being. In affirming the priority of Being, Heidegger effectively decrees that all existent entities must present themselves through the lens of this all-important *arche*. As Levinas writes, “To affirm the priority of Being over the existent is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with someone, who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the Being of the existent, which permits the apprehension,

¹⁰Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 27.

the domination of the existent (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom.”¹¹ Hence, the only difference between Heidegger’s thought and earlier thinkers such as Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hegel, and Husserl is that he uses a different *arche* to annihilate otherness.

Much like previous Western ontology, Heidegger’s philosophy is characterized by an inordinate emphasis on comprehension. This is especially the case with *Being and Time*. For Levinas, *Being and Time* is permeated by subjectivity insofar as comprehension is the fundamental mode of *Da-sein*’s existence. As Levinas writes, “*Being and Time* has argued perhaps but one sole thesis: Being is inseparable from the comprehension of Being (which unfolds as time); Being is already an appeal to subjectivity.”¹² Hence, because Heidegger’s analysis of *Da-sein* emphasizes comprehension to such an extent, it is permeated by subjectivity.

Subjectivism, of course, represents much more than an innocent attempt to understand reality. For Levinas, subjectivism is inherently exploitative: “‘I think’ comes down to ‘I can’ – to an appropriation of what is, to an exploitation of reality.”¹³ Much as the later Heidegger criticized his own first great work for failing to break out of the Cartesian subject/object dichotomy, Levinas criticizes Heideggerian subjectivity on the grounds that the very desire to comprehend reality is indicative of a complementary desire to control it.

¹¹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 45.

¹²Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 45.

¹³Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

To be sure, Heidegger's brand of subjectivism is not necessarily synonymous with the subjectivism propounded by other modern thinkers. Levinas concedes that Heidegger is no mere proponent of what might be called "free will" philosophy in that, in the Heideggerian ontological schema, freedom possesses man rather than vice versa: "To be sure, the freedom involved in the essence of truth is not for Heidegger a principle of free will."¹⁴ Nonetheless, for Levinas what is decisive is the fact that Heidegger's philosophy posits a nexus between Being and freedom *per se*. This nexus establishes the space in which *Da-sein* can act, a space that is "cleared" by the prior reduction of alterity to sameness: "But the dialectic which thus reconciles freedom and obedience in the concept of truth presupposes the primacy of the same, which marks the direction of and defines the whole of Western philosophy."¹⁵ In other words, the placing of what is different into pre-formulated ontological categories is the *sine qua non* for *Da-sein*'s autonomous activity in obedience to Being.

Indeed, Heidegger's thought promotes selfish autonomy to a perhaps *greater* extent than previous Western ontologists because his emphasis on Being enables the self to remain essentially unaffected by its confrontation with alterity. As an inherently impersonal concept, Being confers on *Da-sein* an unlimited power to comprehend and control its surroundings: "If freedom denotes the mode of remaining the same in the midst of the other, knowledge, where the existent is given by interposition of impersonal Being, contains the

¹⁴Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 45.

¹⁵Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 45.

ultimate sense of freedom.” Or, as Levinas puts it elsewhere, “He (Heidegger) puts over man a neuter which illuminates freedom without putting it in question.”¹⁶

Because it promotes freedom in such a radical manner, Heideggerian ontology is inherently inimical to ethics. Ethics is characterized by the calling into question of egoistic spontaneity. As we have seen, Heideggerian ontology does not allow for such a calling into question. Because of this, Heideggerian ontology is inimical to justice: “It would be opposed to justice, which involves obligations with regard to an existent that refuses to give itself, the Other, who in this sense would be the existent par excellence.”¹⁷

If one re-considers *Being and Time* with this Levinasian insight firmly in mind, the promotion of autonomy operates on a multiplicity of levels. It is almost banal to note that the Heideggerian notion of care (*Sorge*) is essentially individualistic in thrust in that *Da-sein* cares for its “ownmost” existence, not for the well-being of others. Nor does Heidegger’s concept of Being-with (*Mitsein*) negate the subjectivity that permeates fundamental ontology. With its inherent emphasis on the mineness (*Jemeinigkeit*) of *Da-sein*, Heideggerian ontology fails to posit a positive phenomenology of human sociability. To a *Da-sein* that, in its being is concerned about its own being, the Other stands as an obtrusive impediment that potentially hinders its own self-flourishing.

What is considerably less obvious, however, is that care for self presupposes a prior degree of individual comfort and contentment to which Heidegger’s thought is entirely

¹⁶Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 45; Emmanuel Levinas, “Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite,” in Adriann Peperzek, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993),100-101.

¹⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 45.

oblivious. Heidegger's description of *Da-sein*'s essentially utilitarian relationship with ready-to-hand entities fails to account for the *enjoyable* nature of its existence. Before it manipulates them, in Levinas's view, the self experiences "things" as objects to be enjoyed. The Heideggerian conception of care is thus blind to the experience of existential enjoyment that underlies *Da-sein*'s Being-in-the-world. As Levinas quips, "*Da-sein* is never hungry. Food can be interpreted as an implement only in a world of exploitation."¹⁸ This crucial philosophical oversight serves to further obscure *Da-sein*'s Being-with-the-Other. Insofar as the enjoyable nature of *Da-sein*'s existence is hidden from view, the question of how such enjoyment usurps the place of the Other is also obscured.

We have seen how, for Levinas, Heidegger's early thought annihilates otherness and promotes the freedom of the self. But what of Heidegger's later thought? In his postwar work, Heidegger develops a critique of metaphysical subjectivity that looks to the pre-Socratic thinkers such as Parmenides and Heraclitus to point the way to a non-subjective relationship to reality. For Levinas, however, Heidegger's turn to the pre-Socratics is as permeated by the spirit of egoism as his earlier foray into Husserlian phenomenology: "The 'egoism' of ontology is maintained even when, denouncing Socratic philosophy as already forgetful of Being and already on the way to the notion of the 'subject' and technological power, Heidegger finds in Presocratism thought as obedience to the truth of Being."¹⁹

Why is Heidegger's later thought conducive to egoism, for Levinas? In Levinas's view, what is decisive is that Heidegger calls for man to exist in a state of "obedience" to the

¹⁸Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 134.

¹⁹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

truth of Being. In the Heideggerian schema, man obeys the truth of Being by building things that enable the fourfold (*Geviert*) to attain ontological presence. As Levinas puts it, “This obedience would be accomplished in existing as builder and cultivator, effecting the unity of the site which sustains space.”²⁰ Hence, ontological obedience necessitates that man embrace a constructionist stance towards the earth. For Levinas, man’s attempt to assert himself as “builder and cultivator” recreates the egoism that characterizes Cartesian philosophy in a new guise.

Because it is egoistic, the Heideggerian imperative to build in the fourfold is ethically problematic. More specifically, the Heideggerian imperative to build and cultivate supplants the ethical imperative to tend to the needs of the Other. As Levinas puts it, “In bringing together under the firmament of the heavens, the waiting for the gods and the company of mortals in the presence of the things – which is to build and cultivate – Heidegger, with the whole of Western history, conceives of the relation with Other as enacted in the destiny of sedentary peoples, the possessors and builders of the earth.”²¹ Hence, the dweller’s relationship with the earth takes precedence over his relationship to the Other. Because he acts in obedience to Being, the Heideggerian dweller is free to totalize the Other without a second thought.

Viewed from this perspective, Heidegger’s later thought is no less prone to possessive mastery than modern metaphysics. Paradoxically, Heidegger’s attempt to disengage his thought from the stance of possessive mastery characteristic of modern

²⁰Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

²¹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

subjectivity seemingly leads him to counsel a course of action that opens up the possibility of mastery of a different sort: “Possession is preeminently the form in which the Other becomes the same, by becoming mine. In denouncing the sovereignty of the technological powers of man Heidegger exalts the pre-technological powers of possession.”²²

The possessive tendencies that characterize Heidegger’s later thought are complemented by a corresponding tendency towards objectification. Although Heidegger’s later thought is not objectifying in the same sense that earlier ontological schemas are, the fact that it is objectifying is evident: “His analyses do not start with the thing-object, to be sure, but they bear the mark of the great landscapes to which the things refer. Ontology becomes ontology of nature, impersonal fecundity, faceless generous mother, matrix of particular beings, inexhaustible matter for things.”²³

Whatever its other departures from his earlier thinking, then, Heidegger’s later philosophy merely repeats the egoistic, possessive, and objectifying tendencies that characterized fundamental ontology from the start, albeit in a new guise. Whether it is *Da-sein*’s freedom to achieve its authenticity or a mortal’s freedom to build, dwell, and think in the fourfold, the key point is that Heideggerian ontology enables the self to possess and objectify the Other in order to achieve freedom. In this sense, Heideggerian ontology continues a long-standing tradition that dates back to Parmenides, the father of Western ontology to whom Heidegger justly pays tribute.

²²Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

²³Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

A philosophy that exhibits what Levinas calls a “non-allergic” relationship to alterity is compelled to take into account the infinite and transcendent nature of human existence. A heteronomous (other-directed) philosophical schema must be “humanistic” in the sense that it is predicated on a prior conception of an irreducible human essence. However, humanism has been undermined by the ontological attempt to discern the “being of beings,” an attempt that insufficiently distinguishes between the “isness” of human being and the source of its value: “The *beyond* and the *completely other than being* of valuing is, as a result, understood as modalities of being, as *adverbs* relating to the verb *to be* – as if ontology, the understanding of the being of beings, exhausted all the problems.”²⁴ The fact that the crisis of humanism is ontological in nature points to why Heidegger, the century’s preeminent ontologist, is also one of humanism’s most trenchant critics. Acutely aware of Heidegger’s eminence in this regard, Levinas levels a penetrating critique of Heideggerian anti-humanism even as he attempts to re-ground humanism on a restored and improved foundation.

III. Heidegger and Anti-Humanism

Heidegger’s towering presence on the Continental philosophical scene decisively confirms the crisis of humanism that marks twentieth-century thought.²⁵ Arriving in the wake of previous theoretical and methodological critiques of humanism, Levinas writes,

²⁴Emmanuel Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value and the Prospects for Humanism,” in *Value and Values in Evolution*, ed. Edward A. Maziarz (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1979), 181.

²⁵Among the works that examine this crisis are Kate Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism* (London: Hutchinson, 1986) and Luc Ferry and Alain Renault, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*, trans. Mary H.S. Cattani (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990).

“Heidegger, the most contemporary philosopher – a philosopher formed by phenomenology itself which is so important for the notion of value – confirms this calling into question.”²⁶

Heidegger does not merely confirm the questionability of humanism, Levinas recognizes, he also delivers its *coup de grâce*: “The end of metaphysics, the end of humanism – this is the thesis of Heidegger.”²⁷ In order to get proper perspective on Heidegger’s critique of humanism, it is necessary to briefly consider the argument that he presents in his “Letter on Humanism.” In that essay, Heidegger levels a critique of humanism in the following passage:

Every humanism is either grounded in metaphysics or is made to be the ground of one. Every determination of the essence of man that already presupposes an interpretation of beings without asking about the truth of Being, whether knowingly or not, is metaphysical. The result is that what is peculiar to all metaphysics, specifically with respect to the way the essence of man is determined, is that it is “humanistic.” Accordingly, every humanism remains metaphysical. In defining the humanity of man humanism not only does not ask about the relation of Being to the essence of man, because of its metaphysical origin humanism even impedes the question by neither recognizing nor understanding it.²⁸

On this account, past humanisms have been tethered to a metaphysical world-view. That is to say, past humanisms presuppose a given interpretation of the being of Beings. By focusing on the question of the *humanitas* of *homo humanitas*, past humanisms have neglected to consider the question of the relation of Being to the essence of man. Indeed, in Heidegger’s view, past humanistic schemas actively hinder the very attempt to ponder such a question. Hence, previous attempts to posit the human as the *arche* for all actions focus on

²⁶Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 182.

²⁷Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 183.

²⁸Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 225-226.

beings at the expense of Being. Moreover, prior humanistic attempts to posit the human as the preeminent, if not supreme, value in an ontological hierarchy ignore the centrality of Being, and contribute to the anthropocentric delusions that drive modernity.

Insofar as previous humanisms have been metaphysical in nature, the metaphysical attempt to establish the *humanitas* of *homo humanus* has also contributed to the modern plight of homelessness that accompanies the “abandonment of Being by beings.”²⁹ From a Heideggerian perspective, ending man’s alienation entails jettisoning the notion that man is the guiding principle of his own actions, a notion that elevates man over Being. Additionally, it necessitates discarding the corresponding illusion that man possesses an intrinsic source of value that renders him superior to the rest of reality. All in all, the notion of an “interior” man who is “as a subject identical with himself, certain of himself in the cogito, capable of closing in on himself” and “who in his psychological life experiences values in himself and who in his cultural life extends a meaning to nature” must be relinquished.³⁰ Only by eschewing these metaphysical presuppositions will man be enabled to return home to the “house of Being” of language, a homecoming facilitated not through rational discourse but through the poetic musings of Georg Trakl, Rainer Maria Rilke, and especially Friedrich Hölderlin.

Levinas undermines Heidegger’s critique of metaphysical humanism by taking issue with Heidegger’s diagnosis of modern homelessness. Against Heidegger’s contention that homelessness results from the metaphysical inquiry into the Being of beings, Levinas argues

²⁹Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 218.

³⁰Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 183.

that homelessness is endemic to human existence. As a universal aspect of the human condition, homelessness pre-dates Greek antiquity: “The notion of a man exterior to being and exiled on earth is older than Greek metaphysics, and has certainly already directed the development and orientation of this metaphysics towards the idea of a man foreign to the earth.”³¹ Rather than being a derivative mood that refers back to an original state of ontological wholeness, then, homelessness is man’s primordial condition.

By contending that modern alienation is essentially unrelated to the influence of metaphysics, Levinas effectively makes space for the resuscitation of humanism. Insofar as it is mistaken to blame modern homelessness on Western metaphysics, it is equally misguided to attribute it to the influence of past humanisms. But Levinas does not reject the Heideggerian critique *tout court*; he concedes the partial truth of Heidegger’s diagnosis. Levinas agrees with Heidegger that modern man is homeless. But so was Greek and medieval Christian man, for that matter. By historicizing the phenomenon of homelessness, Heidegger fails to recognize its universality: “There always being a distance from the I and the self, the recurrence of the I to the self is impossible.”³² As it turns out, Heidegger’s failure to recognize this truism is symptomatic of his inability to recognize the ultimate source of man’s homelessness.

For Levinas, the Other is the reason why man is homeless. In sum, the ego is oppressed by its inability to completely separate itself from the Other. This inability is especially disturbing because it signifies a corresponding incapacity to evade its infinite

³¹Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 184.

³²Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 185.

responsibility for the well-being of the Other. Indeed, the self is a veritable “hostage” to the Other: “stranger to himself, obsessed by others, uneasy, the self is a hostage, a hostage in his very recurrence to himself, never ceasing to measure up to himself, but always in this way ever closer to others, ever more indebted, aggravating his own self-bankruptcy.”³³ Being-with-the-Other, rather than Being itself, is the reason for the ego’s inability to consolidate its identity.

To get proper perspective on how the connection between the self and the Other is the ultimate source of man’s homelessness, one is compelled to consider a tradition that Heidegger had contemptuously shoved aside in the process of focusing on the philosophic speculations and poetic musings of the ancient Greeks: the Judaic theological tradition. Heidegger’s emphasis on Athens at the expense of Jerusalem not only overlooks a key source of the Western tradition, but also prevents him from considering Hellenic philosophy in light of its most significant alternative. As Levinas writes, “Have not the Sacred Scriptures read and commented on in the East given a new slant to the Greek writings?”³⁴ The answer, of course, is yes. Taking as his point of departure the recognition that Western civilization is as indebted to the ancient Hebrews as to the ancient Greeks, Levinas is able to consider the problem of modern homelessness from an augmented perspective.

Levinas points to several Biblical passages as evidence that the ancient Hebrews pondered the question of exile prior to its subsequent philosophical and mythopoetic

³³Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 186.

³⁴Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 184. Unfortunately, Levinas fails to specify which particular Biblical translation he uses in this essay.

investigation by the ancient Greeks. More specifically, Levinas quotes Psalm 119: “I am a stranger on earth, do not conceal your commandments from me.” In Levinas’s view, this psalm alludes to Chapter 25, verse 13, of the Book of Leviticus in which Yahweh declares that “No land shall be irrevocably alienated, for the earth is mine, for you are but strangers dwelling in my abode.”³⁵ Besides providing empirical evidence that sustained reflection on man’s utter strangeness in the world did not originate in Hellenic antiquity, Judaic scripture also provides – from Levinas’s perspective – a more compelling and convincing account of its real source.

Whereas Platonic metaphysics had attributed man’s ontological incompleteness to the body/soul dualism, the Book of Psalms locates it in the unsatisfiable ethical obligations that arise from our common status as “strangers” in the world. As Levinas writes: “For in Psalm 119, in the context of this difference which is proclaimed between the self and the world, are to be found the commandments, those which impose an obligation towards other people.”³⁶ Rather than being a manifestation of its longing to return to a place where it can exist in a state of holistic oneness, then, the self’s jarring feeling of worldly displacement arises from the responsibilities that it must shoulder for the well-being of the Other.

As a universal experience, the feeling of not-Being-at-home is one that is shared by all human beings in all times and places. As such, it also provides the impetus for human fraternity. Even as it confirms our status as strangers in a strange land, the communal

³⁵Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 184.

³⁶Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 185.

experience of homelessness unites worldly sojourners in a common enterprise. Indeed, Levinas regards this truism as perhaps the Bible's "principal message":

An Echo of the Bible's permanent message and perhaps its principle message, this condition – or uncondition of – stranger and "slave in the land of Egypt" draws man together with his neighbor. Men seek themselves out in the uncondition of strangers. This latter unites humanity. The difference which accounts for this strangeness in the world is fundamentally a nonindifference in regard to men – in regard to value.³⁷

Characteristically, Levinas appeals to Biblical support to buttress his case. Much as the Book of Psalms alludes to man's nomadic condition, the Book of Genesis points to the intersubjectivity that accompanies the communal experience of nomadism. As Levinas approvingly notes, it was Yahweh, rather than Noah, that closed the door on humanity when it was condemned to die in the flood: "It is 'the Eternal which closed the door of the Arc on Noah,' a text of Genesis tells us with wonderful precision."³⁸ Noah's utter inability to close the door behind him in the face of human suffering is, for Levinas, exquisitely symbolic of the ego's incapacity to remain wholly aloof to the fate of the Other. Rather than signifying a mere failure of nerve, this incapacity plays a constructive role in facilitating the oscillation from solitary egoism to communal altruism.

At the same time, however, man's inability to remain detached from his fellows serves as an implicit confirmation of his interior dimension. The fact that the ego can have its sense of Being-at-home disturbed by the Other signifies its separateness from the Other: "Having no rest in one's self, without any bias in the world, this strangeness to every place,

³⁷Levinas, "The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value," 185. Of course, for Levinas the Bible is the Hebraic scriptures. This fact should be kept in mind whenever Levinas appeals to Biblical authority.

³⁸Levinas, "The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value," 185.

this Being-on-the-other-side of being – this is certainly an interiority in its own way.”³⁹ The ego’s responsibility for the Other grounds human subjectivity and confirms man as the *arche* of his own actions. Moreover, this responsibility constitutes the ultimate source of man’s supreme value on the ontological value-hierarchy. Viewed alongside all other beings, man stands alone in bearing responsibility for the remainder of humanity.

Viewed from the perspective of Levinas’s “Biblical humanism,” Heidegger’s conflation of humanism with post-Platonic metaphysics is revealed to be a product of his Hellenic provincialism. Nonetheless, one should not categorically dismiss Heidegger’s critique of humanism. For Levinas, Heideggerian anti-humanism is correct in alluding to the impoverished nature of past humanisms. The being of human being does not lie in the realm of existent entities, nor in a conception of man as the truth-establishing subject. As Levinas writes, “Modern antihumanism is no doubt right when in man conceived as an individual in a genus or a being situated in an ontological region, persevering in being like all other substances, it does not discover a privilege which would make of him the aimed at end of reality or when it calls into question man as a being belonging to no genus, to no ontological region but only to his interiority.”⁴⁰ All in all, Levinas agrees with Heidegger that traditional humanism has failed to posit a source of human value that is commensurate with man’s dignity.

One should reject, however, Heidegger’s prioritization of Being over man that underlies his anti-humanistic critique. Coming in the wake of modern philosophy – and its

³⁹Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 186.

⁴⁰Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 186.

selfish and egoistic focus on the autonomous self – such a conception has a certain undeniable appeal, as the large number of contemporary Heideggerians eloquently attests. However, it fails to recognize man’s status as an ethically responsible being and, by extension, the irreducible source of his value.

As we have seen, this failure is a by-product of Heidegger’s exclusive focus on the Greek component of the Athens-Jerusalem axis. Heidegger’s inability to find “in man, lost in history and the order of things the trace of this responsibility which makes a subjectivity, and, in the other person, the trace of this value” represents a symptom of his failure to consider, and take seriously, the Hebraic theological tradition.⁴¹ As it turns out, this oversight is hardly incidental. Part of the reason why Heidegger was drawn to the ancient Greeks was that their thought proved to be more hospitable to the pagan religiosity that looms in the background of much of his philosophy. By way of confronting Heidegger’s anti-humanistic philosophy with Biblical humanism, Levinas is thus compelled to confront Judaism’s age-old nemesis.

IV. Heidegger and the Pagan Temptation

In his essay entitled “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” Levinas links Heidegger’s paganism with his influential critique of modern industrial technology. As modern technology’s most articulate and influential critic, Heidegger sounds a passionate cry of protest against the technological standardization that afflicts the modern age. As with his critique of humanism, Heidegger’s achievement in this regard is not to be completely dismissed. Regardless of whether one welcomes or loathes the growth of technology, it must

⁴¹Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 187.

be conceded that its development poses certain undeniable dangers. Hence, whatever its other shortcomings, there is “some truth” to the Heideggerian critique in that it alerts us to the dangers posed by the advent of the technological age. As Levinas recognizes, “There is some truth in this declamation. Technical things are dangerous. They not only threaten a person’s identity, they risk blowing up the planet.”⁴² If only because it points to these two dangers, thoughtful persons are compelled to give this critique its due.

Be that as it may, one is also obligated to remain cognizant of the poisoned sources of the Heideggerian critique. One such source is, of course, reactionary conservatism: “But the enemies of industrial society are in most cases reactionary. They forget or detest the great hopes of our age.”⁴³ Like a myriad of other thinkers, Heidegger paints a sentimental and idyllic picture of the pre-modern past in order to dwell on the dark side of modernity.

The other source represents perhaps the greater danger: paganism: “I am thinking of one prestigious current in modern thought, which emerged from Germany to flood the pagan resources of our Western souls. I am thinking of Heidegger and the Heideggerians.”⁴⁴ The pagan aspect of Heidegger’s philosophy not only separates it from that of other reactionaries – the vast majority of whom profess a vestigial faith in Christianity – but also renders it uniquely seductive.

⁴²Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” 231. The title refers to Yuri Alexeyevich Gagarin, a Russian cosmonaut who, on April 12, 1961, became the first man to enter outer space.

⁴³Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” 231.

⁴⁴Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” 231.

On Levinas's account, the pagan cast of Heidegger's thought derives from its persistent emphasis on the world (*Welt*): "One would like man to rediscover the *world*."⁴⁵ Heidegger's conception of the world was prone to a certain flux. In *Being and Time*, the world consisted of equipmental items-of-gear, while in the "Origin of the Work of Art" the world is the sparring partner of the earth in works of art. In his later work, the world consisted of the fourfold (*Geviert*) of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. For Levinas, what is significant about Heidegger's persistent focus on the world is that it contains a corresponding attempt to "rediscover" the ineffable mystery it contains.

The Heideggerian project of worldly rediscovery entails calling attention to the experiences of mystical transcendence that occasion our everyday use of things and our inhabitation of the natural environment. As Levinas writes, to rediscover the world "means to follow a path that winds its way through fields, to feel the unity created by the bridge, the bridge that links the two river banks and by the architecture of buildings, the presence of a tree, the chiaroscuro, of the forests, the mystery of things, of a jug, of worn-out shoes of a peasant girl, the gleam from a carafe of wine sitting on a white tablecloth."⁴⁶ In the Heideggerian world of whatever configuration, natural and man-made things possess a sacred aspect that is often obscured by the hustle-and-bustle cadence of modern life.

Concomitant with the rediscovery of the holy aspect of things is a corresponding emphasis on the centrality of place. Indeed, things are sacred because they are gathering places in which transcendence and immanence merge in harmonious oneness. Insofar as

⁴⁵Levinas, "Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us," 231.

⁴⁶Levinas, "Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us," 232.

places in general admit the fourfold, they are to be treasured accordingly. Man's natural habitat is one such place that merits special consideration in that it contains an impenetrable mystery that demands respect, if not awe. "To rediscover the world," as Levinas writes, "is to attempt to recover a childhood mystery snuggled up inside the place, to open up to the light of great landscapes, the fascination with nature and the delight of camping in the mountains."⁴⁷

What is wrong with Heidegger's pagan call for worldly rediscovery? The problem that afflicts Heidegger's brand of pagan religiosity is the same problem that afflicts all past, present, and future varieties of paganism: cruelty: "The mystery of things is the source of all cruelty towards men."⁴⁸ In its very radicalness, this point bears repeating: paganism is not merely cruel but represents the ultimate "source" of "all cruelty." How can this be so? How can a religion that has been, for most of Western history, displaced by the world's great monotheistic faiths represent a perpetual source of human wickedness? The answer, as it turns out, relates to the manner in which paganism complements a nationalistic political impulse.

On Levinas's account, nationalism is the inevitable consequence of paganism's overwhelming stress on the ontological significance of place.⁴⁹ As we have seen, paganism

⁴⁷Levinas, "Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us," 231-232.

⁴⁸Levinas, "Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us," 232.

⁴⁹For his part, Jacques Derrida argues that Heidegger's emphasis on place is not pagan. As Derrida puts it, "the solicitation of the site and the land is in no way, it must be emphasized, a passionate attachment to territory or locality, is in no way a provincialism or particularism. . . . The thinking of Being thus is not a pagan cult of the site, because the site is never a given proximity but a promised one." Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 145.

for Levinas represents a “putting down (of) roots, almost in the etymological sense of the term.”⁵⁰ In turn, the pagan stress on “enrootedness” engenders nationalism because it effectually constructs an ontological dichotomy between natives and strangers. As Levinas writes, “One’s implementation in a landscape, one’s attachment to *place*, without which the universe would become insignificant and would hardly exist, is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers. And in this light technology is less dangerous than the spirits (*génies*) of the *place*.”⁵¹ Hence, the pagan sanctification of place draws an implicit distinction between the privileged insider who occupies the sacred hearth and the despised outsider who dwells outside of its purview.

What renders this distinction uniquely “cruel” is its pure arbitrariness. The baseless distinction between those rooted in the place and those who are placeless stigmatizes the latter on the basis of a wholly conventional distinction. Despite its sheer artificiality, however, the native/foreigner dichotomy encouraged by paganism represents the toxic source from which the very real pathologies of nationalism, chauvinism, and xenophobia originate. As Levinas writes, paganism is “a nationalism in terms of its cruelty and pitilessness – that is to say, in its immediate, naive, and unconscious sense.”⁵²

Even if it does not engender rabid nationalism, however, man’s attempt to put down roots is ethically pernicious in that it radicalizes the ego’s separation from the Other. Before it can develop a sentimental attachment to the site in which it is placed, the ego must

⁵⁰Emmanuel Levinas, “Simon Weil Against the Bible,” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 137.

⁵¹Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” 232.

⁵²Levinas, “Simone Weil Against the Bible,” 137.

necessarily separate itself from the Other. In the fact that paganism implicitly demands that the ego sever its ties with the Other, it also demands that the ego cut itself off from transcendence and from the “exteriority” that comes from its erotic desire to connect with otherness. In this light, paganism evinces not only the ego’s separation from other people but also from the realm of transcendence: “The separated being must run the risk of the paganism which evinces this separation and in which this separation is accomplished.”⁵³

In light of the cruelty that looms in the background of paganism’s call for roots – eventuating as it does in inflammatory nationalism – the spread of planetary technology is revealed to be a salutary, if not downright progressive, development. For Levinas, modern technology uproots human beings from the earth. In this sense, Levinas agrees with Heidegger. However, whereas Heidegger laments the uprooting effect of modern technology, Levinas celebrates it for the same reason. Insofar as “technology wrenches us out of the Heideggerian world and the superstitions regarding *place*,” Levinas recognizes, it likewise wrenches out of the native/foreigner dichotomy encouraged by the pagan emphasis on place. As Levinas puts it, “Technology does away with the privilege of enrootedness and the related sense of exile.”⁵⁴

By destroying the very distinction between native and foreigner, technology makes possible a novel global order free from the superfluous distinctions that have historically plagued relations among men. Hence, the possibility of a new intimacy, one based on naked human fraternity: “From this point on, an opportunity appears to us: to perceive men outside

⁵³Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 142.

⁵⁴Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and We,” 232-233, 232.

the situation in which they are placed, and let the human face shine in all its nudity.”⁵⁵ In rendering an undiluted face-to-face encounter with the Other possible, technology should be properly regarded as the positive phenomenon that it generally is.

For Levinas, the “achievement” of the Russian astronaut Gagarin is emblematic of modern technology’s liberating potential. Through the wonder of aeronautic technology, Gagarin was freed from the “superstition of place.” Levinas’s ecstatic description of Gagarin’s feat is worth quoting in full: “But what perhaps counts most of all is that he left the place. For one hour, man existed beyond any horizon – everything around him was sky or, more exactly, everything around him was geometrical space. A man existed in the horizon of homogenous space.”⁵⁶ The great hope of our age, for Levinas, is that all human beings will be enabled to enjoy the utter sense of placelessness that Gagarin briefly experienced. For in existing outside of any geographical boundary, Gagarin was neither native nor foreigner, neither insider nor outsider, neither inhabitant nor exile. Extended to the rest of humanity through technological advancement, such a placeless condition promises liberation from the arbitrary divisions that continually obstruct person-to-person relations.

In its displacing effect, modern technology completes the work of Judaism, which is likewise characterized by a nomadic ethos: “Judaism has always been free with regard to place.” In light of the cruelty entailed by the putting down of roots, this represents one of Judaism’s noblest features, in Levinas’s view. Much in contrast to the mythological earth-worship that is standard fare for pagan thinkers of the Heideggerian stripe, the Bible

⁵⁵Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” 233.

⁵⁶Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” 233.

downplays the aesthetic beauty of nature and instead emphasizes its utility for satisfying human needs: “the Book of Books is sober in its descriptions of nature! ‘A land flowing with milk and honey’ – the landscape is described in terms of food.” Moreover, Judaism subordinates place to the ethical imperatives of justice, a prioritization inherent in the concept of the promised land itself: “The Bible knows only a Holy Land, a fabulous land that spews forth the unjust, a land in which one does not put down roots without certain conditions.”⁵⁷

Levinas points to a particular episode in the Torah to buttress his point. As recounted in the Biblical Book of Genesis, Abraham plants a tamarisk at Beersheba. Seemingly, the beauty of the tamarisk provides a refreshing aesthetic contrast to the desolation of the desert. As Levinas puts it, the tamarisk is “one of the rare ‘individual’ trees planted in the Bible, which appears in all its freshness and colour to charm the imagination in the midst of so much peregrination, across so much desert.” However, in the Talmudic imagination, the significance of the tamarisk is purely utilitarian: “Tamarisk is an acronym; the three letters needed to write the word in Hebrew are the initials used for Food, Drink, and Shelter, three things necessary to man which man offers to man.” Hence, the tamarisk is a source of “Food, Drink, and Shelter,” nothing more. On Levinas’s account, the ultimate significance of this Biblical episode is that “The earth is for man. Man is his own master, in order to serve man. Let us remain masters of the mystery that the earth breathes.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” 233.

⁵⁸Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” 233.

Of course, the Bible is not only indifferent to the worldly idols extolled by the pagan imagination; it is actively hostile to them. In Levinas's view, the Jewish religion is distinguished by its unremitting hostility to any and all forms of paganism. As Levinas puts it, "*The sacred filtering into the world* – Judaism is perhaps no more than the negation of all that." How does Judaism "negate" the irruption of the sacred into the world? For Levinas, Judaism demystifies the cosmos by destroying the earthly "idols" that signify worldly enchantment: "Judaism has not sublimated idols, it has demanded that they be destroyed."⁵⁹

Indeed, it is this unrelenting hostility to all manifestations of Baalism that most renders Judaism most "distant from Christianity," on Levinas's account. Christianity, especially in its Catholic manifestation, sublimates the pagan worship of idols into a monotheistic framework: "Through sublimation, Christianity continues to give piety roots, nurturing itself on landscapes and memories culled from family, tribe and nation. This is why it conquered humanity." Judaism, however, refused to make compromises with paganism. Because of its "abstract universalism," Judaism has consistently combated the "imagination and passions" unleashed by paganism. However, because of its uncompromising vision, Judaism has effectively "demystified the universe" and "nature from a spell." More importantly, it has enabled man to be discovered "in the nudity of his face."⁶⁰ Inasmuch as modern technology carries on the Judaic task of worldly disenchantment, it, too, enables man to be discovered in the nakedness of his true condition. For this reason, its spread should be welcomed, not lamented.

⁵⁹Levinas, "Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us," 232, 234.

⁶⁰Levinas, "Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us," 233, 233-234, 234.

V. Conclusion

The Dutch philosopher Theo de Boer describes the difference between Heidegger and Levinas as follows:

In Levinas the central point of his thought is not truth or unconcealment of Being, but rather the reality of persecuted people in the daily history of the world. Levinas does not blame traditional metaphysics for having forgotten the truth of Being, but he holds against it that it has forgotten the dignity of men. In its insensitivity to justice and injustice, and its indifference to good and evil. The jurisdiction of history is a form of terror. The victims of history make their judgement on history. To listen to their voice is more in line with the dignity of philosophy than to lend an ear to the anonymous event that is called the truth of Being.⁶¹

As this chapter has noted, Levinas's emphasis on "the reality of persecuted people in the daily history of the world" informs his critique of Heidegger. Levinas's critique of Heideggerian ontology identifies how the ontological, anti-humanistic, and pagan cast of the latter's thought is inherently totalizing. This can be viewed as the first of Levinas's two principal objections to fundamental ontology. The second major objection, which I have ignored until now, relates to its political consequences. In sum, fundamental ontology necessarily leads to tyranny: "Even though it opposes the technological passion issued forth from the forgetting of Being hidden by the existent, Heideggerian ontology, which subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relationship with Being in general, remains under obedience to the anonymous and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny."⁶²

⁶¹Theo de Boer, *Van Brentano tot Levinas* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1991), 162. Quoted in Tijmes, "Home and Homelessness," 208.

⁶²Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 47.

Viewed from the perspective of Levinas' critique of the Occidental ontological tradition, such a conclusion is to be expected. For Levinas, Heideggerian Being represents merely the latest *arche* utilized by Western ontologists to eliminate the alterity of the Other and promote the freedom of the self. As the political manifestation of the totalization of the Other that ontology perpetrates in the realm of thought, tyranny represents the diluted essence of ontological politics. Much as ontological thought facilitates the domination of the other person by the autonomous ego, so too does it enable the state to totalize its "Other" – its subjects – in a comparatively comprehensive manner: "For the philosophical tradition the conflicts between the same and the other are resolved by theory whereby the other is reduced to the same – or, concretely, by the community of the state where by anonymous power, though it be intelligible, the I rediscovers war in the tyrannic oppression it undergoes from the totality."⁶³ In this light, the tyrannical rule of the modern state extends into the political realm the violent, thematizing tendencies that characterize ontology generally.

Nor is this conclusion shocking in light of the anti-humanistic cast of Heidegger's thought. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, anti-humanistic thinkers often posited grandiose schemes designed to put an end to the alienation supposedly engendered by subjective humanism. Much like earlier theoretical anti-humanists such as Marx and Nietzsche, Heidegger accuses past humanisms of contributing to modern estrangement by overlooking a pivotal aspect of the human condition.⁶⁴ A key difference between Heidegger

⁶³Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 47.

⁶⁴Of course, the early Marx had a humanistic bent that is in obvious tension with the deterministic flavor of his later wrings on capital. See Karl Marx, "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New

and his anti-humanistic forebears lies in the fact that, for him, it is metaphysical inquiry into the Being of beings that engenders modern alienation rather than philosophical idealism or slave-morality. Nonetheless, the comparison remains instructive: like Marx, Heidegger anticipates a future historical epoch in which man will finally recover his original ontological unity free from the obfuscating effect of past philosophical distortions. And like Marx and Nietzsche, Heidegger provides an ample supply of metaphysical *pathos* that unwittingly complements the violent political objectives of totalitarian political movements. In this sense, Heidegger's rectorship merely repeats the Marxist tragedy as farce.

And in a cruelly ironic twist, the disastrous failure of these eschatological projects has left contemporary man more homeless than ever: "Today's anxiety is more profound. It comes from the experience of revolutions that sink into bureaucracy and repression, and totalitarian violences that pass as revolutions. For in them the disalienation itself is alienated."⁶⁵ For Levinas, the fact that Heidegger's anti-humanistic philosophy briefly crossed paths with the century's most barbaric anti-humanistic political movement points towards the tyrannical impulse that unites both.

Heidegger's paganism, with its inherent capacity to engender nationalistic, xenophobic, and chauvinistic political tendencies, renders this danger even more acute. Indeed, at times Levinas suggests that paganism is the ultimate *source* of tyranny: "Tyranny is not the pure and simple extension of technology to reified men. Its origin lies in the pagan

York: W.W. Norton Company), especially pages 84-85 and 120-121.

⁶⁵Emmanuel Levinas, "No Identity," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhorr, 1987), 143.

‘moods,’ in the adoration that enslaved men devote to their masters.”⁶⁶ Through its emphasis on human rootedness and autochthony, Heidegger’s thought encourages human beings to divide themselves into natives and foreigners, thus inviting political persecution of the perceived outsiders who threaten the sanctity of the homeland (*Heimat*). Just as importantly, the pagan emphasis on place effectively closes off transcendence, leaving man powerless before the arbitrary exercise of worldly power. In a milieu where immanence and transcendence have been collapsed into a monolithic worldly totality, there can be no appeal to justice, nor indeed to any other metaphysical standard capable of curbing the exercise of immanent power. Because the homeland is the court of final appeal, the state that claims to act on its behalf possesses a blank check to dominate its subjects unhindered by external constraints.

From a Levinasian standpoint, then, the banal consequence of Heideggerian ontology is not individual heroism, communal intimacy, or an enlivened relationship to things but quiet sanction to – if not encouragement of – the expansion of impersonal state power. In the context of a philosophical schema that subordinates human beings to an ontological *arche*, refuses to posit an absolute source of human value and prizes place over people, such a conclusion is more than understandable. A “philosophy of power” as much as “injustice,” Heidegger’s thought is tragically emblematic of the dangerous political tendencies attendant with the subordination of ethics to ontology.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46-47.

⁶⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46-47.

Even as he bemoans the pernicious political consequences of ontological supremacy, however, Levinas does not call for its complete eradication. Indeed, Western ontology has a constructive role to play in Levinas's ethico-political schema. More specifically, Levinas suggests that the Greek ontological tradition is needed to universalize the ethical truths unearthed by the Judaic ethical tradition. As he writes, "At no point did the Western philosophical tradition lose its right to the last word; everything must, indeed, be expressed in its tongue; but perhaps it is not the place of the first meaning of beings, the place where meaning begins."⁶⁸ Similarly, even as he distances himself from Heideggerian anti-humanism, Levinas seconds many of Heidegger's criticisms of past humanism. Furthermore, insofar as he emphasizes the worldly aspect of ethical action, Levinas is no proponent of a radical transcendence that would be diametrically opposed to pagan worldliness. In these respects, the gap between Heidegger and Levinas is not as stark as it first appears.

The ambiguity of Levinas's attempt to distance himself from Heidegger's ontological and anti-humanistic philosophy also characterizes his corresponding attempt to separate himself from Heidegger's place-bound ethos. To be sure, Levinas identifies the cruelty intrinsic to pagan attempts to "put down roots." In this respect, a political home worthy of our allegiance presents itself as a virtual impossibility: all homes must first be founded, and the act of founding is revealed as inherently violent and totalizing. If this was the end of the matter, Levinas' significance for political thought would be of entirely negative import. However, Levinas does not call for a radical nomadism: if only implicitly, Levinas recognizes the validity of the human desire for homecoming. To appeal to another Judaic

⁶⁸Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 24-25.

metaphor, even Abraham possesses a vision of home that sustains him in his nomadic wanderings. What propels Abraham's journey through the wilderness is the vision of a "great land" of Canaan. What distinguishes it from the Odyssean sojourn is the ethical desire for the Other that inspires it. Cognizant of the Abrahamic ideal, and well aware of the pitfalls endemic to Heidegger's ontological, anti-humanistic, and pagan philosophy, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas posits a relationship to place that is ethical in emphasis, humanistic in stress, and transcendent in scope. The political implications of a Levinasian relationship to place will be fully examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Dwelling in the Face of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Hospitality

A sojourner, you are not to oppress:
you yourselves know (well) the feeling of the sojourner,
for sojourners were you in the land of Egypt.

Exodus 23:9

I. Introduction

Like Heidegger, Levinas is concerned about the problem of modern homelessness. However, whereas Heidegger interprets homelessness as an ontological symptom of the abandonment of Being by beings, Levinas regards it as a reminder of man's failure to meet his ethical obligation to the Other. Hence, whereas Heidegger considers the problem of homelessness from an ontological standpoint, Levinas contemplates it from an ethical vantage point. For Levinas, the problem of homelessness is epitomized not in man's failure to heed the call of Being but in the existence of unhoused people who have been territorially uprooted by economic destitution, political upheaval, and war. This change of emphasis from the ontological plight of *homelessness* to the ontic plight of *the homeless* marks the distance that separates Heidegger from Levinas. Coming from a theological tradition heavily imprinted with the experience of exile, Levinas ponders the plight of the homeless with a persistence and intensity that is matched by few contemporaries. As Derrida writes, Levinas "never turned his eyes away" from the "violence" and "distress" experienced by the "foreigner, the immigrant (with or without papers), the exile, the refugee, those without a country, or a State, the displaced person or population."¹

¹Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 64.

A keen awareness of the suffering experienced by those who lack access to a home (*maison*) informs Levinas's discussion of the dwelling in *Totality and Infinity*. In this discussion, Levinas identifies the home as the place of origin that underlies subjective thought and action. More specifically, the home undergirds mental activities such as recollection (*recueillement*), representation, and the physical activity of labor. The home is foundational to these endeavors because it shelters the self from the elements. Once liberated from the elemental realm, the ego is free to assert itself as a possessive being. But this achievement of interior and exterior mastery comes at the invariable expense of the self's connection to transcendence. When the Other is welcomed into the home, however, the I overcomes its egoistic attempt to dominate its surroundings. Moreover, by extending hospitality (*hospitalité*) to the Other, the self transforms the home into an instrument of ethical action.²

Levinas's description of the home and of the welcoming act that potentially occurs within its confines makes no overt mention of politics. The fact that Levinas's hospitality ethos bears potential political implications, however, is evident when his concept of the Third (*la tiers*) is taken into account. The Third is the third person who faces the self

²Despite the fact that the word itself is used only sparingly by Levinas, Derrida regards the concept of hospitality as central to *Totality and Infinity*: "Although the word is neither frequently used nor emphasized within it, *Totality and Infinity* bequeaths to us an immense treatise of hospitality." *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 21. Besides *Adieu*, Derrida also addresses the Levinasian concept of hospitality in "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999). For more on hospitality, see Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991); Thomas W. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); and Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984).

whenever it confronts the Other. As the representative of the larger human fraternity, the Third demands the ego's undivided attention. Considered from the perspective of Levinas's discussion of the home, this implies that the I is equally called to welcome (*accueil*) the Third into its political space. Being hospitable to the Third necessitates the creation of political and juridical institutions that reflect the nature of the human fraternity.

Extending a warm welcome to the Third, however, is no mean feat because the political realm is not coterminous with the ethical. For Levinas, politics is inherently violent and totalizing, a fact that renders the relation between ethics and politics heterogeneous in nature. The abyss that separates the ethical from the political – and which renders the deduction of the latter from the former manifestly impossible – is symbolized by what Levinas calls the “State of Caesar.” The defining feature of the Caesarian State is an aversion to ethical constraints, a fact that renders it an inappropriate organ for the extension of hospitality. A more apt vehicle for welcoming the Third is what Levinas labels the “State of David.” In explicit contrast to the State of Caesar, the Davidic State points beyond the State to the realm of the infinite, to ethics. The State of David, which reaches its culmination in the Messianic State, breaks the stranglehold of political immanence by extending hospitality to the foreigner, exile, refugee, and immigrant into the territory over which it is sovereign.

In this chapter, I will examine the political implications of Levinas's concept of hospitality. I shall begin by elucidating Levinas's analysis of the home as it is presented in *Totality and Infinity*. In Levinas' description, the home achieves its full dignity when the Other is welcomed into it, thereby transforming it from a pagan site to one that illuminates

the existence of the transcendent. Subsequently, I will consider Levinas's concept of the Third, noting how its presence illuminates the fact of human fraternity and demands the creation of political-juridical institutions that are apt vehicles for extending hospitality. After discussing Levinas's critique of the traditional State of Caesar as it has developed under the influence of the Augustinian real/ideal dichotomy, I shall consider his conception of the State of David and its Messianic culmination. By way of overcoming the real/ideal dualism, the State of David points towards the possibility of an authentically monotheistic politics. I will then examine the hospitality ethos that is one of the defining features of such a politics, noting how the monotheistic State distinguishes itself from its pagan predecessors by welcoming the transnationally homeless into its sphere of its jurisdiction. I shall conclude with some criticisms of Levinas, noting how the ethical thrust of his hospitality ethos is undermined by his Zionist loyalties and his racist fear of a "yellow peril." These shortcomings notwithstanding, however, Levinas's politics of hospitality retains its enticing appeal in an age in which the plight of the homeless has become a topic of increasing concern.

II. Levinas's Concept of the Home

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas considers the nature and significance of the home or dwelling. Considered as an implement, the home's utility is obvious in the fact that it shelters its inhabitant from "the inclemencies of the weather" and the threat posed by "enemies or the importunate." As valuable as these functions are, however, they do not account for the "privileged role" that the home occupies in relation to other items of "gear." What makes the home a uniquely valuable implement is the fact that it represents the point of

origin from which intentional human activities originate: “The privileged role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition, and in this sense its commencement.”³ No mere “‘implement’ among ‘implements,’” then, the home constitutes the *conditione sine qua non* of subjective human actions such as recollection, representation, and labor. Of these activities, the act of recollection stands out as particularly significant.

The self’s ability to recollect itself is precarious in an unhoused state. Prior to its subsequent inhabitation in a home, the ego “lives from” the elements in which it is immersed. Even as it is dependent upon its elemental surroundings, however, the I enjoys its existence as an autonomous ego that is at home (*chez-soi*) in the world: “In enjoyment throbs egoist being . . . To be separated is to be at home with oneself. But to be at home with oneself . . . is to live from . . . is to enjoy the elemental.”⁴

However, the mere fact that the self is dependent upon the elements renders its happiness decidedly ambiguous. The elements possess a strangeness, an anonymous “there is” (*il y a*) quality that causes the ego to speculate about its future happiness. Concerned about the “morrow,” the I attempts to master its insecurity by attempting to possess the world and thereby establish its economic autarky. Such independence, in turn, presupposes the ability of the self to suspend “the immediate reactions the world solicits in view of a greater

³Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 152.

⁴Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 177. Levinas’s notion of an “elemental” state has drawn comparisons to Locke’s state of nature. See Robb A. McDaniel, “Garden-Variety Liberals: Discovering Eden in Levinas and Locke,” *Polity*, 34, 2 (2001): 117-139.

attention to oneself, one's possibilities," an ability that is denied to the self in the elements.⁵ Hence, the significance of the home, which facilitates the inhabitation necessary for the ego to withdraw from the elemental realm and recollect itself in earnest.

The home enables the self to recollect itself because it welcomes the I into its confines. By extending an original welcome to the self, the home enables it to dwell in the world.⁶ "To dwell," Levinas writes, "is not the simple fact of the anonymous reality of a being cast into existence, as a stone one casts behind oneself; it is recollection, a coming to oneself, a retreat home with oneself as in a land of refuge, which answers to a hospitality, an expectancy, a human welcome."⁷ In the fact that the act of dwelling "answers to" an earlier extension of hospitality, one can say that the dweller, the prospective host (*hôte*), is first of all a guest. The host's uncertain identity as host – an ambiguity mirrored in the French term *hôte*, which connotes both host and guest – is reflected in the various courses of action that are available to the self once it has achieved refuge in the home.

Once it has been welcomed into the "extraterritoriality" of the home, the self is enabled to assert itself as a possessive being.⁸ After accepting the home's welcoming

⁵Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 154.

⁶For Levinas, the welcoming aspect of the home is symbolized by the figure of the woman: "The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the Home, and inhabitation." *Totality and Infinity*, 155. It should be continually borne in mind that Levinas uses the term "woman" to connote the "welcome of the dwelling" (*Totality and Infinity*, 158). Hence, the physical absence of a member of the fairer sex does not connote a corresponding absence of the welcoming aspect of the home.

⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 156.

⁸The self's possessive relationship to the world is accomplished through labor. Labor is the process by which the elemental world is seized and deposited in the home. Insofar as the laboring activity is essentially egoistic, it can be viewed as the process by which the

embrace, the I can attempt to use this hospitality to its own advantage by shutting itself up in its self-enclosed world. In metaphorically locking the doors and windows of the home, the I reveals the latter as the cipher of its interiority. The centripetal nature of this process marks the self as an autonomous being that is radically divorced from the exterior realm of alterity and from its immanent source, the Other: “And this possibility of forgetting the transcendence of the Other – of banishing with impunity all hospitality (that is, all language) from one’s home, banishing the transcendental relation that alone permits the I to shut itself up in itself – evinces the absolute truth, the radicalism, of separation.”⁹ By way of radicalizing its status as a separate being, the self thereby ensures that the home will remain a pagan shrine to itself.

Levinas illustrates his point in this regard by pointing to Gyges.¹⁰ As described in Plato’s *Republic*, the descendant of Gyges takes advantage of his possession of a magical ring that renders him invisible by killing the king and seducing his wife. For Levinas, Gyges’s descendant can be viewed as a particularly egregious example of the egotistical self in that he helps himself to the hospitality offered by others – particularly with regard to the king’s throne and his wife – and reciprocates none in return. Acknowledging his connectedness to the Other in perverse fashion, he cynically manipulates it to his own

elemental other is reduced to the same. For Levinas, the annihilation of elemental alterity through labor is the necessary pre-condition for the creation of money: “Because it is not in itself the thing can be exchanged and accordingly be compared, be quantified, and consequently already lose its very identity, be reflected in money.” *Totality and Infinity*, 162. Inasmuch as the laboring process presupposes the existence of the home, the home’s importance in relation to the economic realm is manifest.

⁹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 172-173.

¹⁰Plato, *Republic*, 359d-360b.

advantage by way of asserting his unlimited freedom to do what he pleases. As Levinas writes, “Gyges plays a double game, a presence to others and an absence, speaking to ‘others’ and evading speech; Gyges is the very condition of man, the possibility of injustice and radical egoism, the possibility of accepting the rules of the game, but cheating.”¹¹ And the instrument that enables Gyges’s ancestor to perpetrate injustice is his ring, the symbol of his separation. In this respect, it is akin to the home which, as the emblem of the self’s interiority, can likewise be utilized to act in a similarly ignoble fashion.

Needless to say, not all homes are condemned to play the role of Gyges’s ring. The home can potentially be a place where hospitality is given as well as taken. Hospitality is extended when “I welcome the Other who presents himself in my home by opening my home to him.”¹² For Levinas, the seemingly unremarkable act of “opening my home” to the Other is a gesture that is fraught with uncommon ethical significance. Indeed, it is of such ethical import that decisive political implications result from its performance, as will become apparent later.

On Levinas’s account, accepting the Other into the home represents an act of obedience to a timeless moral imperative commanded by the Decalogue: “Thou shalt not murder.” Not harming the Other in this fashion represents the most basic and rudimentary law of hospitable conduct. As Levinas makes clear, however, it also constitutes an act of recognition by which the presence of transcendence is suitably acknowledged: “But the untraversable infinity of the negation of murder is announced by this dimension of height,

¹¹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 173.

¹²Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 171.

where the Other comes to me concretely in the ethical impossibility of committing this murder.”¹³ As significant as this act of obedience is, in and of itself it is insufficient, inasmuch as the hospitable gesture requires corollary obligations of a more positive nature.

This is most evident with respect to the economic components of the welcoming act. For Levinas, the face of the Other “paralyzes possession” insofar as it implicitly demands that the self take an active, caring interest in its material well-being. Viewed from this perspective, the mere offering of kind words and best regards is decidedly inadequate: words must be supported with concrete actions. Hence, opening one’s home to the Other necessitates the offering of nourishing food, warm, dry clothing, and comfortable shelter to one who may not be well-fed, well-clothed, and sheltered from the elements. This facet of the hospitable gesture is a reflection of the fact that the self’s relationship with the Other is, like all other human relationships, necessarily economic in character: “No human or interhuman relationship can be enacted outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home.”¹⁴

Opening one’s home to the Other in this fashion, however, benefits not only the guest who is the recipient of the host’s economic hospitality. It is also to the advantage of the host who is in perpetual danger of conflating his or her identity with the ownership of material possessions. By giving its possessions to the Other, the host is enabled to view them with a degree of clarity that is otherwise impossible: “But in order that I be able to free myself from the very possession that the welcome of the home establishes, in order that I be able to see

¹³Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 171.

¹⁴Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 172.

things in themselves, that is, represent them to myself, I must know how *to give* what I possess.”¹⁵ Considered from this perspective, hospitality makes a non-slavish and reflective relationship to material possessions possible.

The Other is able to effect these remarkable transformations with regard to the self’s relationship to its possessions through language. The language evoked by the presence of the Other is uniquely powerful because it emanates from transcendence. Indeed, the language expressed by the face of the Other is of such compelling power that the self’s very identity is called into question: “The calling in question of the I, coextensive with the manifestation of the Other in the face, we call language.”¹⁶

Language undermines the identity of the self by way of calling the more egregious manifestations of its ipseity into question. Prior to the approach of the Other, the self clings to a blissfully ignorant view of its own freedom: as Heidegger would put it, the self’s possession of freedom is not an “issue” for it. In the process of discoursing with the Other, however, the ego discovers that the exercise of this freedom is potentially unethical. Newly conscious of the inter-subjective consequences of its autonomy, the I now becomes ashamed

¹⁵Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 171.

¹⁶Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 171. After *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas would deviate from this undifferentiated conception of language by drawing a distinction between “the saying” and “the said.” Levinas’s revised view of language was inspired by Derrida’s 1964 essay “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas.” In this piece, Derrida criticizes Levinas’s thought for relying on the *logos* of the tradition and for being oblivious to the ontological and violent nature of language. Levinas’s second major work *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* implicitly responds to Derrida’s critique by distinguishing between the pre-linguistic, non-ontological realm of the saying and the linguistic, ontological realm of the said. Considered in relation to Levinas’s earlier discussion of language in *Totality and Infinity*, the expression of the face can be viewed as a “saying” that exists prior to the formulation of linguistic concepts.

of the “naïveté” that previously accompanied its unconscious, spontaneous exercise: “In this commerce with the infinity of exteriority or of height the naïveté of the direct impulse, the naïveté of the being exercising itself as a force on the move, is ashamed of its naïveté.”¹⁷

The self’s discovery of the ethically problematic consequences of its freedom constitutes the decisive stage in its transformation from an egoistical being to an altruistic servant of the Other. The self is not all that is changed by its encounter with the Other, however. The symbol of its autonomy – the home – likewise experiences a profound transfiguration. When the Other is welcomed into the home, the latter ceases resembling a “root” that the self puts into the ground as a means of isolating itself from its fellows: “The chosen home is the very opposite of a root.”¹⁸ Instead, the home attains the status of a chosen place because the presence of the Other graces it with the presence of the infinite. Such a home ceases resembling Gyges’s ring and instead becomes an ethical instrument worthy of Abraham.

The home attains an Abrahamic character by virtue of the fact that it mirrors the common experience of exile that unites host and guest. Of course, it goes without saying that the guest “has no other place, is not autochthonous, is uprooted, without a country, not an inhabitant, exposed to the cold and the heat of the seasons. To be reduced to having recourse to me is the homelessness of the neighbor.”¹⁹ However, at the most primordial level, the host is also homeless. By welcoming the Other into the home, the host implicitly acknowledges

¹⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 171.

¹⁸Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 172.

¹⁹Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 91.

its own exilic status. Viewed from this perspective, the home that houses the hospitable gesture is an “inn” in that both of its inhabitants are self-admitted exiles.

Its exilic nature notwithstanding, the inn is no less solidly anchored than a more conventional home. The hospitable home “indicates a disengagement, a wandering (*errance*) which has made it possible, which is not a less with respect to installation, but the surplus of the relationship with the Other, metaphysics.”²⁰ In the fact that it is grounded on a solidly metaphysical, rather than pagan, foundation, it represents the only proper object of man’s attempt to achieve homecoming. As Brian J. Walsh evocatively puts it, “True homecoming is only possible if the security of the home is extended to the vulnerability of the other, if the safety of the familiar is extended beyond the boundaries of the home to the unfamiliar, the alien.”²¹

Brief as it is, Levinas’s discussion of the home stands as one of the most fruitful discussions of his entire corpus. What it posits is nothing less than a normative standard by which the adequacy of the human relationship to place can be ethically judged. More specifically, what Levinas’s analysis suggests is that our status as moral beings stands or falls with our treatment of the strangers who presents themselves on our doorstep. By way of positing an ethics of hospitality, Levinas also provides an ethical gauge with which the home’s status as a legitimate entity can be assessed. Is the home an Abrahamic instrument of ethical compassion for the stranger, widow, and orphan? Or is it little more than a miserable

²⁰Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 172.

²¹Brian J. Walsh, “Homemaking in Exile: Homelessness, Postmodernity and Theological Reflection,” Paper presented to the Canadian Theological Society, June 2, 1995, 9.

domicile that Gyges retires to after a long day of regicide and seduction? In this respect, Levinas provides a welcome dose of ethical sensitivity to a postmodern genre more often dominated by considerations of aesthetic delicacy.

As notable as this achievement is, however, the question of politics remains open. Although ethics permeates Levinas's discussion of the home, politics is conspicuously absent. The notable lack of political themes in this respect is a reflection of the fact that the self's relationship to the Other occurs on an anarchical, non-political plane. Even so, this fact does not preclude the possibility of what might be called a "politics of hospitality." As other sections of *Totality and Infinity* make clear, the self does not confront the Other in isolation, but also faces "the Third" (*la tiers*). As it turns out, Levinas's concept of the Third transforms his ethical philosophy into a theory of politics and renders his hospitable ethos into a political doctrine.

III. The Third and the Possibility of Human Fraternity

In his two major works – *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* – Levinas discusses the ethico-political significance of the Third (*la tiers*).²² What is the Third? Perhaps the most instructive way of defining the Third is to consider it in relation to the Other. Whereas the Other refers to the other person, the Third refers to another person. And while the locution Third seemingly implies that the third party occupies a position of secondary importance *vis-a-vis* the Other, Levinas maintains that the Other is equal to the

²²Because the Third demands the same infinite responsibility as the Other, it will be capitalized throughout this essay. For a good discussion of Levinas's concept of the Third, see William Paul Simmons's essay entitled "The Third: Levinas's Theoretical Move from An-Archical Ethics to the Realm of Justice and Politics," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 25, 6 (1999): 83-104.

Third because the face of the former reflects the presence of the latter: “His (the Other’s) equality within this essential poverty consists in referring to the *third party*, thus present at the encounter, whom in the midst of his destitution the Other already serves.”²³ Inasmuch as the Third exists in a condition of parity with respect to the Other, the self is no less responsible for the welfare of the other person than for the third party.

That being said, taking ethical responsibility for the personal well-being of the Third is no elementary matter inasmuch as it does not represent a singular person but rather the rest of humanity. If the Other corresponds to the Thou of Martin Buber’s I-Thou relationship, the interlocutor that the self faces in the form of the Third more closely approximates a “we.” Phrased in Buberian parlance, then, one can say that the I confronts a we every time it encounters a Thou: “The *thou* is posted in front of a *we*.”²⁴ The fact that the rest of the human race confronts the self contemporaneously with the Other entails that the ego is obligated not only to take ethical responsibility for the single, lone stranger that faces it but also the rest of the human plurality. In this sense, the I is compelled to model itself after the character of Alyosha Karamazov in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, a character who had declared that “each one of us is guilty before everyone, and I more than others.”²⁵

It goes without saying that the appearance of the Third significantly complicates the self-Other relationship. At the very least, the interjection of an alien party eliminates the Other’s status as the sole object of the self’s moral concern. As Levinas writes, the

²³Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

²⁴Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

²⁵Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: New American Library, 1957), 264.

introduction of the Third entails a certain “betrayal” of the I’s “anarchical relation with illeity.”²⁶ At the same time, however, Levinas is at pains to emphasize that the Third’s presence is salutary. In order to grasp Levinas’s point in this regard – and in order to relate his concept of the Third to his hospitality ethos – it is necessary to reconsider the act of welcome described at the end of the previous section in light of the changes wrought by the entrance of the third person.

Consider the example of language. Levinas’s description of the hospitable act identifies the crucial role that language plays in undermining the self’s identity as a self. With the insertion of the Third into the I’s relationship with the Other, however, a wholly new communicative situation arises. Insofar as language now involves not just two interlocutors but the entire human collective, intimate one-on-one discourse is no longer sufficient. As Levinas writes, “Language as the presence of the face does not invite complicity with the preferred being, the self-sufficient ‘I-Thou’ forgetful of the universe; in its frankness it refuses the clandestinity of love, where it loses its frankness and meaning and turns into laughter or cooing.”²⁷ In order to speak to the mass of humanity, language must adapt accordingly and assume more general form. If the linguistic exchange between the self and the Other resembles a Socratic dialectic, the language that accompanies the presence of the Third more closely resembles the “sermon, exhortation,” and “prophetic word” of an Old

²⁶Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 158.

²⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

Testament prophet.²⁸ Considered in this light, language oscillates into a thematizing – even violent – instrument that aggressively solicits the self’s attention.

The Third exhorts the self to respond to it. In this respect, it is akin to the Other, whose demand on the ego’s undivided attention is no less compelling. Faced with two parties that simultaneously vie for its attention and concern, the ego is compelled to weigh between competing ethical obligations. Besides being a distinctive mental activity, such an act is necessary because it forces the self to consider the welfare of those who fall outside of the parameters of the self-Other relationship. As Levinas puts it, the presence of the Third prevents the self from seeking “the complicity of a private relation and a clandestinity” with the Other.²⁹ In compelling the self to enlarge its sphere of moral concern, the third party ensures that its attempt to satisfy its “asymmetrical” obligations to the other person will not be pursued at the excessive expense of others. In this sense, the Third serves as an “incessant correction” to the danger of ethical myopia.

Up until this point, I have noted how Levinas’s concept of the Third engenders significant transformations with respect to language and the nature of ethical obligation. It is not difficult to predict the consequences of these changes *vis-à-vis* Levinas’s hospitality ethos. With respect to language, welcoming the Third necessitates a discourse of sufficient “frankness and meaning” to reflect the fact that “language is justice.”³⁰ Moreover,

²⁸Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 213.

²⁹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 212.

³⁰Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213. Here, the notion of “justice” is synonymous with “ethics.” In his later writings, Levinas draws a distinction between the ethical sphere of one-on-one interaction and the political sphere of justice.

expressing hospitality toward the Third necessitates that the self curtail the extent of its ethical responsibility to the Other. On Levinas's account, these changes are engendered by the self's newfound consciousness of an aspect of the human condition that the face of the Third brings home to it: fraternity (*fraternité*).

Perhaps the most appropriate way to consider Levinas's idiosyncratic conception of fraternity is to note what is *not*. Human fraternity, Levinas emphasizes, is not grounded in a common *genus* based on biological or linguistic characteristics. Rather, the cement that binds the members of the human fraternal order to one another is collective responsibility: "It is my responsibility before a face looking at me absolutely foreign (and the epiphany of the face coincides with these two moments) that constitutes the original fact of fraternity." Put differently, the link that binds the human community together is the shared ethical responsibility of everyone for everyone else. The ethical obligation to welcome the face of the Other is equally dispersed among the members of the Levinasian community. Moreover, the ethical imperative that serves as the foundation of human *égalité* also determines the core characteristics of the human *fraternité*.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas identifies two principal aspects of human fraternity. One such aspect is the irreducible singularity of every human being: "It (human fraternity) involves individualities whose logical status is not reducible to the status of ultimate differences in a genus, for their singularity consists in each referring to itself."³¹ Like equality, human singularity is predicated on the individual responsibility that each person has for the welfare of the larger human community. In sum, each member of the Levinasian

³¹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 214.

fraternal order is unique by virtue of the fact that each is singularly responsible for the well-being of fellow members.

Obviously, the grounding of individual dignity in shared moral obligation represents Levinas's attempt to salvage the respect for individual personhood that is one of the more valuable legacies of the Enlightenment from the attacks leveled by its Heideggerian critics. Even so, Levinas's defense is ambiguous in the fact that it jettisons modern philosophy's emphasis on the self and supplants it with a heteronomous schema. Levinas's conscious attempt to defend the dignity of the individual while avoiding the egoistic excesses of modern philosophy is also reflected in the second aspect of the Levinasian human fraternity: monotheism.

Monotheism, of course, is the belief that there is but one God. For Levinas, the human fraternity is monotheistic in the sense that its members are inextricably linked by the "commonness of father." Such "commonness" is reflected in the "primary proximity, in which the face presents itself to my welcome." Put differently, God's paternal reign over the human fraternity is manifested in the self's connection to the Other. Indeed, Levinas goes so far as to maintain that monotheism cannot be properly comprehended without reference to the self-Other relation: "Monotheism signifies this human kinship, this idea of a human race that refers back to the approach of the Other in the face, in a dimension of height, in responsibility for oneself and the Other."³²

Clearly, Levinas's advocacy of monotheism is tailored to appeal to postmodern sensibilities. By rendering the locus of divine presence in ethical relationships, Levinas's

³²Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 214.

theological vision emphasizes its this-worldly import. That being said, the monotheistic aspect of Levinasian ethics cannot be dismissed as mere “flavoring.” In the fact that monotheism is the source of the human fraternity’s communal coherence, the collective recognition of irreducible human singularity is only possible “thanks to God”: “it is only thanks to God that, as a subject incomparable with the other, I am approached as an Other by others, that is, ‘for myself.’”³³ From a Levinasian vantage point, then, respect for human personhood is unthinkable without the “father” whose presence underlies the proximity that inheres in the human community. Hence, the “commonness of God” prevents the human fraternal order from collapsing into a Hobbesian free-for-all of separate, autonomous selves.

As the ultimate source of community, divine paternity also makes possible the practice of politics. Politics is prefigured in the face of the Third inasmuch as its presence demands the creation of politico-juridical institutions to govern the human brotherhood: “In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the we, aspires to State, institutions, laws which are the source of universality.”³⁴ Insofar as the Third inspires the creation of “State, institutions, laws,” one can say that its presence projects the self into the realm of politics.

Obviously, the State and its accompanying institutions should mirror the human community over which it is sovereign. That is to say, it should respect irreducible human dignity and rest on a monotheistically ethical foundation. The necessity for the political

³³Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 158.

³⁴Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 300.

sphere to fulfill its governing function while reflecting the structural features of the human fraternity represents the Levinasian ethico-political imperative. Adhering to this imperative necessitates welcoming the Third into the self's public space by creating a political community where individual human dignity is respected and ethical conduct encouraged. As it turns out, extending such a welcome turns out to be a highly problematic endeavor insofar as the sphere where political action occurs is radically dissimilar from the anarchical realm where the hospitable gesture is ethically performed. For Levinas, the non-ethical aspect of the political realm is epitomized in the historic prominence of what he calls the "State of Caesar."

IV. From the State of Caesar to the Messianic State

Levinas's discussion of the State of Caesar occurs in the context of a piece entitled "The State of Caesar and the State of David." Like the other writings gathered in *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, Levinas's essay is presented in the form of a reading of the Talmud. Even if it is not one of Levinas's more straightforward philosophical writings, the piece is of unusual interest to students of political theory. Indeed, it sheds considerable light not only on Levinas's view of politics but also on the critique of Christianity that informs that view.

Levinas utilizes the locution State of Caesar to designate the non-ethical, autonomous practice of politics. No mere reference to the Roman *res publica*, then, the term potentially encompasses everything from the Greek *polis* to the modern nation-State. Even if its existence precedes the birth of Christianity, however, the definitive feature of the State of Caesar is its conformity to the Christian imperative to "Render to Caesar the things that are

Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." In other words, the Caesarian State is the political entity that complements the Augustinian dichotomy between the temporal and the spiritual that, in Levinas's view, epitomizes the Christian conception of politics.

For Levinas, the Christian approach is inherently problematic in that its demarcation between the earthly City and the City of God leaves the former ethically unregulated. The Augustinian distinction between the City of Man and the *Civitas Dei* is problematic not because it introduces a tension between the political and the ethical but because it *precludes* the possibility of such tension: "In Christianity, the kingdom of God and the earthly kingdom are separated yet placed side by side without touching and, in principle, without contesting each other."³⁵ While this arrangement is advantageous in that it facilitates the harmonious co-existence of political power and its spiritual competitor, the fact that Christianity has often been a State religion reveals that one of its chief beneficiaries is the State itself. By promoting Christianity with the seal of official approval, the State in turn receives a blank check to conduct itself in whatever fashion it fancies. Liberated by Christianity's "political indifference," the State is left free to succumb to Machiavellian power-aggrandizement.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas vividly describes the *praxis* of politics as it has developed under the influence of centuries of spiritually-sanctioned ethical neglect. In sum, the political realm is inhospitable to moral action: "politics is opposed to morality, as

³⁵Emmanuel Levinas, "The State of Caesar and the State of David," in *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), 177.

philosophy to naivete.”³⁶ As “the art of foreseeing war and of winning it by any means,” the practice of the political art (*technē*) is inspired by an overriding desire to get the better of one’s fellows. The fact that this particular *technē* has historically “been enjoined as the very exercise of reason” is a disturbing reflection of the degree to which *ratio* itself is tainted by the same agonistic spirit. Indeed, even the actions of the most peace-minded political actors are driven by the desire to dominate adversaries and ascend to a position of power and influence on the political hierarchy. In the fact that it is inherently warlike, the practice of the political art is revealed to be not only amoral but downright immoral.

The political art is also impersonal. Politics is inextricably connected with the art of lawgiving, with the formulation and execution of abstract laws. By virtue of their general quality, laws make no allowance for the fact of human alterity, an alterity exemplified in the form of the unlucky exception whose very existence confounds the broad brush of generalization that animates the lawgiving art. Even in their most enlightened form, laws oppress the individual. The universalizing spirit that inspires the legislation and execution of laws mark the political realm as inherently tyrannical. As Levinas writes, “politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and other who have given rise to it, for it judges them according to universal rules, and thus in absentia.”³⁷

For Levinas, the impersonal – and hence tyrannical – nature of political life is reflected in the manner in which it prizes “works” over the men who constitute them. Whether it is the ancient city-State or the modern nation-State, the State-work totalizes the

³⁶Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 21.

³⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 300.

individual. As Levinas writes, “In political life, taken unrebuked, humanity is understood from its works – a humanity of interchangeable men, or reciprocal relations.”³⁸ In such a milieu, exploitation is inevitable. Viewed from this perspective, the first casualties of the war that political actors attempt to win by hook or by crook are the actors themselves, all of whom must submerge their identity into the State totality.

Much as the political sphere is organically incapable of fostering respect for human dignity, it is equally hostile to a monotheistic orientation. Indeed, the State of Caesar more closely resembles a pagan idol. Unlike other pagan gods, however, the State-god reveals itself to be a particularly jealous deity. Ever mindful of challenges to its sovereignty, the “pagan State” will brutally suppress all internal and external threats: “The State of Caesar separates humanity from its deliverance by developing without hindrance and reaching the plenitude (or hypertrophy – natural, as it were) of the form it received from the Graeco-Roman world, the pagan State, jealous of its sovereignty, the State in search of hegemony, the conquering, imperialist, totalitarian, oppressive State, attached to realist egoism.”³⁹

In the context of a critique of Augustinian politics, it is ironic that Levinas’s description of the State of Caesar recalls Augustine’s critique of the City of Man. Like Augustine, Levinas suggests that the practice of politics is inherently immoral. Seemingly, Levinas would concur with Augustine’s notion that kingdoms are akin to bands of robbers. As Augustine puts it:

³⁸Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 298.

³⁹Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 184.

Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms? A gang is a group of men under the command of a leader, bound by a compact of association, in which the plunder is divided according to an agreed convention. If this villainy wins so many recruits from the ranks of the demoralized that it acquires territory, establishes a base, captures cities and subdues peoples, it then openly arrogates to itself the title of kingdom, which is conferred on it in the eyes of the world, not by the renouncement of aggression but by the attainment of impunity. For it was a witty and a truthful rejoinder which was given by a captured pirate to Alexander the Great. The king asked the fellow, 'What is your idea, in infesting the sea?' And the pirate answered, with uninhibited insolence, 'The same as yours, in infesting the earth! But because I do it with a tiny craft, I'm called a pirate: because you have a might navy, you're called an emperor.'⁴⁰

Levinas shares Augustine's dark view of the political. The face of the Third calls for the creation of political and juridical institutions that reflect the respect for individual personhood that befits "children of God." What the Caesarian State delivers instead is war and individual self-alienation, relegating ethics to the margins of political life. Insofar as the State of Caesar persists by virtue of Christianity's ethical abdication of the political sphere, however, its prominence is, to a certain extent, historically-contingent. That is to say, the State of Caesar is not the only – or even the most likely – institutional expression of man's political existence. There are, and have been, *alternatives*.

For Levinas, the most compelling such alternative is elucidated in rabbinic Judaism. What renders rabbinic Judaism unusually notable in this respect is its unique vision of the relationship between the political and spiritual. Unlike Augustinian Christianity, rabbinic Judaism blurs the line between the City of Man and the City of God: "In the Judaism of the Rabbis, in the centuries immediately preceding the birth of Christianity, as in post-Christian

⁴⁰St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 139.

rabbinical doctrine, the distinction between the political order and spiritual order (between the earthly City and the City of God) does not possess the clear-cut character suggested by the evangelical expression ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.’”⁴¹ At the same time, rabbinic Judaism eschews the contrary notion that “political power and the divine order are one and the same.” Levinas explicates the unique manner in which rabbinic Judaism navigates between these opposing extremes by way of describing what he calls the “State of David.”

Like his reference to the State of Caesar, Levinas’s use of the locution State of David is deliberate. In sum, the State of David designates the State whose governing practices are directly “related to the ideal world.” Hence, the Davidic State blurs the line between the real and the ideal in decidedly un-Augustinian fashion. Why the reference to David? David is a member of the family line that engenders the Messiah. Much as David’s bloodline produces the Messiah, the State that bears his name culminates in the Messianic State: “the State of David remains in the final stage of Deliverance.”⁴² Hence, the State of David can be viewed as an intermediary political form that exists halfway between the State’s primitive Caesarian manifestation and its Messianic apotheosis, which I will discuss shortly.

In stark contrast to the Caesarian State, the State of David is built upon a monotheistic foundation. The Davidic State reflects the “commonness of Father” in the fact that its ruler is responsive to a transcendent source of obligation. Its paradigmatic figure is, of course, King David. What makes David a monotheistic political leader? As noted in the

⁴¹Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 178.

⁴²Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 181.

Talmud, David maintains an intimate relationship with the Torah. The link that binds David to the Book constitutes the pathway by which transcendence enters into the governing practices of the State. Moreover, by immersing himself in the Torah, David enables the State to realize its full potential as a monotheistic political entity: “the State, in accordance with its pure essence, is possible only if the divine word enters into it; the prince is educated in this knowledge; this knowledge is taken up by each person on his own account; tradition is renewal.”⁴³

It should be continually borne in mind that Levinas’s discussion of the State of David occurs in the context of his Talmudic commentaries. Hence, Levinas is *not* suggesting that political leaders must immerse themselves in the Torah to become capable of ethically-informed political action. All the same, the example of David is instructive. For Levinas, this legendary Biblical figure derives his political excellence from his connection with transcendence. David’s connection with the infinite enables him to navigate political obstacles with a degree of ethical sensitivity wholly foreign to the Caesarian prince wallowing in the muck of Machiavellian *raison d’état*.

This is not to suggest that such a State is fully liberated from the demands of political necessity. In the Talmudic literature, the Davidic State is a “bearer of promises” in the fact that its existence foreshadows the impending Messianic epoch. Inasmuch as the Deliverance that it anticipates is not yet “at hand,” the State of David’s day-to-day conduct will be preoccupied less with the realization of grandiose eschatological schemes than with the problems attendant with day-to-day governance: “The epoch of the Messiah can and must

⁴³Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 180.

result from the political order that is allegedly indifferent to eschatology and preoccupied solely with the problems of the hour.”⁴⁴ In the fact that it is “preoccupied solely with the problems of the hour,” then, the State of David remains somewhat mired in the world of *Realpolitik*. While its actions acknowledge the existence of the transcendent, the Davidic State is not yet fully delivered from the occasional necessity to act in a more Caesarian fashion in order to facilitate its self-preservation.

The dualism that characterizes the State of David’s existence is epitomized in the figure of King David. David’s style of governance is distinctive in that he “wages war and rules during the day, and at night, when men are resting, he devotes himself to the Law.” Seemingly, David lives a double life in that he engages in warmongering by day and pious contemplation of the Word by night. David succumbs to this duality with the quiet expectation that the coming age of deliverance will restore the unity that is absent in his life by way of instituting an era of justice and freedom: “a double life in order to remake the unity of life.”⁴⁵ Even as he limits the horizon of his actions to seemingly mundane affairs of state, then, the ruler of the State of David nonetheless prepares the way for the subsequent messianic transfiguration.

The State of David reaches its culmination in the Messianic State, which announces the end of “all exile and all violence.”⁴⁶ Seemingly, its arrival ends – or at least renders less acute – the dualism that had characterized the State of David, which was only imperfectly

⁴⁴Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 180, 181.

⁴⁵Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 181.

⁴⁶Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 181.

freed from the taint of Caesarianism.⁴⁷ In the process of setting the people of Israel free from “exile” and “violence,” however, the Messiah who presides over the Messianic State initiates the chain of events that will gradually eventuate in the liberation of all humanity: “The Messiah institutes a just society and sets humanity free after setting Israel free.”⁴⁸ In the fact that its appearance portends the liberation of the human race, the Messianic State possesses a universal significance that far transcends the limited scope of Jewish experience. No mere creature of Jewish particularism, the Messianic State heralds a human as well as an Israelite homecoming.

What are we to make of Levinas’s discussion of the Messianic State? Obviously, the Messianic State stands at the farthest possible remove from the Caesarian State. Whereas the State of Caesar totalizes its subjects, the Messianic State liberates them. And while the former is a pagan entity, the latter is the monotheistic political institution *par excellence*. In these respects, the Messianic State is the ideal political organ for extending hospitality to the Third. Must all states, then, undergo a messianic transformation in order to become apt vehicles for hospitable political action? Levinas admits that even when the concept of the Messianic State is removed of its supernatural and apocalyptic connotations, it nonetheless strikes the secular mind as “premature” at best and “utopian” at worst.⁴⁹ Be that as it may,

⁴⁷This is, of course, a contested issue in Jewish thought. Some commentators emphasize the supernatural aspects of the Messianic Age while others, such as Maimonides, subscribe to a non-apocalyptic brand of messianism. Levinas appeals to the latter strand as a means of conveying “the importance that Jewish thought attaches to going beyond beautiful dreams in order to fulfil the ideal in events promised by a State.” Levinas, “The State of Caesar the State of David,” 181.

⁴⁸Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 180.

⁴⁹Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 186.

the Messianic State is superior to other political institutions because of the radical manner in which it points “beyond the State” to a transcendent source of human obligation. But Levinas also emphasizes that the Messianic State retains political form. Indeed, this is perhaps the central thesis of Levinas’s “State of Caesar” piece: “What is most important is the idea that not only does the essence of the State not contradict the divine order, but it is called by it.”⁵⁰

For Levinas, the fact that the Messianic State strikes modern sensibilities as “utopian” is at least partially the result of historico-political circumstances. For most of Western history, the dominance of a particular religion – Christianity – has rendered the question of a monotheistic politics merely “academic.” In Levinas’s view, however, the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel has propelled what was formerly an abstract question into the *lebenswelt* of concrete political practice. Formerly, the notion of *any* type of monotheistic State was a moot question inasmuch as its historical vehicle – Israel – was factually non-existent.⁵¹ With the formation of the Zionist State, however, Israel suddenly finds itself capable “of thinking a politics which would bring to completion its monotheistic message.”⁵²

That said, the challenge of creating a monotheistic politics is a formidable one. For Levinas, the political leaders who preside over the Zionist political experiment are presented

⁵⁰Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 180.

⁵¹Of course, one could plausibly object that Levinas is ignoring the political significance of Christian monotheism. For Levinas, however, Christianity’s failure lies in the fact that it leaves the realm of politics untouched by its own “monotheistic message.”

⁵²Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 187.

with the challenge of striking a balance between the demands of ethics and the necessities of politics. Put in Levinasian parlance, Israelite political actors are faced with the challenge of responding to both the face of the Other and the Third. As if this challenge is not formidable enough, it is rendered even more daunting by a notable lack of theoretical guidance. That is to say, *a priori* formulations are of limited utility in the realm of politics. Indeed, even the Talmudic literature fails to provide firm and authoritative guidance with respect to the implementation of a monotheistic politics: “At the heart of daily conflicts, the living experience of the government – and even the painful necessities of the occupation – allow lessons as yet untaught to be detected in the ancient Revelation.”⁵³

Given the conspicuous lack of theoretical guidance in this regard, political agents are compelled to act spontaneously. This is not to say that such agents act in a complete theoretical vacuum, but rather that pre-conceived formulas must be appropriately calibrated with respect to what Heidegger would call the “facticity” of the current situation: “Only the responsibility of a modern State, exercised on the land promised to Abraham’s descendants, should allow his heirs to elaborate explicitly, by comparing formulas to facts, a political doctrine suitable for monotheists”⁵⁴ The content of “a political doctrine suitable for monotheists,” then, is contingently related to the “facts” of Israel’s particular historico-political context. While a myriad of political theorists from Aristotle to Publius have celebrated the necessity of prudence in the conduct of politics, Levinas reveals himself to be unusually averse to supplying the conceptual specifics of a coherent political theory.

⁵³Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 187.

⁵⁴Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 186.

In Derrida's view, the fuzzy nature of Levinas's monotheistic political vision is a reflection of the "hiatus" that separates the ethical from the political realm.⁵⁵ In Levinas's thought, ethics is not coterminous with politics. Whereas the anarchical realm of the former is a realm of peace and face-to-face interaction, the latter sphere is characterized by warlike aggression and anonymous uniformity. The hiatus that renders ethics heterogeneous in relation to politics compels the political actor to leap from the realm of the former to the sphere of the latter through an act of almost heroic resolve. In this light, the realization of a monotheistic politics necessitates an act of resolve whereby the political actor accepts responsibility for the burden of engaging in ethically-informed political action.

Viewed from this perspective, welcoming the Third into the self's political space proves to be a daunting challenge. Indeed, Levinas's discussion suggests that the likelihood creating political and juridical institutions that are capable of extending welcome necessitates the appearance of a Messianic overman. Even if the lacuna between ethics and politics compels the monotheistic political actor to navigate the divide that separates ethics from politics, however, the face of the Third nonetheless demands that the attempt be made. Recognizing this necessity, Levinas propounds several "formulas" of a politics of hospitality that should be consulted by political actors who endeavor to make the difficult, but necessary, leap from the anarchical realm of ethics to the violent, totalizing sphere of politics.

⁵⁵Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 116.

V. Conclusion

As described in *Totality and Infinity*, the hospitable gesture by which the self welcomes the Other into its private space is accomplished through language and the relinquishment of material possessions. While it is tempting to suggest that political hospitality replicates these same actions in the public space, Levinas's view of politics renders such a conclusion decidedly uncertain. Insofar as politics is inherently warlike and self-alienating, even the most ethical political actions are morally tainted. While this insight has been a staple of Western political thought since Augustine, Levinas stresses how Talmudic Judaism is particularly alert to the dangers of political totalization: "Talmudic wisdom is entirely aware of the internal contradiction of the State subordinating some men to others in order to liberate them, whatever the principles of those who hold power."⁵⁶ It is hardly surprising, then, that Hebraic political thought is often characterized by an anarchical impulse, an impulse exemplified in the pronouncements of Old Testament prophets who rail against the State's failure to meet its ethical obligations. Levinas mirrors this anarchical tendency in his radical critique of politics.

At the same time, Talmudic thought evinces a Messianic bent in recognizing that "the City in its simplest sense is never this side of the religious."⁵⁷ Here, too, Levinas follows the lead of Talmudic Judaism in endeavoring to propound the "positive" elements of a politics of hospitality. For Levinas, the significance of the Torah lies in the fact that it "demands in opposition to the natural perseverance of each being for his or her own being (a fundamental

⁵⁶Levinas, "The State of David and the State of Caesar," 155.

⁵⁷Levinas, "The State of David and the State of Caesar," 183.

ontological law), care for the stranger, widow, and the orphan, a preoccupation with the other person.”⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Levinas points to several key Biblical passages that illuminate how such “care” and “preoccupation with the other” can be transplanted into the political space.

One such passage occurs in the context of the Book of Deuteronomy. In chapter 23, verse 8, the Biblical text commands that “Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother; thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian, because thou wast a stranger in his land.”⁵⁹ Obviously, this commandment is of political import in the fact that it is directed towards a particular *people*, the citizens of the newly-established State of Zion. Besides its obvious political significance, the particular manner in which the commandment is phrased resonates with several key Levinasian themes that have been noted in this chapter. In order to appreciate its full ethico-political significance, it is necessary to consider its peculiar phraseology in greater detail.

The first part of the commandment prohibits Israelites from “abhor(ing)” the Edomites because of their status as “brother(s).”⁶⁰ The Edomites are brothers not because they are kindred spirits in the Zionist project but because they are members of the human race. As such, the Edomites approach the Israelites from a position of “height” that commands respect. For their part, the Israelites are ordered to respond accordingly by

⁵⁸Emmanuel Levinas, “Contempt for the Torah as Idolatry,” in *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 61.

⁵⁹Cited by Levinas in “The Nations and the Presence of Israel,” in *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 97.

⁶⁰The Edomites were an ancient people who were descended from Esau and who lived southeast of the dead sea.

subordinating all local, provincial, and national loyalties to a greater commitment to the human plurality. In this light, the extension of hospitality to the national stranger is coeval with a corresponding embrace of human fraternity. As Levinas writes, “Fraternity (but what does it mean? Is it not, according to the Bible, a synonym of humanity?) and hospitality: are these not stronger than the horror a man may feel for the other who denies him in his alterity?”⁶¹ The answer, it would seem, is yes, provided that human beings properly comport themselves so as to let this “stronger” impulse take its proper course.

The next part of the commandment is just as significant. Here, the Israelites are prohibited from “abhor(ing)” an Egyptian on the grounds that “thou wast a stranger in his land.” Whereas the Edomites deserve respect because of their status as “brothers,” the Egyptians merit it because the Israelites were previously guests in their land. In the Book of Exodus, the Egyptians initially welcomed the Israelites into their homeland. Of course, the Egyptians eventually betrayed their hospitality by eventually subjecting the Hebrews to arbitrary political domination and back-breaking servitude. But the commandment makes no mention of this. Instead, the Israelites are commanded to reciprocate the Egyptians for their previous extension of hospitality. By ordering the Israelites to welcome the Egyptians into the homeland, the commandment compels them to reciprocate what is rightly owed. At the same time, the commandment effectively orders them to forego any attempts at vengeance. The commandment thus enjoins both remembrance of past kindness and forgiveness of previous transgressions.

⁶¹Levinas, “The Nations and the Presence of Israel,” 97.

In the aforementioned example, the ethico-political imperative to welcome the Edomite and Egyptian strangers is ordered by God. Yahweh commands the Israelites to act hospitably towards their national guests because He is the only authentic possessor of the earth. This point is amply conveyed in chapter 25, verse 13 of the Book of Leviticus, where the Biblical text declares “No land shall be irrevocably alienated, for the earth is mine, for you are but strangers dwelling in my abode.” Approvingly cited by Levinas in “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” this declaration vividly illustrates the covenantal nature of territorial possession.⁶² Yahweh has a covenant with His people that renders the latter stewards, rather than owners, of the territory that He has given to them. Cognizance of this fact marks the conduct of a “chosen” people, a point made in Franz Rosenzweig’s *The Star of Redemption*: “And so even when it has a home, this people, in recurrent contrast to all other peoples of this earth, is not allowed full possession of that home.”⁶³ Viewed in light of its real owner, the assertion that a particular piece of territory is owned by a particular people is revealed to be an act of impious ingratitude to the divine Host of hosts who enables the land to be possessed at all.

What exactly does it mean to be a steward, rather than a possessor, of the earth? For Levinas, welcoming the foreigner into the homeland represents the principal means by which attempts to possess the land are repudiated. Considered in relation to the grandiose political projects that have characterized the twentieth century, the simple toleration of outsiders

⁶²Levinas, “The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value,” 184.

⁶³Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1970), 300.

appears to be a simple, even unremarkable, affair. Considered in relation to the nationalistic, xenophobic, and chauvinistic political enthusiasms that continue to mark the contemporary political climate, however, it represents an act of Nietzschean overcoming of the ever-present temptation to prize one's particular people over the rest of humanity. As Levinas puts it, "Simple tolerance? God alone knows how much love that tolerance demands."⁶⁴

Tolerance of foreign strangers represents a decidedly monotheistic political act. The fact that such an act can occur at all stands as nothing less than a shining testament to the God who makes it possible: "That a people should accept those who come and settle among them – even though they are foreigners, with their way of speaking, their smell – that a people should give them an *aksaniah*, such a place at the inn, and the wherewithal to breathe and to live – is a song to the glory of the God of Israel." Indeed, Levinas goes so far as to maintain that those who sing this particular "song" by "admit(ing) others among one's own" mark themselves as members the "Messianic order."⁶⁵

This represents Levinas's unique contribution to postmodern politics. Far from counseling a glib relativism, Levinas's thought provides a normative criterion by which nations can be held ethically responsible. In Levinas's ethico-political calculus, a nation will distinguish itself as either noble or base – as either a State of Caesar or as a member of the Messianic order, as it were – by virtue of how it treats foreigners. As Levinas writes, "To shelter the other in one's own land or home, to tolerate the presence of the landless and homeless on the 'ancestral soil,' so jealously, so meanly loved – is that the criterion of

⁶⁴Levinas, "The Nations and the Presence of Israel," 98.

⁶⁵Levinas, "The Nations and the Presence of Israel," 98.

humanness? Unquestionably so.”⁶⁶ This “criterion of humanness” is central to a politics of hospitality, and is reiterated continuously throughout Levinas’s entire corpus. As such, it represents perhaps *the* pivotal “formula” that political actors are compelled to take with them when making the leap from ethics to politics.

That being said, it suffers from a crippling vagueness. What exactly does it mean to “tolerate” the presence of the “landless” on the “ancestral soil”? What is the extent and nature of the native’s responsibility to the foreigner? Levinas’s failure to provide definitive answers to these questions is hardly incidental. Like Heidegger, whose aversion to the political was deeply embedded in his philosophical thought, Levinas’s “politics of suspicion” has a deep-seated rationale. Whereas Heidegger is humbled by Being, Levinas is left speechless in the face of the Other. Although the face of the Third calls for the language of justice, Levinas seems hesitant to oblige for fear of harming the Other.

Levinas’s lack of conceptual specificity in this regard is complemented by a related difficulty. Here, I am compelled to mention the question of Israel in Levinas’s thought. For Levinas, the founding of the Zionist State is “one of the greatest events of internal history, and, indeed, of all History.”⁶⁷ In ascribing world-historic importance to the Israeli State, Levinas reveals himself to be a proponent of Zionist exceptionalism. Is Levinas guilty of sneaking nationalism in through the Zionist back door? To be sure, Levinas’s doctrine of Zionist exceptionalism is no ordinary nationalism. Levinas, it should be borne in mind, was an official citizen of France, not Israel. Furthermore, Israel poses a double function in

⁶⁶Levinas, “The Nations and the Presence of Israel,” 98.

⁶⁷Levinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” 187.

Levinas's thought both as an ideal state where social justice is incarnated and as a real state where the drive to realize justice is compromised by existing political reality. As an expression of universalism, Levinas's Zionism transcends the boundaries of mere nationalism: "Our text, which began with the cities of refuge, reminds or teaches us that the longing for Zion, that Zionism, is not one more nationalism or particularism; nor is it a simple search for a place of refuge."⁶⁸

By the same token, however, when Levinas conflates the existing state of Israel with the Messianic State, he falls prey to the temptation of nationalism. Coming from a thinker unusually alert to the "cruelty" entailed by the nationalistic attempt to "put down roots," Levinas's Zionism is in obvious tension with the universalistic spirit of his thought. For when Levinas praises the existing State of Israel, "the non-place of alterity has become the place of Israel's borders."⁶⁹

Nothing more eloquently attests to this tension than a radio broadcast that Levinas participated in shortly after the massacres in the Chatila and Sabra camps in Israel-occupied Lebanon in 1982. In this radio broadcast, the interviewer Shlomo Malka asked Levinas the following question: "Emmanuel Levinas, you are the philosopher of the 'Other,' Isn't

⁶⁸Emmanuel Levinas, "Cities of Refuge," in *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Writings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 52. Derrida usefully notes that Levinas prefers using the term "universalism" instead of "cosmopolitanism." Derrida gives two basic reasons for this. For one, "this sort of political thought refers pure hospitality, and thus peace, to an indefinite progress." Secondly, Levinas avoids the term because of "the well-known ideological connotations with which modern anti-Semitism saddled the great tradition of a cosmopolitanism passed down from Stoicism or Pauline Christianity to the Enlightenment and to Kant." Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 88.

⁶⁹Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1996), 44.

history, isn't politics the very site of the encounter with the 'Other,' and for the Israeli, isn't the 'Other' above all the Palestinian?" Levinas's reply is worth quoting in full:

My definition of the Other is completely different. The Other is the neighbor, who is not necessarily kin, but who can be. And in that sense, if you're for the Other, you're for the neighbor. But if your neighbor attacks another neighbor or treats him unjustly, what can you do? Then alterity takes on another character, in alterity we can find an enemy, or at least then we are faced with the problem of knowing who is right and who is wrong, who is just and who is unjust. There are people who are wrong.⁷⁰

Thus, the Other presents himself as a neighbor who can present himself or herself as either a friend or an enemy. Presumably, the Palestinian refugees murdered by the members of the Phalangist Militia had presented themselves as enemies not worthy of welcome. In this pronouncement, ethical sensitivity is supplanted by Machiavellian *Realpolitik*.

This statement cannot be dismissed as a mere aberration because the problem of alterity transcends the question of Israel in Levinas's thought. The Palestinian Other is not the only Other that can present itself as an enemy. For example, in a notorious essay, Levinas argues that both Jews and Christians are threatened by "the rise of countless masses of Asiatic and undeveloped peoples . . . who no longer refer to our holy history, for whom Abraham, Isaac and Jacob no longer mean anything." But why should the influx of Asian immigrants be a threat to the Judeo-Christian heritage of the West? Levinas's answer is that the threat posed by "the yellow peril" is "not racial, it is spiritual. It does not involve inferior values; it involves a radical strangeness, a stranger to the weight of its past, from which there

⁷⁰Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 294.

does not filter any familiar voice or inflection, a lunar or Martian past.”⁷¹ Hence, the threat posed by the Asian Other lies in its “radical strangeness.”

Levinas’s dire warnings about the threat posed by the “yellow peril” represent the Franco-Jewish philosopher at his very worst. The fact that such statements could be made by Levinas, the “philosopher of the ‘Other,’” attests to just how formidable a challenge it is to extend hospitality to the Other. In these instances, Levinas fails to extend hospitality to the Other, and fails spectacularly. Even so, the fact that Levinas’s hospitality ethos staggers under the burden of his own shortcomings does not negate his insights any more than Heidegger’s temporary support for Nazism nullifies his status as one of the twentieth century’s preeminent thinkers. Levinas’s contribution lies in conceptualizing a politics that is wholly centered around the “needs of strangers.”

Against the Heideggerian notion of putting down roots, Levinas emphasizes the ethical necessity of uprooting oneself from one’s “place in the sun” in obedience to an imperative of divine origin. In celebrating the virtues of a nomadic relationship to place, Levinas reveals himself to be a thinker who eloquently speaks to the plight of those displaced by the crisis of the nation-state system. His politics of hospitality responds to the suffering of the homeless by insisting that political leaders are morally compelled to welcome the refugee into the sanctity of the homeland. That said, the fact that Levinas fails to uphold his hospitality ethos with respect to the Palestinian and Asian Other suggests that there is something fundamentally amiss about Levinas’s politics of hospitality. Thus, as ethically

⁷¹Emmanuel Levinas, “Le Débat Russo-Chinois et la dialéctique,” in *Les imprévus de l’histoire* (Montpellier, France: Fata Morgana, 1994), 171-172. Quoted in Alford, “Levinas and Political Theory,” 159-160.

compelling as Levinas's political vision might be, it fails to do justice to what Heidegger characterized as the human desire for rootedness. As such, it raises the question of whether the human need for rootedness can be reconciled with the ethical imperative to welcome the stranger. The possibility of such a politics is the subject of the next, and concluding, chapter.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Towards a Postmodern Politics of Place

Where is my home? I ask and seek and have sought
for it. I have not found it.

Friedrich Nietzsche
Thus Spoke Zarathustra

I. Introduction

Heidegger's concern with the problem of homelessness stretches from *Being and Time* to his postwar work, animating everything from his early analysis of everydayness (*Alltäglichkeit*) to his later critique of modern technology. In response to this perceived crisis, Heidegger advances several ontological models that highlight the embedded nature of human existence. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger identifies the world as the place where Being becomes manifest. In the first division of the text, Heidegger suggests that human beings avoid becoming existentially uprooted from their worldly moorings when they individually comes to grips with the finite nature of their existence. In the second division, however, Heidegger argues that human beings achieve authenticity when they engage in communicative struggle to realize the destiny (*Geschick*) of a people or community (*Volk*). In the years of his 1929-1935 turn (*Kehre*), Heidegger would eliminate the rhetorical tension between individualism and collectivism by arguing that language or art is the locus of ontological revelation. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger suggests that a spiritual rejuvenation of the German nation is the means by which the German people can maintain its sense of linguistic autochthony in an epoch characterized by standardized rootlessness. However, in his postwar lectures and writings, Heidegger would retreat from

the notion that voluntaristic action is the panacea to the loss of *Bodenständigkeit* in modernity. For the late Heidegger, human beings naturally dwell in the fourfold (*Geviert*) of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. Hence, only by saving the earth, receiving the sky, awaiting the divinities, and escorting mortals can human beings find a home in a homeless age.

Such is the nature of Heidegger's career-long homecoming project, a project that is as dynamic as it is provocative. For Levinas, Heidegger's homecoming project is objectionable because it is averse to transcendence and conducive to tyranny. Mindful of the flaws endemic to the Heideggerian project, Levinas advances an alternative that is infinite in scope and liberationist in intent. For Levinas, the self maintains a proper relationship to place when it welcomes the Other into the home (*la maison*). However, the host is also obligated to extend welcome to the Third (*la tiers*) by creating political institutions that are ethically responsible, respectful of human dignity, and monotheistic in orientation.

Levinas thus not only levels an insightful critique of Heideggerian ontology, but also advances an alternative vision of how human beings should properly relate to place. But what are the larger philosophical and political implications of the Heidegger-Levinas debate? In this chapter, I shall attempt to answer this question by way of a more dialogic engagement with the thought of Heidegger and Levinas. I will begin by relating their conflicting views, once again, to Hegel's discussion of the homeless spirit. For Hegel, the rise of the homeless spirit is a consequence of the liberation of subjectivity. Although Heidegger and Levinas are critical of the subjective stance that engenders the rise of the homeless spirit, they posit different solutions to the Hegelian problematic, with Heidegger advocating an ontology of

place and Levinas propounding an ethics of hospitality (*hospitalité*). After examining the political implications of Heideggerian homecoming and Levinasian hospitality, I will level some criticisms at both of their respective positions. Then, I will attempt to identify some of the essential elements of a postmodern politics of place through a consideration of Heidegger's interpretation of Sophocles's *Antigone* and Levinas's reading of the Biblical story of Abraham. As I will argue, a postmodern politics of place is ontological and ethical. As such, a postmodern politics of place navigates a middle ground between the polar extremes of nationalistic chauvinism and rootless cosmopolitanism.

II. Heidegger, Levinas, and the Problem of the Homeless Spirit

This study began with a consideration of Hegel's discussion of the birth of the homeless spirit in Greek antiquity. In Hegel's narrative, the Socratic liberation of subjectivity represents the birth of individual self-consciousness in the Greek *polis*. However, for Hegel, the rise of self-consciousness is profoundly alienating. As an individual, the subject feels separated from the tribe. Similarly, as a creature characterized by self-consciousness, the subject is condemned to regard its community from a certain distance. Hence, the split between individual and community engendered by the rise of subjectivity introduces a feeling of estrangement that demands reconciliation.

Like Hegel, Heidegger argues that the problem of homelessness is an inevitable byproduct of the liberation of subjectivity. And like Hegel, Heidegger suggests that the liberation of subjectivity occurred in the thought of the ancient Greeks, although it would only assume modern form in the thought of Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche. However, whereas Hegel had regarded the liberation of subjectivity as an essentially

progressive development, in Heidegger's view the Cartesian liberation of subjectivity is tragic because it engenders the plight of homelessness that blights the modern age. Thus, Heidegger's project is to effect a return to the pre-subjective state that man enjoyed prior to the irruption of individual self-consciousness. However, because modern subjectivity is the logical outgrowth of pre-modern metaphysics, a homecoming does not merely entail a return to man's pre-subjective state but also to his pre-metaphysical state as well. In sum, Heidegger calls for man to return home to his homeland (*Heimat*) where he will exist in a state of nearness to Being that has been absent in the West since Greek antiquity.

In the homeland, individuals will not be autonomous but will be fundamentally embedded within the larger community. Furthermore, individuals will relate to their communities in a spirit of devotional appreciation rather than critical distance. In the *Heimat*, then, the individual is ensconced in the community and there is no consciousness of self. Moreover, there is no politics in the modern sense. As Catherine Zuckert notes,

Compared to the dehumanizing alienation and exploitation, standardization and pollution characteristic of contemporary industrial society, Heidegger's homey world initially looks very attractive. Upon reflection, however, we see that his turn away from the technological results of metaphysics leads him to embrace an entirely tradition-based world. Founded on explicit denial of any eternal or universally valid moral truths, this world would have no philosophy or science. There would be no moral principles applicable to human beings as such, although there would be mores or customs. Although thought and poetry would be needed to help people recollect the origin and beauty of their way of life, there would, strictly speaking, be no innovation or criticism. (Nor would there be much criticism; there would be only devotional appreciation). Articles of use would be crafted and buildings erected, but there would be no scientific discoveries or technological innovations. Production would occur primarily for domestic consumption; there would be little commerce from (or challenge from) other countries. Rather than a means of calculation, mathematics would once again become a leisured activity as it had in ancient Greece. Most important of all, there would be no politics in the modern sense. According to

Heidegger, the power-seeking attributed to human “nature” belongs only to the philosophically-defined world of the West.¹

Heidegger’s longing for the homeland looms in the background of his career-long critique of Western subjectivity. In *Being and Time*, however, Heidegger’s critique of Western subjectivity is decidedly ambiguous. On the one hand, Heidegger’s assertion that *Da-sein* is Being-in-the-world points to the rooted nature of human existence. *Da-sein*, Heidegger declares, is not a self-conscious individual but is a being that is ensconced in a communal world that dictates its practical and theoretical concerns. On the other hand, Heidegger’s discussion of angst (*Angst*) drives a wedge between the self and world. In sum, Heidegger’s analysis of anxiety suggests that human beings are *never* truly at home in the world. Of course, Heidegger’s discussion of the *Volk* can be read as an attempt to reassert the embedded nature of human existence. Seemingly, the historical destiny that unites *Da-sein* to its *Volk* is the nexus that links the self to the world. Overall, however, Heidegger’s early homecoming attempt is ambiguous.

Heidegger’s critique of subjectivity would become more internally consistent in his middle-period work. In arguing that Being becomes unconcealed in language, Heidegger effectively suggests that the individual subject is ensconced in a linguistic whole that precludes the possibility of detached theoretical contemplation. However, the stress on voluntarism that underlies Heidegger’s ringing call for the German nation to engender a metaphysical revolution in the West suggests that he has not wholly freed his thought from the taint of subjectivism. Arguably, Heidegger has merely substituted collective

¹Catherine Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 66-67.

subjectivism for individual subjectivism. While this substitution is of no small consequence, especially in relation to the question of politics, the spirit of subjectivism is arguably no less pronounced in Heidegger's middle-period work than in his early work.

In the aftermath of his mid-1930s confrontation with Nietzsche and his failed rectorship, however, Heidegger himself subsequently came to the conclusion that nationalism is merely subjectivity writ large. Indeed, to the later Heidegger, all political "isms" are manifestations of modern subjectivism. Hence, the non-political tone of Heidegger's call for mortals to dwell in the fourfold of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals can be seen as a manifestation of his anti-subjective ethos. To the extent that such an enterprise is feasible, Heidegger's later-work consummates his attempt to overcome the spirit of subjectivism. Insofar as the fourfold is characterized by a primordial oneness, there can be no separation between the individual "mortal" and its other components. Similarly, non-subjective meditation on man's "abode" in the "house of Being" supplants critical reflection in Heidegger's later work, thus effecting a reconciliation between subject and object in a decidedly mystical manner.

For Levinas, Heidegger's critique of subjectivity is tainted by ontological supremacy, anti-humanistic bias, and pagan religiosity. Not surprisingly, then, Levinas posits himself as a defender of subjectivity, an intention that he announces at the very beginning of *Totality and Infinity*: "This book does then present itself as a defense of subjectivity, but it will apprehend subjectivity, not at the level of its purely egoist protection against totality, nor in its anguish before death but as founded in the idea of infinity."² However, as the above

²Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 26.

statement makes clear, Levinas is by no means an unqualified defender of subjectivity.

Levinas is no apologist for a subjectivity predicated on Cartesian egoism or Kierkegaardian angst, but only for a subjectivity founded on the idea of infinity. As we shall see, this qualification is of no small consequence.

In Levinas's view, subjectivity is worthy of being defended because individuality is the vital prerequisite for ethical action: "I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an 'I' precisely because I am exposed to the Other."³ Similarly, only an individual conscious of its autonomy can shoulder its asymmetrical, infinite responsibility for the Other. However, subjectivism is problematic because it potentially complements the totalization of alterity that characterizes the history of Western ontology. While individualism is foundational to ethical action, it can foster a callous disregard for the welfare of the Other. Similarly, while self-consciousness is a vital prerequisite for ethical conduct, it can facilitate a solipsistic manner of approaching reality that is averse to transcendence. Hence, for Levinas, subjectivity only merits defense if it recognizes the inter-subjective nature of human existence and if it is open to its infinite dimension.

We can see Levinas's ambiguous view of subjectivism in his view of Socrates. On the one hand, Socrates's urbanity complements Judaism's humanistic thrust: "Socrates preferred the town, in which one meets people, to the countryside and the trees. Judaism is the brother of the Socratic message."⁴ However, Socrates's manner of philosophizing is

³Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 26-27.

⁴Levinas, "Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us," 233.

objectionable because its inward-looking ethos effectively annihilates otherness: “The primacy of the same was Socrates’s teaching, to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though in all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside – to receive nothing free.”⁵ So, while Socrates’s manner of existence is marked by a responsiveness to otherness, his mode of philosophizing remains centered on the self. In this sense, Socrates is emblematic of the ambiguous legacy of subjectivity.

Unlike Socratic subjectivity, ethical subjectivity is open to transcendence. Indeed, the Levinasian subject is a host (*hôte*) of otherness. As Levinas puts it, “Prior to every vision of self it (self-consciousness) is accomplished by holding *oneself* up (*se tenant*); it is *implanted in itself* as a body and it keeps itself (*se tient*), in its interiority, in its home. It thus accomplishes separation positively, without being reducible to a negation of the being from which it separates. But thus precisely, it can welcome that being. The subject is a host.”⁶ By acting as host to the Other, the subject realizes itself as an ethical being.

Hence, in the debate between Heidegger and Levinas on subjectivity, we come face to face with two conflicting views of subjectivity. For Heidegger, man’s attempt to assert himself as a self-conscious individual is a symptom of his homelessness. For Levinas, however, man is primordially homeless, and his attempt to assert himself as a subject is a necessary component of his existence as a moral being. Just as importantly, the Heidegger-Levinas debate on subjectivity is fraught with political consequences. The irruption of subjectivity is a politically consequential development because it propels the self’s attempt to

⁵Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

⁶Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 299.

return to the tribe or community from which it is estranged. For Heidegger and Levinas, the political search for home results in two radically dissimilar political visions.

III. The Politics of Heideggerian Homecoming and Levinasian Hospitality

For Heidegger, modern politics is tainted by the spirit of subjectivism. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that the public space is a place where *Da-sein* is dominated by the they (*das Man*). In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger suggests that the modern practice of politics is plagued by the spirit of social standardization and scientific-technological calculation. And in his later work, Heidegger argues that all modern political systems are in the grip of metaphysics and are hence organically incapable of facilitating a confrontation between modern man and global technology. In all three phases of his work, then, Heidegger accuses modern politics of exacerbating the crisis of homelessness that plagues the West as a whole.

Given the inherently subjective nature of modern politics, the most appropriate response would seem to be withdrawal from the political realm altogether. And sure enough, much of Heidegger's work counsels the abdication of the political realm. In the first half of *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that *Da-sein* safeguards its authenticity by avoiding the public space that encourages inauthenticity. In his later work, Heidegger's quietism is evinced by his counsel for mortals to dwell rather than pursue political action. In these respects, Heidegger's homecoming project is apolitical, perhaps even antipolitical.

However, in other instances, Heidegger assumes a different stance towards the political. In the second half of *Being and Time*, Heidegger implies that fully realized authenticity necessitates that *Da-sein* pursue collective action. In *An Introduction to*

Metaphysics, Heidegger calls upon the German nation to “wrest” a destiny from within itself to save Europe and the Continent from the threat of nihilism. And in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger argues that the founding of a political state is a means by which ontological truth comes to presence. In such instances, Heidegger reveals himself to be a thinker who is intimately concerned with the question of politics.

What are we to make of Heidegger’s ambiguous attitude towards the political? The answer, of course, hinges around the concept itself. Here, it is useful to draw a distinction between the ancient and the modern concepts of the political. For Heidegger, modern politics is permeated by the spirit of subjectivity because it is metaphysical in nature. That is to say, modern politics presupposes a given interpretation of the Being of beings, an interpretation that is beyond the realm of questioning. In contrast, the practice of politics in ancient Greece was non-metaphysical. Because it did not presuppose a metaphysical foundation, the practice of the Greek political art invited questioning. As Stuart Elden puts it,

Heidegger suggests that for modern eyes, the ‘political’ is the way in which history is accomplished, and as such is itself unquestioned. The failure to question the ‘political’ belongs with its totality. The totality of the political is not simply based on the arbitrary wilfulness of dictators, but in the metaphysical essence of modern actuality in general. This metaphysical essence is, of course, fundamentally different from the way in which the Greek world was historical. The ‘political’ is unquestioned, yet the *polis* was for the Greeks that which was altogether worthy of question. Hence, rethinking the *polis* leads us explicitly to question the ‘political,’ to historicise it, to situate it.⁷

Viewed from this perspective, Heidegger’s critical stance to politics is really a manifestation of his antipathy to modern politics. Conversely, Heidegger’s more politically-charged

⁷Elden, “Rethinking the *Polis*,” 414.

pronouncements are manifestations of his attempt to recover the ancient Greek concept of the political.

What is the ancient Greek concept of the political, for Heidegger? Here, it is instructive to note the motif of struggle (*Auseinandersetzung*) that permeates Heidegger's writings. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's emphasis on struggle is evinced in his discussion of how the *Volk* frees up its destiny through communal "battle." In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger's stress on struggle is exhibited in his discussion of how the founder creates the *polis* through the performance of ontological violence. In its celebration of struggle, Heidegger's thought evinces a discernible enchantment with the agonistic character of Greek political life. As Hannah Arendt notes, political action in the Greek *polis* was agonal in character: "the public realm itself, the *polis*, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aien aristeuein*)."⁸ Considered from this vantage point, Heidegger's emphasis on struggle is a manifestation of his attempt to recover the agonistic aspect of the *vita activa* that animated the world of the *polis*.

Heidegger's celebration of the agonistic character of *polis*-life is at one with his celebration of its hierarchical social structure. The Heideggerian stress on hierarchy appears at numerous instances in Heidegger's *oeuvre*. In *Being and Time*, the Heideggerian celebration of hierarchy manifests itself in Heidegger's brief yet significant mention of the "heroes" who spearhead the *Volk*'s attempt to realize its historical destiny. In *An*

⁸Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 41.

Introduction to Metaphysics, an explicit elitism colors Heidegger's discussion of the process by which select individuals found the site of man's "being-there." In these instances, Heidegger evinces a discernible, if subtle, enchantment with the emphasis on hierarchy that characterized the outlook of the ancient Greeks. Indeed, the philosophical thought of the post-Socratic Greek philosophers who stand opposed to Greek politics also exhibits the Greek sense of hierarchy. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates conceptualizes a city where philosopher-kings rule over guardians and ordinary craftsmen. In Aristotle's *Politics*, a clear distinction is drawn between the free citizen and the slave by nature: "Now, nature wishes to make a difference also in the bodies of free and slave, with those of the latter being strong for necessary uses and those of the former being erect and useless for such working but useful for a political way of life" (1254b7).⁹ Considered from this vantage point, Heidegger's elitism is a manifestation of his attempt to recover the sense of rank that characterized both Greek politics and philosophy.

Seemingly, the Heideggerian *polis* is characterized by agonistic conflict and a hierarchical structure. While these are important features of the Heideggerian political vision, an equally significant aspect of Heidegger's political theory is his stress on the ontological significance of place. For Heidegger, the Greek practice of politics was necessarily place-bound. As we have seen, Heidegger continually stressed that the proper translation of *polis* is not "city-state" but "site." In defining the *polis* as site, Heidegger suggests that the Greek practice of politics was spatially circumscribed. As it stands, the

⁹Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Peter L. Simpson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

recognition that, in Henri Lefebvre's words, "there is a politics of space because *politics is spatial*," runs counter to the cosmopolitan thrust of modern politics.¹⁰

The most ringing expression of the cosmopolitan universalism that underlies modern politics was sounded by Immanuel Kant in his essay entitled "Perpetual Peace." In that essay, Kant writes the following:

Although this body politic presently exists only in very rough outline, a feeling seems nonetheless to be already stirring among all its members who have an interest in the whole, and this gives rise to the hope that, finally, after many revolutions of reform, nature's supreme objective, a universal *cosmopolitan state*, the womb in which all of the human species' original capacities will be developed.¹¹

In this pronouncement, Kant expresses the modern longing for the arrival of the "universal cosmopolitan state." In the Kantian imagination, the universal cosmopolitan will supervene over all national differences and thus render them politically inconsequential.

Like Kant, Heidegger anticipates the arrival of the universal cosmopolitan state. But whereas Kant welcomes its arrival, Heidegger loathes it. For Heidegger, the universal cosmopolitan state celebrated by Kant is the product of the metaphysical mode of thought that is unique to the West. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the universal cosmopolitan state is the product of the *end* of Western metaphysics: "The end of philosophy means the beginning of the world civilization that is based upon Western European thinking."¹² Suffice to say, by emphasizing the place-bound nature of political

¹⁰Henri Lefebvre, "Reflections on the Politics of Space," *Antipode* 8, 2 (1976), 33.

¹¹Immanuel Kant, "Universal History," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, ed. Ted Humphry (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 38.

¹²Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," 435.

action, Heidegger undermines the universalist pretensions of the universal cosmopolitan state celebrated by Kant.

In contrast to the universal and cosmopolitan state, Heidegger celebrates the particular and provincial community. Whereas the universal and cosmopolitan state encompasses all of the world's peoples, the Heideggerian community houses a particular *Volk*. Similarly, whereas the universal and cosmopolitan state is spatially boundless, the Heideggerian community is limited in its geographic scope. Moreover, whereas the universal and cosmopolitan state is governed by a state structure constructed on metaphysical foundations, the Heideggerian community is governed by conventions that are decidedly pre-metaphysical in nature. Putting all of this together, Heidegger's homecoming project looks to effect a return to a world of agonistic struggle, heroic creators, and *Bodenständigkeit*.

What of the Levinasian political vision? As we have seen, Levinas is no less critical of modern politics than Heidegger. But whereas Heidegger criticizes the metaphysical cast of modern politics, Levinas charges it with being ontological in nature. For Levinas, ontology is the process by which the self utilizes an *arche* to totalize the Other. By extension, ontological politics is the process by which political actors utilize the institutions of the state apparatus to totalize the Other. As Levinas puts it,

For me, the negative element, the lament of violence in the state, in the hierarchy appears, appears even when the hierarchy functions perfectly, when everyone submits to universal ideas. There are cruelties which are terrible because they proceed from the necessity of the reasonable order. There are, if you like, the tears that a civil servant cannot see, the tears of the Other.¹³

¹³Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," Unpublished manuscript, trans. Tina Chanter, Simon Critchley, and Nick Walker, 1990, 23.

Given the inherently violent nature of politics, it comes as little surprise that the bulk of Levinas's writings exhibit an aversion to conventional, practical politics. However, the fact that Levinas is hardly an apolitical thinker becomes evident when his concept of the Third is taken in account. In the Levinasian ethical schema, the appearance of the Third compels the self to pursue social justice by creating monotheistic political institutions that respect the dignity of the individual.

Here, it is not difficult to discern how Levinas's thought overlaps with modern liberalism. Like Hobbes and Locke, Levinas argues that political institutions should respect the dignity of the individual *qua* individual. That said, Levinas's defense of individual dignity is decidedly non-liberal. For Levinas, the individual should be respected not because it possesses rights, but rather because it is singularly responsible for the welfare of the Other. As Levinas puts it, "As I see it, subjective protest is not received favourably on the pretext that its egoism is sacred, but because the I alone can perceive the 'secret tears' of the Other which are caused by the very reasonableness of the hierarchy."¹⁴ Needless to say, Levinas's *apologia* for liberalism is highly idiosyncratic; as Fred C. Alford puts it, "Levinas's defense of liberalism is likely the strangest defense the reader has encountered."¹⁵ Indeed, for Alford, Levinas's defense of liberalism is so qualified that it can be described as a type of "inverted liberalism." "Inverted" or not, Levinas's brand of liberalism recognizes the importance of protecting individual human dignity.

¹⁴Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," 23.

¹⁵Fred C. Alford, "Levinas and Political Theory," *Political Theory* 32, 2 (April 2004), 147.

If Levinas's idiosyncratic defense of individualism is in tension with liberalism, his celebration of fraternity underscores just how far the Franco-Jewish philosopher's political thought stands from traditional liberal political theory. In calling for a politics of *fraternité*, of course, Levinas echoes a time-honored theme of French republican thought. However, Levinas's emphasis on fraternity is perhaps more akin to an Aristotelian politics of friendship (*philia*) than French republicanism. In Levinas's thought, "at the level of politics, the ethical relation is translated into . . . a classical conception of political friendship as fraternity, as a relation between free equals who happen to be male."¹⁶ In the French republican tradition, the stress on *fraternité* is balanced by a corresponding emphasis on *liberté*. In the Levinasian ethico-political schema, however, *liberté* is downplayed in favor of *fraternité*. In this respect, Levinas's political thought echoes the Aristotelian emphasis on communal holism.

For Levinas, the human fraternity is a coherent community by virtue of its monotheistic character. That is to say, the Levinasian fraternal order is undergirded not by universal possession of the rights of man, but by the sovereignty of God. For Levinas, God is the ultimate source of ethical responsibility. Absent the existence of God, the self would be free to totalize the Other without a second thought. As Caygill puts it, "Against the principle of freedom and being as gathering or domination, Levinas seeks protection from elemental evil in the thought of a human dignity emerging from a fraternity in which humans are called by God to responsibility for the other man."¹⁷

¹⁶Simon Critchley, "Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them," *Political Theory* 32, 2 (April 2004), 173.

¹⁷Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, 31.

In its monotheistic component, Levinas's political theory does not recall Aristotle as much as St. Augustine, who had argued that human friendship is mediated by the presence of God. In the *City of God*, Augustine argues that life's dangers make a "carefree" friendship impossible: "Yet the more friends we have and the more dispersed they are in different places, the further and more widely extend our fears that some evil may befall them from among all the evils of this present world."¹⁸ From an Augustinian perspective, the evils of this world make a purely immanent friendship impossible. Levinas agrees with Augustine in the sense that the members of the Levinasian fraternity are brothers and sisters with one another only because of the presence of God. Hence, there can be no strict separation between fraternity and monotheism in Levinas's political theory.

For Levinas, the family is a model of human fraternity. *Totality and Infinity* concludes with an invocation of the "marvel of the family": "The situation in which the I thus posits itself before truth in placing its subjective morality in the infinite time of its fecundity – a situation in which the instant of eroticism and the infinity of paternity are conjoined is concretized in the marvel of the family." In Levinas's view, the family is a "marvel" because it is an expression of human fecundity. Unlike the State, the individual's submission to the familial order is based upon human fecundity, not arbitrary coercion. In this sense, the family is a paradigm of a communal arrangement that preserves human plurality: "In the biological fact of fecundity are outlined the lineaments of fecundity in general as a relation between man and man and between the I and itself not resembling the

¹⁸St. Augustine, *City of God*, 862.

structures constitutive of the State, lineaments of a reality that is not subordinated to the State as a means and does not represent a reduced model of the State.”¹⁹

As a thinker who celebrates the “marvel of the family,” Levinas is a philosopher who recognizes the importance of community. However, although Levinas is a defender of community, he is not a defender of communal particularism. For Levinas, the imperative to create a monotheistic community demands a corresponding embrace of moral universalism. In the Levinasian community, individuals will demonstrate their fidelity to God by overcoming their localized attachments. For Levinas, this is accomplished through the extension of hospitality to the stranger.

The ethical imperative to welcome the Other operates on a variety of levels. Here, it is instructive to note the ambivalent nature of Levinas’s concept of the Other. For Derrida, the stranger who merits welcome are the aliens who request asylum in a given national territory. As Derrida writes,

By means of discreet though transparent allusions, Levinas oriented our gazes toward what is happening today, not only in Israel but in Europe and in France, in Africa, and Asia, since at least the time of the first World War and since what Hannah Arendt called *The Decline of the Nation State*: everywhere that refugees of every kind, immigrants with or without citizenship, exiled or forced from their homes, whether with or without papers, from the heart of Nazi Europe to the former Yugoslavia, from the Middle East to Rwanda, from Zaire all the way to California, from the Church of St. Bernard to the thirteenth arrondissement in Paris, Cambodians, Armenians, Palestinians, Algerians, and so many others call for a change in the socio- and geo-political space – a juridico-political mutation, though, before this, assuming that this limit still has any persistence, an ethical conversion.²⁰

¹⁹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 306.

²⁰Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 70-71.

On this account, Levinas is a thinker who speaks to the plight of the “refugees” and “immigrants” displaced by the crisis of the nation-state system. To Annabel Herzog, however, the Other who merits welcome are the disenfranchised. In this view, Levinas is a thinker who speaks to the plight of all those who are unable to find a place in modern society. Which interpretation is correct? Actually, there is no necessary contradiction between the two respective positions. Arguably, Levinas is concerned about the plight of *everyone* who lacks access to a home. In his discussion of the “Dwelling” in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes the act of hospitality as occurring in the anarchical plane where ethical action occurs. However, the entrance of the Third renders the act of hospitality a decidedly political act. Putting all of this together, the self is compelled to welcome the Other into the private space of the home *and* the public space of the homeland.

So, with Heidegger and Levinas, we are presented with two conflicting political visions. Heidegger’s politics of homecoming looks to a world of rooted communities founded by and presided over by the exceptional few who experience the struggle (*Auseinandersetzung*) of Being with singular intensity. Levinas’s politics of hospitality looks to a universal world order presided over by a single godhead who commands human beings to overcome their local attachments and extend hospitality to the homeless. Obviously, Heidegger’s politics of homecoming stands far removed from Levinas’s politics of hospitality. Be that as it may, both political visions are similar in the sense that they both suffer from significant weaknesses.

IV. Heidegger and Levinas: Misgivings

In Continental philosophy, criticisms of Heidegger have become a familiar part of the intellectual landscape. Everyone from Derrida to Habermas has taken Heidegger to task for a variety of perceived shortcomings. Indeed, even such non-Continentalists such as Richard Rorty have participated in this celebrated Continental pastime.²¹ Viewed from this perspective, Levinas is one of a long line of critics of the philosopher of Being. Although Levinas's critique of Heidegger is couched in a Continental vernacular that is seemingly impenetrable, the crux of Levinas's argument is actually quite simple: Heidegger prizes ontology over ethics. And because he elevates ontology over ethics, the German philosopher's political vision is tainted by ontological supremacy.

As noted earlier, Heidegger looks to reinvigorate the Being of Western politics with the agonistic spirit of Greek antiquity. At its best, the Heideggerian celebration of struggle (*Auseinandersetzung*) provides a refreshing counterpoint to the emphasis on reconciliation and compromise that characterizes modern liberal politics. From a Levinasian standpoint, however, the last thing that the world needs is an infusion of Greek agonism into the already violent realm of politics. But even in the context of a more humane age, agonism is objectionable on moral grounds. The excessive celebration of conflict renders precarious the possibility of a peaceful co-existence between the self and the Other. In order to be ethical,

²¹For more on Rorty's critique of Heidegger, see Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

peace must be sought “in a relation that starts from an I and goes to the Other, in desire and goodness, where the I both maintains itself and exists without egoism.”²²

A similar critique can be leveled at the Heideggerian defense of hierarchy. Obviously, Heidegger’s celebration of hierarchy is a cry of protest against the homogenizing tendencies of modern egalitarianism. At its worst, Heidegger’s celebration of the “violent men” who found and preside over a given *polis* raises the specter of a Nietzschean master morality in which the dignity of the many is trampled on by the few. To be sure, Heidegger does not explicitly advocate a master morality. Even so, Heidegger’s defense of hierarchy is nonetheless disconcerting if only because it evinces an utter lack of concern for the welfare of those who occupy a less exalted position on the ontological hierarchy. As Fried notes, “Heidegger’s Nietzscheanism, that is, his withering scorn for democracy, morality, and equality, draws him into an ontological politics where only the rare and great can lead a people into a confrontation with history.”²³

Heidegger’s lack of concern for the victims of heroic self-aggrandizement is indicative of a deeper problem that afflicts the German philosopher’s thought. Put simply, Heidegger’s philosophy is ethically vacuous. In *Being and Time*, this ethical vacuum is apparent in Heidegger’s pejorative description of Being-with (*Mitsein*). In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, it is evinced in Heidegger’s disturbing indifference to the ethical consequences of the founding act. And in the “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger’s blindness is manifest in his refusal to posit a normative ethics. From *Being and Time* to the “Letter on

²²Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 306.

²³Fried, *Heidegger’s Polemos*, 142.

Humanism,” the amoral cast of Heideggerian ontology is manifest. As John Caputo puts it, in Heidegger’s thought, “The victim never comes to presence, never makes an appearance on the scene of the history of Being. . . . That is why the gas chamber is the same as the tractor, as motorized farm equipment. The victim is not a matter of concern, is not what is at issue.”²⁴

Heidegger’s emphasis on the ontological significance of place is tainted by the same spirit of ethical insensitivity. Heidegger’s place-bound ethos can be read as an eloquent cry of protest against the deracinating effects of globalization. For Levinas, however, the Heideggerian stress on place is inherently cruel because its demarcation between sacred and profane space reinforces the distinction between native and foreigner that underlies nationalism. Indeed, viewed from Levinas’s perspective, the specter of cruelty haunts all place-oriented political theories. As William E. Connolly puts it, “the nostalgia in political theory (and the culture at large) for a ‘politics of place’ in which territoriality, sovereignty, electoral accountability and belonging all correspond to each other in one ‘political place’ has the double effect today of depoliticizing global issues and weakening the ability to challenge state chauvinism.”²⁵

²⁴John Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 144. Not everyone would agree with Caputo’s assessment, and every now and then scholars sympathetic to Heidegger attempt to extract a humanistic ethics from his thought. For example, Julian Young attempts to defend Heidegger from Levinas’s charge that Heidegger’s later thought counsels ontological self-absorption. For more, see Young, *Heidegger’s Later Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Young also grapples with Heidegger in *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²⁵William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, third edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), xvi.

If Heidegger's politics of homecoming can be accused of ontological chauvinism and ethical insensitivity, what of Levinas's politics of hospitality? Arguably, Levinas excessively emphasizes ethics at the expense of ontology. For Levinas, all attempts to speak to the question of Being are inherently violent. While the example of Heidegger suggests that there is more than a grain of truth to this position, it nonetheless presents a skewed picture of ontology. While ontology can potentially engender the totalization of the Other, ontology is also necessary for ethical action. As Derrida notes,

Not only is the thought of Being not ethical violence (as Levinas claims), but it seems no ethics – in Levinas's sense can be opened without it . . . (The thought of Being) conditions the respect for the other *as what it is*. Without this acknowledgement, which is not a knowledge, or without this 'letting-be' of an existent (Other) as something existing outside me in the sense of what it is (first in its alterity), no ethics would be possible . . . to let the other be in its existence and essence as Other means that what gains access to, is that which is essence and that which is existence; and that is the Being which they presuppose. Without this, no letting-be would be possible, and first of all, the letting be of respect and of the ethical commandment addressing itself to freedom. Violence would reign to such a degree that it would no longer able to appear and be named.²⁶

Derrida illuminates how Levinas's rigid dichotomy between ontology and ethics, like his corresponding distinctions between philosophy and ethics and Greek and Jew, is untenable. Indeed, the ethics/ontology dichotomy is implausible even within the limited purview of Levinas's own thought. How can the self act ethically on behalf of the Other if the Other is not identified as Other? Seemingly, Levinasian ethics rests on an inadequate ontological foundation.

Because he is oblivious to the importance of ontology, Levinas is blind to the ontological significance of place. On one level, Levinas's obliviousness to the importance of

²⁶Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 138.

place is admirable in that it renders him largely – though not completely – immune to the chauvinistic enthusiasms that ensnared Heidegger. On another level, however, it is a regrettable oversight. The uprooting engendered by the spread of modern technology, as even Levinas recognizes, undermines identity. The technological destruction of identity creates an ontological vacuum begging to be filled. For Hannah Arendt, the existence of “homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth” provided an atmosphere conducive to the rise of modern totalitarianism.²⁷ Viewed from the perspective of twentieth-century political history, the problem of homelessness demands attention if only because of the catastrophic political consequences that potentially flow from it.

Even if we ignore the political consequences that are entailed by it, however, the predicament of homelessness demands attention for another reason. In our time, the march of globalization annihilates cultural differences though the spread of Western science and technology. None foresaw this development with greater perspicuity than Heidegger. In the words of Strauss, Heidegger anticipated “the victory of an ever more completely urbanized, ever more completely technological West over the whole planet – complete levelling and uniformity regardless of whether it is brought about by iron compulsion or by soapy

²⁷Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1968), vii. Of course, Arendt’s thought is heavily indebted to Heidegger. That being said, even thinkers who do not have as much baggage as she in this regard are inclined to agree with her diagnosis. For example, Marshall McLuhan agrees with Arendt, if from a different perspective. For McLuhan, modern man’s homelessness is evinced in the rise of “electronic man”: “Man the food-gatherer reappears incongruously as information-gatherer. In this role electronic man is no less a nomad than his paleolithic ancestors.” *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Mentor, 1964), 248.

advertisement of the output of mass production.” In staring into the abyss of global uniformity, Strauss observes, “Heidegger is the only man who has an inkling of the problem of a world society.”²⁸ The “world society” of the future, Heidegger foresaw, is a society in which otherness is absent. In seemingly dismissing the danger to otherness represented by the spread of globalization, Levinas ignores a potent source of ontological violence in the contemporary world.

Here, it is instructive to reconsider Levinas’s view of technology. In “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” Levinas draws a linkage between modern technology and Judaism. For Levinas, Judaism and technology are linked by their nomadic ethos: both Judaism and technology uproot human beings from the earth and thereby free them from the cruelties engendered by the pagan emphasis on place.²⁹ Hence, because modern technology carries on the uprooting work of Judaism, its spread is an essentially salutary development. By uprooting human beings from the earth, modern technology returns human beings to the homeless state that characterizes them at the most primordial level of their existence.

²⁸Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 42-43.

²⁹The theme of nomadism has also been explored by Gilles Deleuze in his concept of “nomad thought.” In Deleuze’s view, Nietzsche is the prototypical “nomadic” thinker. As Deleuze writes, Nietzsche’s philosophical discourse is “above all nomadic; its statements can be conceived as the utterances of a mobile war machine and not the utterances of a rational administrative machinery whose philosophers would be bureaucrats of pure reason.” Deleuze, “Nomad Thought,” in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 149.

As it stands, Levinas's *apologia* for modern technology is flawed because it fails to consider the possibility that there is a significant difference between natural and technologically-induced homelessness. As Tijmes puts it,

Levinas identifies the nomadic existence too readily with the homelessness and uprootedness of modern man. The adventure of Abraham leaving his own country and going to the promised land is of a quite different character from the uprootedness produced by modern technologies. Failing to comprehend the difference leads Levinas to speak uncritically about modern technique.³⁰

Tijmes's point raises an obvious question: what is the difference between the "nomadic existence" and the "homelessness and uprootedness of modern man"? Here, Heidegger's critique of technology gives us a possible answer.

For Levinas, the spread of global technology engenders a situation in which the self and the Other face each other in a situation of perfect "nudity." For Heidegger, however, the rise of modern technology transforms human beings into standing-reserve (*Bestand*) raw material. Hence, whereas Abraham's departure from home enables him to encounter the Other in a situation of perfect clarity, the uprooting engendered by modern technology precludes the possibility of undistorted face-to-face interaction. In the technological epoch, all individuals are compelled to present themselves as standard-reserve.

Seemingly, Levinas's hostility to Heidegger leads him to adhere to an overly sanguine view of modern technology. Hence, if Heidegger's homecoming ethos potentially engenders ontological chauvinism and ethical insensitivity, Levinas's politics of hospitality exhibits a blindness to the importance of ontology, a blindness that causes him to underestimate the dangers of modern technology. Seemingly, both Heidegger and Levinas

³⁰Tijmes, "Home and Homelessness," 210.

leave us pining for a politics of place that is ontological and ethical. Is it possible to envision a politics of place that strikes a balance between the ontological need for rootedness and the ethical imperative to respect alterity?

V. Conclusion

Up until this point, I have painted a decidedly negative portrait of Heidegger, noting how his thought potentially engenders ontological chauvinism and ethical insensitivity.

While these dangers are risks of Heidegger's thought, they are not necessary consequences of his manner of thinking (*Denken*). As Thiele puts it,

It cannot be denied that Heidegger occasionally spoke of homelessness as if its remedy entailed a national retrenchment. But a national, racial, ethnic or linguistic circumspection of home, which is likely to produce a malignant chauvinism, is not intrinsic to Heidegger's thought. Heidegger's philosophic understanding of human being indicates that most fundamentally home is not found within the confines of national borders, though it is not, for that reason, a private domain. Home does not refer primarily to a spatial location. Rather, home is a relation of nearness to the world. In this light, Heidegger's lingering nationalism represents a nostalgic, and therefore misconstrued, effort that stands opposed to the thrust of his philosophy as a whole.³¹

Following the lead of Thiele, I will now attempt to explore the possibility of a Heidegger who is open to otherness, a Heidegger whom Dallmayr calls "the Other Heidegger."

In 1934, Heidegger offered a lecture course on Hölderlin's "Germania" (*Germanien*) and "The Rhine" (*Der Rhein*). At the beginning of the lecture course, Heidegger quotes the following lines from Hölderlin: "Forbidden Fruit, like the laurel, however, / Is most of all the fatherland. This (fruit) everyone should taste last." The fact that Heidegger would quote lines from the German poet that identify the "fatherland" as a "forbidden fruit" suggests that

³¹Thiele, *Timely Meditations*, 172.

the German philosopher himself was beginning to grow wary of the nationalist euphoria that seized Germany in the mid-1930s. However, Heidegger did not delineate exactly how the German nation should comport its existence in an alternative fashion until 1941 when he offered two more lecture courses on Hölderlin entitled “Remembrance” (*Andenken*) and “The Ister” (*Der Ister*). In these lecture courses, the principal theme is the encounter between native and foreign modes of existence. Taken together, these lecture courses present a picture of Heidegger as a philosopher of cross-cultural encounter rather than a standard-bearer of *völkisch* nationalism.

The subject matter of Heidegger’s lecture on the Ister is the motif of journeying. Heidegger begins the lecture by discussing the river Danube that is the subject of Hölderlin’s hymn. On one level, the river is a site for human settlement: “The river ‘is’ the locality that pervades the abode of human beings upon the earth, determines them to where they belong and where they are homely.” On another level, however, the river is a place of journey: “The river is the locality of journeying. Yet the river is also the journeying of locality.”³² All in all, the river is *both* a site (*Ortschaft*) and a journey (*Wanderschaft*).

For Heidegger, the example of the river is emblematic of the home because the home is also both a site and a journey. From this perspective, homecoming is less a sedentary appropriation of otherness than an external journey into the realm of the foreign. As Heidegger puts it,

Locality and journeying, however, in which the poetic essence of the rivers is announced, relate to becoming homely in what is one’s own. And this is so in the distinctive sense that one’s own, finding one’s own, and appropriating what one has

³²Heidegger, *Heidegger’s Hymn “The Ister,”* 21, 33.

found as one's own, is not that which is most self-evident or easiest but remains what is most difficult. As what is most difficult, it is taken into poetic care. . . . This *coming to be* at home in one's own in itself entails that human beings are initially, and for a long time, and initially forever, not at home. And this in turn entails that human beings fail to recognize, that they deny, and perhaps even have to deny and flee what belongs to the home. Coming to be at home is thus a passage through the foreign.³³

Heidegger considers the theme of homecoming through journey through a discussion of Sophocles's *Antigone*. At the beginning of his exegesis, Heidegger focuses on the opening lines of the first chorus song (*polla ta deina kouden anthropou deinoteron pelei*), which he translates as "Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing more uncanny looms or stirs beyond the human being" (333-334). Seizing on the word *deinon*, which is customarily translated as "strange" or "enormous," Heidegger argues that *deinon* is properly translated as "uncanny" (*Unheimlich*) or "unhomely" (*Unheimisch*). Properly understood, the opening lines of the choral ode express the truism that human beings are distinguished by the fact that they are homeless: "Sophocles' word, which speaks of the human being as the most uncanny being, says that human beings are, in a singular sense, not homely, and that their care is to become homely."³⁴

In Heidegger's view, the figure of Sophocles's tragedy who most exemplifies the homelessness of human existence is its main character, Antigone. This facet of Antigone's character is perhaps most apparent in her dialogue with her sister Ismene. In this dialogue, Ismene attempts to dissuade Antigone from burying her brother Polynices. Insofar as such an action defies Creon's prohibition against burying the individual who had led an attack on

³³Heidegger, *Holderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 49.

³⁴Heidegger, *Holderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 171.

Thebes, it is also one that invites retribution. In response, Antigone declares that she is prepared *pathein to deinon touto*, which Heidegger translates as “to take up into my own essence the uncanny that here and now appears.”³⁵ That is to say, Antigone is prepared to face up to the uncanny essence of her existence no matter what the consequences.

For Heidegger, Antigone’s response to Ismene is indicative of the spiritual transformation that is entailed by the experience of homelessness. Estrangement is not a product of human convention (*nomos*) but is instead a natural aspect of the human condition that, properly experienced, causes human beings to rise to the fulness of their existential potentiality. As Heidegger puts it, “This first of all entails that the unhomely is nothing that human beings themselves make but rather the converse: something that makes them into what they are and who they can be.”³⁶ Viewed from this perspective, Antigone’s peculiar excellence lies in the fact that she resolutely faces up to the homeless facet of human existence. At the same time, by accepting her primordial uncanniness, Antigone achieves a homecoming in the truest sense. Contemplated from this vantage point, Antigone’s death represents an authentic homecoming. In Heidegger’s words, “Her dying is her becoming homely, but a becoming homely within and from out of such being unhomely.”³⁷

For Heidegger, this reading of Antigone’s character is further confirmed by the closing words of the choral ode. In these lines, the chorus proclaims “Such shall not be entrusted to my hearth, nor share their delusion with my knowing, who put such a thing to

³⁵The following translations of the Greek text are Heidegger’s.

³⁶Heidegger, *Holderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* 103.

³⁷Heidegger, *Holderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* 104.

work” (373-375). In these lines, the chorus effectively expels Antigone from the “hearth,” or the abode of human dwelling. However, the key question is what is meant by hearth. Does the hearth mean a conventional home where human beings exist in a state of homeliness? If this is the case, then the choral ode would be a mere affirmation of placid conformity. However, the rest of the choral ode mitigates against such an interpretation. As noted earlier, the beginning lines of the ode recognize human beings as “not homely.” If human beings are not homely, then no human being can be completely at home in the hearth. Because it is a place where the not homely are homely, then, the hearth is really a place of homeliness *and* homelessness. For Heidegger, this is the “knowledge” of the hearth that is expressed by the choral ode: “And if the most uncanny consists in being unhomely, then this knowledge must be closer to the un-homely, indeed closer to the homely, and from such nearness have some intimation of the law of being unhomely.”³⁸

Thus, much as the river is a site of journey, the hearth is an abode of homelessness. Seemingly, in his “Ister” lecture, Heidegger conceptualizes the home as a place that transcends fixed boundaries. As Dallmayr puts it, “home or homecoming for Heidegger is by no means a native possession but only the farthest horizon of the soul’s journey abroad.”³⁹ Considered in relation to the question of Germany itself, Heidegger’s “Ister” lecture suggest that a Germanic homecoming does not involve a renewed commitment to autochthony, but rather a journey abroad.

³⁸Heidegger, *Holderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* 105.

³⁹Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, 176.

Needless to say, this is a very different Heidegger than the one that has been presented thus far. Here, Heidegger's emphasis on rootedness is counterbalanced by a corresponding stress on journey. In these lectures, Heidegger counsels a return to the roots of Western existence in order to cultivate a thinking of difference. In order to overcome the hubris of the modern West, Heidegger advocates that the West return to its deepest roots. By descending to its pre-metaphysical origins, the West effectively overcomes the rationalism that is the modern expression of Western metaphysics. As it stands, this Heideggerian return to the origins not only undermines Western rationalism but also the ontological underpinnings of the West itself. As Strauss puts it, "the West has first to recover within itself that which would make possible a meeting of West and East: its own deepest roots, which antedate its rationalism, which in a way antedate the separation of West and East."⁴⁰ Hence, a journey to the origins of Western existence is at the same time a journey beyond the boundary that separates the Occident from the Orient.

For Heidegger, homecoming necessitates a journey towards otherness. Interestingly enough, the Biblical story of Abraham, a story much admired by Levinas, vividly illustrates the sojourn towards alterity. For Levinas, the story of Abraham's departure from home is emblematic of the self's journey from interiority to exteriority: "To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland for a yet unknown land, and forbids his servant to even bring his son to the point of departure."⁴¹

⁴⁰Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 43.

⁴¹Emmanuel Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," trans. Alphonso Lingis, in *Deconstruction in Context*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 348. Much like Levinas, Paul Tillich views the story of Abraham's departure as emblematic

In Levinas's view, Abraham symbolizes the metaphysical journey towards otherness that is manifest in what Levinas calls the "Jewish moments" of the Western tradition.⁴² For Levinas, the Jewish moments are the instances in Occidental thought when infinity breaks through the walls of totality. Such Jewish elements include Socrates's *daimon*, Plato's Good (*Agathon*) beyond being, Aristotle's active intellect, the trace in Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius's doctrine of *via eminentiae*, as well as Descartes's idea of the infinite. In its own way, the story of Abraham illuminates how a "Jewish moment" plays itself out on a spatial continuum.

The story of Abraham is a story of departure: God orders Abraham to depart from his "fatherland" in obedience to an imperative of divine origin (Gen: 12:1-3). Understood symbolically, God's command to Abraham implies that human beings are morally compelled to sever their ties to their fatherland. It goes without saying that the story of Abraham has profound Levinasian echoes. Like the Levinasian journey towards otherness, Abraham's journey is exterior in its trajectory. Indeed, not only does Abraham depart from his fatherland, he also "forbids his servant to bring his son to the point of departure." Seemingly, the Abrahamic itinerary is unambiguously centrifugal in nature.

The affinity between the story of Abraham and Levinas's thought is self-evident. That being said, the story of Abraham also resonates with the vision of the home that

of the nomadic ethos that underlies the Judaic vision of place. For more, see Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Roger C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

⁴²For more on Levinas's view of Abraham, see "Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics," in *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Heidegger presents in his Hölderlin lectures. For Heidegger, the Danube river that is the subject of Hölderlin's hymn is a place of journey. Similarly, the hearth identified in the final lines of the choral ode of Sophocles's *Antigone* is a home occupied by the unhomely. Likewise, in the Biblical story of Abraham, the home is a particular "land" that can only be reached through the process of journey by a person who has embraced exile. In both the Abrahamic story and Heidegger's Hölderlin lectures, the home is a place that lies on the other side of a journey.

At the same time, the story of Abraham takes us beyond Heidegger because the Abrahamic journey is ethical in import. Abraham does not enter into a condition of exile in order to exist in an authentic relationship with Being, but in order meet the needs of the Other. "Infinity is not 'before' me; I express it in giving a sign of the giving of signs, of the 'for-the-Other' in which I am dis-interested: here I am! The accusative (*me voici*) here is remarkable: here I am, under your eyes, at your service, your obedient servant."⁴³ By responding to the otherness of God's voice, Abraham distinguishes himself as an "obedient servant" of the Other.

Heidegger and Levinas interpret the mythopoetic literature of the ancient Greeks and Hebrews in a manner that conceptualizes the process of homecoming in terms of journey. No doubt, such a solution to the Heidegger-Levinas debate on home and homelessness is bound to strike some observers as perhaps too convenient. However, using these narratives to find a middle ground between Heidegger and Levinas is a fruitful endeavor in an age in

⁴³Emmanuel Levinas, "God and Philosophy," trans. R. Cohen, *Philosophy Today* 22 (1978), 141.

which the spread of globalization clashes with the resurgence of tribalism. On the one hand, the process of globalization uproots human beings from the traditions of land, language, ethnicity, and religion that stabilized their ancestors for millennia. On the other hand, the resurgence of tribalism presents us with the specter of communities that strive to maintain their autochthony through “ethnic cleansing” and the violent suppression of difference. In such a milieu, there is a pressing need for a politics of place that is ontological yet ethical; humanistic yet non-anthropocentric; worldly yet transcendent. Inasmuch as Heidegger was a thinker who famously proclaimed that “questioning is the piety of thought,” it seems appropriate to end this study with a series of questions.⁴⁴ For one, is it possible for man to find a home on earth in an age in which the possibility of having a home is increasingly called into question? And if it is, can such a home facilitate a close human relationship to Being and the Other? Such are the questions of home that haunt us in a homeless age.

⁴⁴Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 341.

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