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Human Making and the Making of the Human: Singularity, Sociality, and Creativity in

Nicholas of Cusa and Martin Heidegger

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Religious Studies

by

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December 2021

The dissertation of Eva P. Braunstein is approved.

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VITA OF EVA P. BRAUNSTEIN
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ABSTRACT

Human Making and the Making of the Human: Singularity, Sociality, and Creativity in

Nicholas of Cusa and Martin Heidegger

by

Eva P. Braunstein

In recent decades, there has been renewed interest in the fifteenth-century philosopher
and theologian Nicholas of Cusa, especially as a figure offering insights into the genealogical
development, the possibilities, and the challenges of modernity—topics expounded in the
twentieth century by Martin Heidegger, the great diagnostician of the modern technological
condition. While Heidegger's philosophical indebtedness to mystical Christian traditions has
been well-established by recent scholarship, there has yet to be a major study connecting
Nicholas of Cusa and Heidegger, who in many ways bookend the modern epoch. In filling
that lacuna, this dissertation draws out the shared thematic concerns of these two prolific
thinkers and critically reappraises the thought of Cusanus and Heidegger on three central
themes: the singularity of the human individual, the fundamental sociality of the human, and
the bounds and possibilities of human creativity. My comparative analysis demonstrates that
Cusanus at the origins of modernity and Heidegger at the end of modernity offer two
different but complementary ways to understand the uniqueness of each human individual,

whose singularity is threatened by the leveling forces operative in industrialized late-capitalism and in certain mechanized forms of production. The dissertation further argues that Cusanus's communal practice of mystical contemplation, which attempts through discourse to reconcile uniqueness with communal commensurability, parallels the question in Heidegger's thought about how individual authenticity can be experienced, enacted, and publicly communicated. Finally, the dissertation argues that Cusanus's and Heidegger's accounts of creativity suggest potential antidotes to the excesses of automatization and the aesthetic deterioration associated with the modern technological condition. Both Cusanus and Heidegger propose ways to read works of art as the kinds of poetic making that can institute and sustain a community, while opening the way to new forms of thinking and of inhabiting the world.

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Human Making and the Making of the Human: Singularity, Sociality, and Creativity in Nicholas of Cusa and Martin Heidegger

By Eva P. Braunstein

In recent decades, scholars of religion and intellectual history have recovered interest in the early modern German cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, turning to him as a resource for thinking through both the possibilities and the challenges of modernity.[1] During this same period, scholars of modern philosophy and the history of Christian thought have shown the indebtedness of Martin Heidegger's philosophical outlook to mystical Christian traditions, among other influences.[2] However, there has yet to be a major study connecting Nicholas of Cusa and Heidegger, figures who in many ways bookend the modern epoch. This dissertation fills this lacuna, and draws out the shared thematic concerns of these two prolific thinkers. More specifically, this project critically reappraises the thought of Nicholas of Cusa and Heidegger on three central themes: the singularity of the human individual, sociality, and creativity. In the introduction that follows, I survey the scholarly landscape of Cusanus studies, especially his relation to the epochal threshold of modernity, in order to show how my project is situated within that periodization debate. I then explain how my work expands out from the existing scholarly literature on Heidegger, Cusanus, and mystical traditions.

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[1] See Peter J. Casarella, introduction to *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, ed. Peter J. Casarella (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), xi–xxix; Thomas A. Carlson. *The Indiscrete Image: Infinitude and Creation of the Human* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 95–115; Elizabeth Brient*, The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold of Modernity* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002); Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013); Michael Edward Moore, *Nicholas of Cusa and the Kairos of Modernity: Cassirer, Gadamer, Blumenberg* (Brooklyn: Punctum, 2013).

[2] John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986); Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions: The Remains of Saint Augustine in* Being and Time *and Beyond* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Is Nicholas of Cusa Modern? Contested Histories of Cusanus and Modernity

Where does Nicholas of Cusa stand in the sweep of intellectual history? Out of which epochal moment did his thought emerge? The German cardinal stands at the threshold of modernity, anticipating many of its elements and adapting antique and medieval sources, especially those of Neoplatonism, to novel situations in modern ways. My position—consonant with the scholarship not only of Michel de Certeau and Hans Blumenberg but also of Michael E. Moore[3] and Karsten Harries[4]—is that Cusanus is a composite figure, and it is precisely because he occupies this liminal, transitional place between medieval and modern thought that his thinking provides an illuminating perspective from which to examine the development of modern concepts of individual singularity within a social sphere, and of modern conceptions of scientific knowledge—concepts and concerns that Heidegger then engages at a crisis point of later modernity.

Peter Casarella, in "Nicholas of Cusa and the Ends of Medieval Mysticism," catalogues the history of Cusanus interpretation on the question of modernity, demonstrating that while disagreement may remain about whether Cusanus is *more* medieval than modern, he is doubtless a figure in whom we moderns, anxious to understand the strangeness of our own age, continue to see something fascinating and worthwhile. Casarella acknowledges that Ray Petry, in *Late Medieval Mysticism* (1957) and Evelyn Underhill in *Mysticism: a Study of the Nature of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911) saw Cusanus as a basically *medieval*

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[3] See Moore, *Cusa*.

[4] See Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001); Harries, "On the Power and Poverty of Perspective: Cusanus and Alberti" in *Cusanus*, 105–26.

mystical figure.[5] However, Franz Joseph Clemens in 1847 was one of the first scholars to label Cusanus as a "precursor" of modernity, especially in his similarities to Kant's philosophy and the "philosophy of identity and nature."[6] Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer also interpreted Cusanus as "a mystical precursor to modernity's worldliness."[7] Raymond Kiblansky's research called into question the neo-Kantian interpretation of Cusanus proposed by Cohen and Cassirer, and emphasized the continuity of the Platonic tradition in Renaissance thought.[8] Rudolf Haubst considered Cusanus to be "a doorkeeper of a new era," at the epochal threshold between the medieval and the modern.[9] In his landmark *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age,* Hans Blumenberg, too, locates Cusanus at the cusp of modernity, as one whose ideas prepared the way for radical rupture that would come to full fruition in Giordano Bruno's atheistic transformation of the cosmology of infinite worlds. In *Passage to Modernity*, Louis Dupré, responding to Blumenberg, does not identify in Cusanus the origins of modern self-assertion but instead presents the German cardinal as the last person to attempt to synthesize theocentric and anthropocentric currents in the face of medieval nominalism.[10]

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[5] Casarella, "Nicholas of Cusa and the Ends of Medieval Mysticism," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia A. Lamm (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 388–403.

[6] Franz Joseph Clemens, quoted in Casarella, "Ends," 392.

[7] Casarella, "Ends," 392.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Rudolf Haubst, quoted in Casarella, "Ends," 393.

[10] Casarella, "Ends," 395.

One major concern within the debate over Cusanus's epochal status is the proper

identification of his theory of knowledge, and the extent to which that theory of knowledge

resembles Kant's transcendental idealism, according to which, as Jasper Hopkins puts it:

> The forms of space and of time, along with certain universal concepts, or categories, are imposed by the mind on an unordered sensory-manifold, so that in this way the "given" becomes synthesized and constructed by the knowing mind, which makes the objects-of-experience conform to it, rather than its conforming to them, when it combines sensory-images of them, compares the images, and abstracts from the images mental concepts.[11]

Ernst Cassirer and Norbert Henke are most prominent among those committed to this proto-

Kantian rendering of Cusanus's theory of knowledge,[12] against which Hopkins argues

vociferously, instead highlighting the respects in which Cusanus adheres to a more Albertian-

Thomistic epistemology. Hopkins notes, for example, that Nicholas "alludes to the human

mind as assimilating itself to the object, alludes to truth as an adequation of the mind and the

thing, and alludes to the intellect's knowing by way of abstracting an intelligible

representation from what is a perceptual likeness."[13] Though Hopkins insists that it is an

error to label Cusanus modern, and accuses Kantian interpreters of overeager eisegesis, he in

the end arrives at a periodization of Cusanus not far removed from that of Cassirer. Hopkins

concedes that Cusanus "must be regarded as a transitional figure"[14] and that his thought "is

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[11] Jasper Hopkins, "Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464): First Modern Philosopher?" *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002): 18.

[12] Especially Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy,* trans. Mario Domandi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010); Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge: Philosophy, Science, and History Since Hegel*, trans. William H. Woglom and Charles W. Hendel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Norbert Herold, *Menschliche Perspektive und Wahrheit. Zur Deutung der Subjektivität in den philosophischen Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1975).

[13] Hopkins, "Cusa,": 22.

[14] Ibid., 28.

an unmistakable boundary mark on the pathway to modernity."[15] Cassirer's own position is

that

> all the thoughts and works of Nicholas Cusanus were still very deeply rooted in this general vision of the medieval mind and of medieval life. The bond established by the intellectual labors of centuries between the content of Christian faith and the content of the Aristotelian and the Neoplatonic theoretical systems was much too strong to be rent with one blow by a thinker who stood so firmly and so surely with the content of faith.[16]

Hopkins, likewise, classifies Cusanus as a liminal figure, who "opens the door to

Modernity—

without himself ever crossing over the threshold that distinguishes the Middle Ages from

Modernity."[17] Hopkins acknowledges that several of Cusanus's central ideas do, however,

resonate more with the modern than the medieval, especially "his notion of learned

ignorance, his notion of the infinite disproportion between the finite and the infinite, his

notion of the coincidence of opposites in God, his notion of the mobility of the earth, and his

notion of the earth's being privatively infinite (i.e., its being finite but unbounded)."[18]

Dermot Moran points out that attempts to compare Cusa to Kant on the theme of

restricted finite knowledge and the insatiable desire for wisdom pass over too quickly a more

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[15] Ibid., 29.

[16] Cassirer, *Individual*, 19. Cassirer notes again that Cusanus "played an important role both in the re-awakening of objectivity and in the deepening of subjectivity. His greatness and his historical singularity consist in his having brought about this change not in opposition to the religious ideas of the Middle Ages, but from the standpoint of these ideas themselves. His 'discovery of nature and of man' was accomplished from the very heart of religion, where he sought to base and to anchor that discovery" (36).

[17] Hopkins, "Cusa,": 29.

[18] Ibid.: "Thus, he does not help 'legitimate' the Modern Age, to borrow Hans Blumenberg's title. Instead, the reverse is true: the Modern Age helped 'legitimate' certain of his ideas." It is not clear what exactly is accomplished by Hopkin's reversal here, for it seems that in either case, the point remains that Cusanus's thinking shares an affinity, even if inchoate, with many modern ideals.

salient comparison: "it is far more accurate to see Cusanus as following the Pauline and Augustinian tradition that sees all human reasoning as limited, or as Cusanus would put it 'conjectural', that is, perspectival."[19] In this sense, Cusanus shares with Heidegger the Pauline and Augustinian notion that mortal finitude has noetic consequences that cannot be surmounted by sheer dint of the will. However, Moran argues that Nicholas's innovative Platonism—which clashed with the Aristotelianism of his opponent John Wenck—is the source of Nicholas's ingenuity: "Cusanus' supposed new procedure [of learned ignorance] is actually a very original application of the traditional *via negativa*. If it led to the self-limitation and self-circumscription of the modern epistemological subject then this is a direct consequence of a certain Platonic negative dialectic."[20] Notably, one of Heidegger's primary worries about the technological condition is that the modern subject has not adequately absorbed precisely this lesson of self-circumscription.

Hopkins is somewhat of an outlier in his resistance to classifying Cusanus as modern or at least proto-modern; such resistance is at odds with the dominant trend of Cusanus scholarship in both the mid and late twentieth century, which understands the cardinal to be an important figure for modern thought. As Peter Casarella observes in his introduction to the essay collection *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, the papers at the 1964 Brixen conference on Cusanus focused on his location at the *origins* of modernity. For example, Rudolf Haubst presented on evolution, Paul Sigmund on equality, and Morimichi Watanabe

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[19] Dermot Moran, "Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464): Platonism at the Dawn of Modernity" in *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity: Studies on Platonism and Early Modern Philosophy* (Springer, 2008), 12.

[20] Ibid., 15.

on tolerance. Thomas McTighe examined the metaphysical background of Cusanus's theory

of science and "emphasized how Cusanus effectively destroyed scholastic ontology and

thereby paved the way for modern science" and Gadamer "highlighted the Neokantian

revival of the 19th and 20th centuries (from Hermann Cohen to Cassirer) and the pivotal role

that the rediscovery of Cusanus's thought played in that movement."[21] At the 2001

conference, the focus shifted from the Cusan's role in the *origins* of modernity to "its

manifold mature expressions,"[22] with papers addressing Cusanus's relevance to "typically

modern questions such as individualism, human creativity, freedom, and the evolution of a

consensual theory of constitutional rights."[23] Despite some of Hopkins's protestations, then,

scholars before and after Cohen and Cassirer have seen Cusanus as a liminal figure,

anticipating and offering insights into modern issues, even if informed by his late medieval

standpoint.

Hans Blumenberg takes this perspective on Cusanus in his magisterial *The*

Legitimacy of the Modern Age, wherein he presents Cusanus as one who "still stands before

this threshold," the modern epoch, in contrast to Giordano Bruno, who subsequently leaves it

behind.[24] Still, Cusanus's "thematization of method," while in his own lifetime remaining

compatible with medieval theology, prepared a pathway "for the point of view to be rendered

autonomous as theoretical immanence and thus as a positivization of *curiositas*."[25] Human

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[21] Casarella, introduction to *Cusanus,* xxii.

[22] Ibid., xxiii.

[23] Ibid., xxiv.

[24] Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallar (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), 469.

autonomy exercised through theoretical curiosity is the distinguishing feature of the *modern* as opposed to the medieval age, on Blumenberg's view. Cusanus's paradigm remains on the side of *limitation*, rather than that of fully realized independence. The cardinal's understanding of his system "did not yet allow the fact to emerge that the triad *infinite God/infinite world/infinite human spirit* opened up alternatives, that it held in readiness the possibility of each of its components becoming autonomous. For the Cusan, it was still entirely beyond the question that in spite of its infinitude, the world could not offer man an essentially adequate, fully satisfying object."[26] Nonetheless, Cusanus's departure from the Aristotelian Scholastic John Wenck, along with his conception of method, decisively opens the way to "the compelling motive of cognitive movement for man" that would become an emancipated exploration of the natural world.[27]

Whereas Blumenberg and Alexandre Koyré[28] emphasize the consequences of the Cusan's thought for the emergence of modern science, Michel de Certeau explores the social and political implications of Cusanus's proto-modern system. Certeau sees in Nicholas of Cusa's early writings, especially *The Catholic Concordance* and *Learned Ignorance*, the attempt to draw together, rather than to erase, emerging differences in viewpoints or worldviews. Certeau thus attributes to Cusanus "a new paradigm of a 'modern' philosophical approach"—modern in its endeavor to respect the irreducibility of multiple perspectives.[29]

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[25] Ibid., 349.

[26] Ibid., 529.

[27] Ibid., 529.

[28] Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (New York: Harper, 1958).

Certeau affirms Cassirer's reading of Cusanus as the progenitor of "a 'modern' conception of the individual" because the cardinal "devoted himself to thinking potentiality in terms of positions defined by a reciprocal determination," according to which each point of view is singular.[30] Certeau sees a through-line from Cusanus's early works—*The Catholic Concordance* and *Learned Ignorance*—to his later mystical text, *On the Vision of God*, which instructs the formation of a contemplative community around a painting and which gestures to characteristically modern notions of human freedom and perspective.[31] Certeau tempers this modernist reading with an acknowledgement of the medieval metaphysics undergirding Cusanus's thought, noting that his model in both *The Catholic Concordance* and *Learned Ignorance* "is 'modern' by its individualist postulate and by its pro-productive perspective, though it is traditional by its theological or mystical foundation, a 'seeding' of infinity in each and all."[32]

The question of Cusanus's modernity arises in the analysis of his political writing as well. Paul Sigmund and Cary Nederman, in their work on *The Catholic Concordance*, position Cusanus as a transitional, composite figure—a forerunner of modern political ideals such as natural individual freedom, popular sovereignty, consent of the governed, constitutionalism, delegation, and consensus, but also an adapter of the metaphysics of

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[29] Michel de Certeau, "The Look: Nicholas of Cusa," in *Mystic Fable*, vol. 2, *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Luce Giard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 27.

[30] Ibid., 28.

[31] Ibid., 47. "This micro-utopia concerns the problem that will haunt 'modern' social thought: on what model are we to envisage the origin of human society, taking as our premise the existence of individuals? In this preface, the model is no longer biblical: the collectivity . . . is the result of a contract of cooperation and of a division of labor; it is itself the first of the *opera humana*, even if the principle of it is the infinity animating every individual."

[32] Ibid., 47.

Dionsyian hierarchy.[33] The anticipatorily modern quality of Cusanus's thought is exemplified in his famous formulation: "For if by nature men are equal in power and equally free, the true properly ordered authority of one common ruler who is their equal in power cannot be naturally established except by the election and consent of the others and law is also established by consent."[34] While *The Catholic Concordance* adheres, in some respects, to the graduated cosmology of emanationist Neoplatonic metaphysics inherited from Dionysius, in *Learned Ignorance*, written shortly thereafter, the cosmological paradigm is instead that of an infinite sphere whose center is equally proximate to every point. This opens the path toward modernity in at least two ways: it rejects the scholastic, Aristotelian distinction between the sublunar and celestial spheres which had hitherto hindered astronomy, and it rejects hierarchy at the social level, since the complex premise of *Learned Ignorance* is the presence of God in each and all. There is no longer an assertion that proximity to the center indicates higher value, because a fixed center has been removed.

What stakes are there in the correct periodization of Nicholas's lifeworld and his writings? I have striven to show the liminality of his work because his position at the *origins* of modernity is what makes him a worthy and fascinating conversation partner for Heidegger, who writes from a major crisis point of modernity. Michael Moore notes that Nicholas of Cusa and Ernst Cassirer—who turned to Cusa in the 1920s to bolster his theory

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[33] See Paul E. Sigmund, "Medieval and Modern Constitutionalism: Nicholas of Cusa and John Locke," in *Cusanus*, 196–209; Cary J. Nederman, "Empire Meets Nation: Imperial Authority and National Government in Renaissance Political Thought," in *Cusanus*, 178–95. See also Sigmund, *Nicholas of Cusa and Medieval Political Thought,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

[34] Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance,* ed. Paul E. Sigmund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 151.

of symbolic and religious forms—both wrote from crisis points in their intellectual and

political contexts, each laboring to draw out a new cultural synthesis that would allow for

stability and peace.[35] The sense of modern crisis was palpable at Davos in 1929, where

Cassirer famously debated Heidegger, whose enchanting new style of philosophy won over

many of those in attendance.[36] That Heidegger understood himself to be writing at a crisis

point in modernity is evident in the apocalyptic tone he sometimes employs—a tone of

desolation that, it is worth noting, was shared by many of his literary contemporaries,

including Thomas Mann and Nicolai Berdyaev. As Moore notes, in 1920s Germany "the

feeling was widespread that European civilization had given way to barbarism and portended

even worse. . . . Philosophical reflections on contemporary history, despairing or radically

prophetic, were not unusual."[37] This sense that the era of Renaissance modernity had reached

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[35] Moore notes that "questions of tradition and crisis, tradition and *kairos*, arise in several contexts: the historical context of Nicholas of Cusa, who as a highly placed intellectual and Cardinal of the Church during the Renaissance period wanted to ensure that the truths and institutions of the Catholic church would survive during a period of ecclesiastical crisis, by taking strength through reform – and in the scholarship of Ernst Cassirer, who looked back to the Renaissance period from the vantage point of a destructive, dangerous period of historical turmoil in Weimar Germany. Cassirer studied the Renaissance period as part of his search for the origins of modern philosophy" (Moore, "Epilogue: Ernst Cassirer and Renaissance Cultural Studies: the Figure of Nicholas of Cusa" in *Nicholas of Cusa and the Making of the Early Modern World* ed. Simon J.G. Burton, Joshua Hollmann, and Eric Parker [Leiden: Brill, 2019], 485).

[36] Peter Gordon describes Cassirer and Heidegger's Davos conference debate on philosophical principles as follows: "it was generally agreed that Heidegger was the decisive victor. He embodied the 'new time' and the 'new pathos of thought.' Even Cassirer's students conceded their teacher's defeat, but rather than praising Heidegger, they regarded him a prophet of the 'mood philosophy' now bewitching the academic scene. Beside him, the once grand figure of Cassirer seemed bathed in twilight: Levinas saw in him 'the end of a particular kind of humanism'" (*Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003], 279).

[37] "The well-known émigré and cult-figure Nicolai Berdyaev, in his essay "The End of the Renaissance," announced that the entire period of modern history, initiated in the Renaissance, had come to an end in the Great War: "there is beginning something unknowable, an historical epoch not yet named with a name. We depart from all the customary historical shores." Berdyaev suggested that human existence – ineluctably enclosed within its epoch – is subject to a kind of historical fate" (Moore, "Epilogue," 494–495).

a tragic terminus shows that Heidegger bookends the epoch at whose origins Cusa wrote, making them a worthy pair for thematic comparison.

Scholarship on Heidegger, Cusa, and Mystical Traditions

My examination of the shared thematic concerns of Heidegger and Cusa can be appreciated as an addition to and an expansion out from the impressive body of literature that exists about Heidegger's relationship to the Rhineland Dominican Meister Eckhart.[38] A landmark book in that subfield is John Caputo's *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, which persuasively presents Meister Eckhart's influence on Heidegger as both structural and historical. Caputo argues for the "kinship between overcoming metaphysics and the mystical leap,"[39] and he elucidates their many other striking thematic similarities, especially the 'letting-be' of *Gelassenheit* and the relinquishment of aspirations to human autonomy.[40] Caputo is careful to explain that he sees "a similarity of structures, not of content"; for example, in drawing out the connection between Heidegger's Dasein and Eckhart's soul, he does *not* claim that "for Heidegger Being is 'really' God, a disguised form of the divinity, and Dasein is 'really' the soul" but claims rather "that the relationships into

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[38] For recent scholarship on the influence of Eckhart on Heidegger, see Ian Moore's *Eckhart, Heidegger and the Imperative of Releasement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019). For a concise treatment of Heidegger's use of the middle voice and its relation to Eckhartian detachment, see David Lewin, "The Middle Voice in Eckhart and Modern Continental Philosophy," *Medieval Mystical Theology* 20:1 (2011): 28–46.

[39] Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, 6.

[40] According to Caputo, "each thinker appeals to man to open himself up to the presence of something which surpasses man, yet from which alone man receives his essence as man. For each thinker, access to this presence is gained not by any human accomplishment, but by 'letting' something be accomplished 'in' man. They are each spokesmen of 'Gelassenheit,' of letting-be-of letting God be God, of letting Being be in its truth. Each teaches a way to find a new rootedness among things, to let the thing lie forth as the thing which it is, to break the shell of creatures to find God within" (Ibid., 8).

which Being and God enter in Heidegger and Meister Eckhart are similar; each plays a similar role within a similar structure."[41] In making the case for Eckhart's influence on Heidegger, Caputo also shows that Heidegger's relationship to mystical traditions more generally is complex. For example, in some of Heidegger's writing, mysticism is not the straightforward solution for overcoming metaphysics since mysticism is sometimes guilty of the very metaphysical otherworldliness he rejects. However, in other cases, Heidegger "suggests a positive parallel between the thinker and the mystic and lets a mystical poet be guide of the leap beyond Leibniz's metaphysical principle."[42] This is one important respect in which Nicholas of Cusa and Heidegger share a kinship; Cusanus's coincidence of opposites requires a leap of its own kind. I follow Caputo in exploring structural similarities between Heidegger and Nicholas of Cusa. It is noteworthy that Cusa, who was himself deeply influenced by Eckhart, is responsible for preserving Eckhart's writings after their heretical condemnation.[43] For the purposes of this project, the connection between Heidegger and Cusanus is less a question of direct historical influence than of thematic parallels and, in some cases, striking contrasts.

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[41] Ibid., 144; "The relationship, the dialectic, the interchange, between God and the soul in Meister Eckhart is similar to the relationship between Being and Dasein in Heidegger. As God takes the initiative in Meister Eckhart, so Being takes the initiative in Heidegger. As the soul must stay open and receptive to God, so Dasein must stay open to Being. This in no way suggests that the terms of the relation—Being and God, Dasein and the soul—are directly related to one another. . . . It suggests a similarity of structures, not of content. It is not what is related but the how which is comparable. In each relation, one term 'addresses' and the other 'corresponds; one sends itself, and the other stays open for its coming. But what is related in each case is quite different: for in one case we have to do with the *unio mystica*, the purification and divinization of the soul, in the other with the epochal event of truth."

[42] Ibid., 141.

[43] Ibid., 101–2.

David Albertson presents Cusanus's late-medieval mathematical theology as a counter-example to *mathesis* narratives—especially those propounded by Husserl and Heidegger—that assume an opposition between mathematical reasoning and theological thought.[44] Cusanus's mathematical cosmology incorporates rather than rejects Christological concepts, and presents quantitative reasoning as a means of ascent to the divine. It therefore does not conform to the *mathesis universalis* narrative that claims that the mathematization of nature entails alienation from sensible experience and a thoroughgoing rejection of all religious cosmologies, since Boethius and Thierry of Chartres remained central sources in Cusanus's mystical applications of the quadrivium. Albertson notes that Cusanus's reconciliation of Arithmos and Logos is well-suited to our contemporary situation—so thoroughly diagnosed by Heidegger—precisely because Cusanus's thought engages creatively with the quantitative, rather than denouncing it.[45]

One important connection between Cusanus and Heidegger is the question of subjectivity, which has been gestured to, though not thoroughly explored, in previous literature. For example, intellectual historian and philosopher Reiner Schürmann's ambitious tome, *Broken Hegemonies*, traces the breakdown of hegemonic thinking from the late

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[44] For example, Albertson notes, "[i]n a disputation in 1539, Martin Luther declared that 'mathematics is theology's greatest enemy of all, since there is no part of philosophy that so fights against theology.' Luther's provocative opposition to the two disciplines continues under other guises today. Martin Heidegger considered *mathesis universalis* as the source of metaphysical oblivion in philosophy and the enemy of thinking. Conversely, Alain Badiou has proposed that the best means for completing the Nietzschean death of God is to secularize infinity through a renewed mathematical Platonism" (*Mathematical Theologies: Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014], 2).

[45] "The Cusan example of a robust mathematical theology hints at a way beyond the limitations shared by liberal (modern) and postliberal (antimodern) theologies. . . . For a theology like his, already thoroughly mathematized, the onset of more intense mathematization would have required no fundamental changes. Indeed such an event might have conveyed even greater opportunities for complexity and relevance than previously enjoyed" (Ibid., 279).

antiquity of Augustine to Meister Eckhart's subversion of natural law to the emergence of

self-consciousness and new definitions of autonomy in Luther and Kant, concluding with a

treatment of Heidegger on subjectivity in the face of modern tragedy and collapsed

normativity. Within that sweeping narrative he includes Nicholas of Cusa, whom he

characterizes as a liminal figure who opens the way toward modern accounts of subjective

uniqueness. Nicholas "is called the last of the Scholastics" because "he still posits the

primacy of an encompassing concatenation where each thing extends its essence into every

other thing (*quodlibet in quolibet*)."[46] And yet Nicholas departs from that scholastic tradition

"by disengaging the I from that entailment. With this, another swerve toward finite

spontaneity is made. He starts off on the road that will eventually lead to the transcendental

subjectivism of the eighteenth century in that individuality appears as a task."[47] After

identifying in Cusanus this origin point of a new kind of subjectivity, Schürmann turns to

Heidegger for his conclusion because he believes Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy* is

a text that "inscribe[s] referential consciousness into the lineage of the fantasms which have

guided our history—a topological text."[48] Schürmann further justifies his selection as

follows: unlike Husserl, Heidegger "put the primacy of subjectivity and consciousness into

question," and unlike Wittgenstein, Heidegger did not "neglect history"; unlike either one,

Heidegger interpreted the copula 'is' in his questioning of metaphysics.[49] Schürmann also

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[46] Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies,* trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 272.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 515.

[49] Ibid.

values the fact that Heidegger's writing always keeps in mind "the double bind, the effect of the everyday ultimates that are natality and mortality."[50] That is, the nascent affirmation of finitude that begins in Cusanus culminates in Heidegger's emphasis on the time-bound, death-colored quality of human existence.

French reception of Heidegger and mystical thought—especially reception by Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion—is another scholarly domain out from which this project expands. For example, in "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" in *Writing and Difference*, Derrida suggestively pairs Heidegger with Nicholas of Cusa on the question of infinity and ontology, noting that infinity permits the conceptualization of the difference between Being and ontic determination.[51] He quotes from Cusanus's *Idiota* dialogues to demonstrate that "[t]he very content of the thought of God is that of a being *about* which no question could be asked (except by being asked by it), and which cannot be determined as an existent."[52] Earlier in the essay, Derrida includes a lengthy footnote on the multiplication of facial images from Cusanus's *Of* [sic] *Learned Ignorance* as an example of the way in which Levinas's ethical theme of the face and face-to-face encounter (which Levinas understands to be a corrective to Heidegger's deficient notion of the Other) evokes "the ambiguity of the notion of substance as concerns God and his

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[50] Ibid., 516.

[51] Derrida says: "Heidegger often reminds us of the 'strange simplicity' of the thought of Being: this is both its difficulty and that which properly touches upon the 'unknowable.' For Heidegger, infinity would be only one eventual determination of this simplicity" ("Violence," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978], 150).

[52] Ibid., 151.

creatures" and leaves unresolved the "Scholastic problem of the analogy."[53] Derrida treats

Cusanus as a noteworthy example of the multifaceted metaphysical tradition to which

Heidegger and Levinas respond in different ways. Additionally, in his essay "Sauf le Nom,"

Derrida sees in Heidegger's treatment of the impossibility of death a consistency with the

apophatic mystical tradition.[54] He also invokes the longstanding tradition of serene

detachment, *Gelassenheit*, present in Eckhart and Heidegger.[55] Mark Taylor expands on these

Derridian insights in his essay 'No Not No,' where he situates Heidegger's concept of *Riss* in

relation to Eckhartian mysticism, especially its exploration of alterity.[56] Taylor notes

Derrida's illustrative citation of Eckhart's comparison of the eye to a sieve, whose filtering

function can tell the difference between Being and nonbeing.[57]

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[53] Ibid., 142–43.

[54] "All the apophatic mystics can also be read as powerful discourses on death, on the (impossible) possibility of the proper eath of being-there that speaks, and that speaks of what carries away, interrupts, denies, or annihilates its speaking as well as its own Dasein. Between the existential analytic of being-to-death or being-for-death, in *Being and Time*, and the remarks of Heidegger on the theological, the theiological, and above all on a theology in which the word 'being' would not even appear, the coherence seems to me profound and the continuity rigorous" (Derrida, *On the Name*, trans. Thomas Dutoit [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995], 44–45).

[55] "The 'no matter' of the 'no matter whom' or of the 'no matter what' would open the way to a sort of serene impassibility, to a very shrill insensibility, if I can put it this way, capable of being stirred by everything, precisely because of this element of indifference that opens onto no matter what difference. This is how I sometimes understand the tradition of *Gelazenheit*, this serenity that allows for being without indifference, lets go without abandoning, unless it abandons without forgetting or forgets without forgetting—a serenity whose insistance one can trace from Meister Eckhardt to Heidegger" (Ibid., 73).

[56] "Neither transcendent nor immanent, the wholly other is traced in an immemorial past, which, though never present eternally returns as an outstanding future that never arrives. As we have seen, the trace of this strange altarity haunts the western theologico-philosophical tradition—from Plato's *khora*, to Eckhart's sieve, to Heidegger's *Riss*, and beyond. It is not impossible that this wholly other is the 'terrifyingly ancient' that approaches from another yet more ancient tradition" (Taylor, "No Not No" in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Coward and Foshay [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992], 195).

[57] "The sieve is, in effect, a figure for Heidegger's 'ontological difference'" (Ibid., 191).

Jean-Luc Marion examines the relationship between Heidegger and Cusanus from yet another perspective: he defends Cusanus—and the apophatic Dionyisan tradition more broadly—from the accusation of conceptual idolatry, expressed as Heideggerian 'onto-theology.' In "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology,'" Marion upholds Cusanus as a figure who is in many ways consonant with the spirit and the aims of Derridian deconstruction and Heidegger's questioning of essence in the history of metaphysics. Marion points out that the connection, made famously by Derrida in his 1968 lecture on 'Différance', between the two questions of the 'metaphysics of presence' and of 'negative theology' is a surprising connection, given that neither phrase has a "precise definition nor clear-cut historical legitimacy" and given that "Heidegger never (to our knowledge) used the phrase 'metaphysics of presence,' a point which is all the more remarkable as he was forever radically questioning the constitution of metaphysics as well as the essence of presence (the *ousia* of the *parousia*)."[58] Marion goes on to argue that neither Pseudo-Dionysius nor Nicholas of Cusa are guilty of onto-theology in the Heideggerian sense. In Pseudo-Dionysius, according to Marion, "Being remains an inconceivable *esse*, without analogy, indeed *penitus incognitum*" which means that his mystical theology is not "inscribed within the horizon of Being" nor in "the onto-theo-logical figure that metaphysics imposed on it."[59] Thus, God can never be grasped or cognized as an object in an assured and

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[58] Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology,'" in *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism,* ed. Caputo and Scanlon (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1999), 20.

[59] Ibid., 30–31. Marion specifies the ways in which Pseudo-Dionysius departs from the traditions that arrive at a terminus and a definite name for the divine: "In contrast to the Neo-platonists who would overcome Being only for the sake of coming unto the One and would pass beyond the One only in order to retrieve it, Dionysius not only does not privilege the one which he paradoxically places in the last position of the divine names; he also does not accord any essential privilege to goodness—while nevertheless still granting it the title

fixed manner. Similarly, Nicholas of Cusa's evocation of the ancient *theologia negativa* in

De Docta Ignorantia avoids a simple binary; that is, "he does not end up with apophasis pure

and simple, but with infinity. . . . This infinity does not revert to affirmation after passing

through negation, but lays bare and circumscribes the divine truth as the experience of

incomprehension," one that Nicholas calls learned ignorance.[60] Learned ignorance avoids

onto-theology, according to Marion, because it "is not a description of an hypostasized

apophasis," but of a third position that reiterates infinity and incomprehensibility.[61] In this

way, both Dionysius and Cusanus avoid what Marion calls the "idolatry of the concept," an

idolatry that is "the same as that of the gaze: imagining oneself to have attained God and to

be capable of maintaining him [sic] under our gaze, like a thing of the world. And the

Revelation of God consists first of all in cleaning the slate of this illusion and its

blasphemy."[62] Though he does not oppose idolatry or blasphemy in the dogmatic senses of

those terms, Heidegger shares with Cusanus an insistence on an irreducible remainder of

mystery in Being, and an excess of givenness that will always supersede human

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'most revered of names.' Goodness transcends Being on principle, but it itself does not attain the essence and hovers, so to speak, between the derived names and the un-namable" (32).

[60] Ibid., 25.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 34. Marion goes so far as to argue that the 'deconstructive' work of clearing away conceptual idols has been ongoing since fourth century: "it is to reply to the Arians that the Cappadocian fathers invented or formalized negative theology, because the Arians claimed that the essence of God was within our grasp, and that the essence of God was to be unbegotten. I think that orthodox theology was in fact a powerful endeavor to deconstruct the naive metaphysics of presence used by Arianism. In that situation, I would say, the part of deconstruction was played by the orthodox theologians" (47).

"It is indeed the theologians themselves who have the most extreme speculative interest in freeing God from any and all inclusion in presence. In fact, it is the heretics who pretend to include God within presence by assigning him a proper name and offering a definition for his essence" (35).

measurements and ordering activities. Marion's treatment of deconstruction and mystical theology illuminates that linkage.

Like Marion, Peter Casarella upholds Cusanus as an example of a thinker who does not fall prey to Heideggerian onto-theological conceptual idolatry. He defends this position through an appeal to Cusanus's unique concept of possibility. In "Nicholas of Cusa and the Power of the Possible," Casarella demonstrates that both Heidegger and Cusanus challenge the ontological assumption that possibility is grounded in a full, transcendent presence. More specifically, Cusanus "leaves behind the Aristotlelian-Scholastic tradition which begins with the claim that actuality is the end of all possibility. Nicholas suggests, as Heidegger maintained in *Being and Time*, that possibility stands higher than actuality."[63] In *De Apice Theoriae* and in *De Possest*, Cusanus presents an alternative way of conceiving of possibility as the height and condition of existence, departing from Aquinas's emphasis on divine act and actuality.[64] Cusanus coins a new term, *possest* (a combination of *posse* and *est*), to describe that which is beyond the coincidence of absolute possibility and absolute actuality. According to Casarella, Nicholas's concept of "*possest* reflects the absolute ground of

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[63] Casarella, "Nicholas of 32. Heidegger refers to the 'quiet power of the possible' in *Being and Time*, paragraph 76: "Because in each case existence is only as factically thrown, historiology (*Historie*) will disclose the quiet power of the possible (*die stille Kraft des Möglichen*) with greater penetration the more simply and the more concretely having-been-in-the-world is understood in terms of its possibility, and "only" presented as such."

[64] "For Thomas Aquinas, steeped in the retrieval of Aristotle in the 13th century, it was admissible that act be limited by potency inasmuch as acts of created existence are dependent upon the possibility of being received materially. However, for Cusanus, . . . [in DAT], possibility itself is the condition for all actual existence" (Casserella, "Nicholas of Cusa," 1).

"Aquinas steps beyond the confines of the strictly Aristotelian argument when, in addition to identifying God with actuality, he claims that God is pure act, devoid of possibility" (15).

possible existence and the existence of possibility itself together at once."[65] This construal of divine manifestation or activity is so striking because it does not conform to a certain Heideggerian narrative about theological sources and their reliance on pure presence.[66] That is, in contrast to the ontotheologians who are "oblivious to the fundamental meaning of ontological difference" and who "have reduced God to the ontological representation of *causa sui*," Nicholas strives, through his enigmatic concepts *possest* and *posse ipsum* to overcome what Heidegger calls "the difference which keeps Being as the ground and beings as what is grounded."[67]

As Casarella points out, "[t]he argument that the highest principle of the 'ontotheological' tradition has always been grasped 'ontically' as yet another being among beings, does not obtain for *possest*."[68] This Cusan concept of possibility, which departs from essentialist metaphysics, gives credence to the criticism—offered already by Werner Beierwaltes, Dermot Moran, and John Caputo—that Heidegger underestimates the extent to which Christian Neoplatonism and other medieval mystical sources themselves in fact

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[65] Ibid., 9. Casarella also describes this concept in relation to Nicholas's notions of *complicatio* and *explicatio*, enfolding and unfolding: "Cusanus presupposes that if something exists, it can exist. If something can exist, then possibility itself can exist. Since everything which exists exists actually, the existence of possibility actually exists. The shorter name for the actual existence of possibility is *possest. . . . Possest* is the proper name for the God in whom all possible existents are actually enfolded" (25–26).

[66] See "Die Onto-Theo-Logische Verfassung der Metaphysik" in *Identitaet und Differenz* (Pfuellingen: GuentherNeske, 1957) 31–67; in English: "The Onto-Theological Constitution of Metaphysics" in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 42–75.

[67] Heidegger, quoted in Casarella, "Nicholas of Cusa," 33.

[68] Ibid., 10.

already provide a critique of ontotheology.[69] Hans Gadamer agrees with this reading, and

suggests that Nicholas of Cusa's thought in particular provides a counter-example to

dominant metaphysical trends. In Casarella's paraphrase, "[f]or Gadamer, *possest*

'overcomes'—in the Heideggerian sense of *Ueberwindung*—the priority of pure presence in

'classical, Parmenidean-Platonic metaphysics,'" and in his speculation on possibility,

Nicholas challenges the longstanding Aristotelian principle of "the identity of pure act with

the highest point of metaphysical reflection."[70]

      Casarella builds on Gadamer's insight, arguing that in *De Apice Theoriae*, Nicholas

describes the light of possibility as that which shows itself to be invisible, and that this

"'invisible' manifestation of possibility itself in all things visible moves us closer to

Heidegger's attempt to overcome metaphysics."[71] Casarella astutely observes that some of

Cusanus's formulations of possibility closely resemble those of Heidegger, both of which

resist a metaphysics of autonomous subjectivity and of immediate presence:

> by radicalizing the difference between possibility itself and its manifestations,
> Cusanus even suggests an ontological difference in the Heideggerian sense. Even
> when using the language of image and exemplar, he does not maintain that the only
> true being is fully present in possibility itself. . . . Possibility itself is the hidden
> ground of its own manifestations. A simple vision of the mind does not 'make
> present' or 'represent' the ground of all beings as yet another being among beings.
> Rather possibility itself is disclosed through its difference from distinct possibilities
> of existence.[72]

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[69] See, for example, Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); John Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*.

[70] Casarella, "Nicholas of Cusa," 11.

[71] Ibid., 31.

[72] Ibid.

In this sense, both Heidegger and Cusanus offer open-ended rather than consummate and

ultimately closed accounts of the real, accounts wherein possibility always exceeds attempts

to unveil or actualize specific instances of a grounding principle. The climax or apex of

theorizing is not a summit, but an awareness of insurmountable hiddenness. As Casarella

points out, both Heidegger and Nicholas link possibility with an abyssal nothing, a

groundlessness which cannot be represented in any form.[73] Acknowledgement of such

groundlessness motivates an acceptance of the fragmentary rather than the systematic.

Others besides Derrida, Marion, and Casarella have seen in Cusanus a spark of the

rebellious playfulness that some might now label as "post-modern." For example, in

"Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of Our Times," David Tracy presents a parallelism

between late- or 'post' modern fragmentary thought and fifteenth-century experimental

writing, showing their kindred resistance to systemic, totalizing forms of culture[74]; in

particular he celebrates the "flexibility and modesty, the speculative fragmentary power" of

Nicholas of Cusa, "with his pluralistic sensibility, his mysticism of limit, his explosion of all

scholasticism by articulating the distinct great modern notion of infinity as glimpsed in his

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[73] "Possibility does not rest on the sure foundation of its own omnipresent ground. . . . Nicholas discloses that possibility itself perdures through the radical possibility that possibility itself might be nothing other than this nothing. Without the possibility of thinking to the abyss of all possibility, the full power of the possible becomes trapped by metaphysical forms of representation. In Heidegger's terms, the quiet power of the possible is sought through the hiddenness of possibility itself" (Ibid., 33).

[74] David Tracy questions prevailing the periodization of the epoch of modernity, arguing that "one can find in what is often named postmodernity as well as in the classical model of modernity itself—classical Enlightenment modernity which repressed the more flexible, more open, more fragmented culture of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and early seventeenth centuries—elements of that creative period of early modernity before the reified model of the Enlightenment became the model of modernity" ("Fragments," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, 171).

retrieval of certain fragments of Eckhart and Dionysius and the whole apophatic tradition."[75]

Heidegger and Cusanus, each in their own ways, retrieve Eckhartian fragments to undo the

scholasticisms of their day.

The movement of Renaissance humanism was a historically significant reaction

against such scholasticism. Heidegger's relationship to Renaissance humanism is treated in

Ernesto Grassi's *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism*. Though Nicholas of

Cusa is not included in this four-part study, I am expanding out from Grassi's analysis of the

similarities between Dionysian and Heideggerian thought, similarities which emerge from

Nicholas's context of Italian humanism. Grassi's reading method and his approach to these

thematic parallels aim to bring out "the present-day relevance of the problems of

Humanism"; he does not intend to interpret the humanist tradition "in terms of a

Heideggerian Existentialism, or conversely, to force Heidegger's theory of 'being-there' into

a tradition which he did not himself know and which he misunderstood whenever he referred

to it."[76] The thematic connection is present even where lines of direct historical connection

are not.

Grassi's major insight is that although Heidegger rejects a certain type of humanism

in his "Letter on Humanism" and elsewhere, Heidegger in fact shares with Renaissance and

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[75] "For Cusanus the apophatic tradition is to be interpreted not merely as an expression of the limits of our intelligence (as with the later Kantians) but as a sign of the very excess of intelligibility in infinity and excess of intelligence in the radical incomprehensibility of God. God's incomprehensibility for Cusanus is never merely a sign (as with such later thinkers as Kant and Jaspers) of our own finitude and limits but of God's very excess and positive incomprehensibility, related always to an infinite universe, never a closed cosmos" (Ibid., 180).

[76] Grassi, *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism. Four Studies* (Albany: State University of New York, 1983), 30.

Italian humanism the thesis that poetic, metaphorical language, not logic, is primary in

opening a world and in our engagement with and construction of distinctive historical ways

of being.[77] In that sense, the historical and literary approach of the Humanist tradition is a

counter-example to Heidegger's interpretation of Western thought as purely "rational

deductive metaphysics."[78] Heidegger and the Renaissance humanists agree that "logical

speech refers us to a more original, 'imagistic' form of language which is at home in the

sphere of logical contradiction."[79] As my subsequent chapters show in more detail, Nicholas

of Cusa fits this description insofar as he employs humanist style, writing in dialogues, using

paintings, games, and geometric metaphors to explain theological and moral lessons, all of

which do not conform to the rules of scholastic logic. His repeated invocation of the notion

of the coincidence of opposites and his conflict with the scholastic John Wenck demonstrate

that he is much more comfortable with logical contradiction than stereotypical

understandings of the thought-world this historical period might allow. Grassi argues that

Italian Humanism as "a new form of philosophizing" based on poetic rather than

metaphysical thinking "has no relationship to the rationalistic approach of Descartes and his

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[77] "[M]etaphor is the rescue from the urgencies of life in which Being announces itself. It is the rescue; there is no other kind. Without metaphor, man, faced with urgencies by which Being threatens to push him into the abyss, would most certainly be destroyed. For the Humanists, metaphor has primacy over all rational, deductive learning and knowledge. A further insight is that languages—and along with them the gods and customs of peoples—arise, flourish, and decay. Time results from the experience of the historicity of metaphors by which reality emerges from concealment" (Ibid., 76).

[78] "Heidegger's definition of Western thought—as rational deductive metaphysics which arises and unfolds exclusively from the problem of the relationship between beings and thought, i.e., in the framework of the question of logical truth—does not hold. In the Humanist tradition, there was always a central concern for the problem of the primacy of unhiddenness, openness, that in which historical 'being-there' can first appear" (Ibid., 29).

[79] Ibid., 51.

attempt to found a new philosophy and the sciences. On the other hand, modern thought, beginning with Descartes, did everything in its power to obscure the importance of the Humanistic tradition."[80] The obscurity of some sources in this branch of the Renaissance tradition may be one reason why Heidegger did not explicitly make the connection between his own work and the humanism that preceded it.

In his fourth chapter, Grassi shows that Heidegger shares at least two theses with Pseudo-Dionysius, namely "that Being is both revealed and hidden in beings, and that in every different being one and the same Being is found. . . .That is, we find here [in *Divine Names*] Heidegger's claim that Being reveals and conceals itself in beings."[81] Both figures emphasize that the sublime (Being, or God) remains hidden and inexhaustible. However, Grassi also highlights "the essential difference between Heidegger's philosophy of unhiddenness and negative theology": Heidegger and Pseudo-Dionysius begin from completely different starting points, one ahistorical and one historical.[82] A second and related difference is that negative theology defines the sublime as that which "can be made visible only by relinquishing those capacities (rational knowledge, memory, and will) that make possible the 'day' of rational life" whereas for Heidegger "the rational process of thought remains necessary in the sphere of beings where Being reveals itself—insofar as this process 'fixes' the order of beings. The giving of grounds establishes and defines beings as the

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[80] Ibid., 78.

[81] Ibid., 86.

[82] Dionysian negative theology regards "divine Being as a Being in and for itself, outside of history, so that it emerges primarily through the theophany of a mystic. Heidegger, however, claims that Being emerges through the 'clearing' of different, purely historical spaces in which particular gods, institutions, and arts appear historically" (Ibid., 90).

particular things found here and now that announce Being."[83] That is, Grassi insists on the this-worldliness of Heidegger's philosophy, over and against the other-worldiness or world-denying tendencies present in some strains of the mystical traditions he engages and adapts. Both Cusanus and Heidegger adopt philosophies of the everyday or the ordinary, where the lofty and the lowly are always in touch with one another.

Dissertation Overview

My dissertation unfolds in four chapters, the first of which is a diagnosis, and the subsequent three of which offer replies. In chapter one, I schematize into three parts Martin Heidegger's and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's shared diagnoses of the ills of modernity: (1) the effacement of the individual, (2) mass anonymous sociality, and (3) machination as the dominant form of production. I include these Frankfurt School theorists because they share thematic concerns with Heidegger, especially the value and fragility of individual uniqueness, the inadequacy of positivism, and the transcendent power of the art. Including Horkheimer and Adorno rounds out and gives a fuller picture of this period of intellectual history; their criticisms of unfettered capitalism and of unregulated libidinal instincts provide a materially situated level of analysis that some of Heidegger's diagnoses lack.

Heidegger, Horkheimer, and Adorno subscribe to and modify Max Weber's rationalization narrative; they all fault an unfettered form of calculation and quantification for its corrosive effects not only on philosophical reflection but also on human freedom and the organization of daily social life. The emergence of mathematical modeling and its certitude,

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[83] Ibid., 91.

according to these disenchantment theses, is one element responsible for our present alienation from the earth, our communities, and ourselves. Horkheimer and Adorno's assessments of modernity expose the need to reimagine something like Nicholas of Cusa's early modern celebration of the individual—a valorization that Heidegger's existential analytic explores from a different perspective. I show that *equivalence* in Horkheimer and Adorno is a conceptual analogue to Søren Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's concepts of *leveling* and Nietzsche's criticisms of the herd. Whereas mimesis preserved the integrity of objects, equivalence reduces all qualities to quantities in service of exchange and substitution.

In the final section of chapter one, I explain Heidegger's assessments of modern technology and machine production. First, I lay out an interpretive debate between Anglophone philosophers of technology—especially Andrew Feenberg, Robert Scharff, and Iain Thomson—about how best to understand Heidegger's position on the perils and promises of industrialized, mechanized tool usage. David Lewin, invoking the mystical traditions that inform Heidegger's thought, argues that both Feenberg and Thomson misinterpret Heidegger as fatalistic because they do not recognize his use of middle discourse. After presenting these interpretive debates, I contextualize and fill out Heidegger's mystically inflected assessment of the technological condition through brief analyses of his essays "The Thing" and "What Are Poets For." I then offer my own reading of "The Question Concerning Technology," which shows how closely that essay aligns with Feenberg's descriptions of autonomization, decontextualization, and quantification in the instrumentalization process, and which shows that Heidegger's medial definitions of freedom and destiny are thorough-going in the essay. Use of this middle discourse is the central

feature of Heidegger's notion of enframing, a fact that Feenberg's understandably

exasperated accusations of technological essentializing gloss over.

My second chapter responds to the problem of late-modern erasures of individuality

and particularity by turning to a figure at the origins of modernity whose thinking offers

resources for conceptualizing singularity: Nicholas of Cusa. Cusanus's mystical thought

presumes the singular, unique, non-interchangeable quality of individuals, because of the

notion that the fullness of infinity is given to 'each and all,' who can become themselves only

by being free. By applying the infinite sphere metaphor to the cosmos rather than to God, as

Eckhart had done, Nicholas imbues each individual part of the cosmos with the value of

infinity. Equivalence is impossible in the differentially related multiplicity contained in the

universe. Nicholas's model of selfhood, I argue, shares affinities with the concepts of

'mineness' and authenticity in Heidegger's account of the individual, whose uniqueness is

defined by mortal finitude and the experience of the call of conscience. Both Cusanus and

Heidegger employ an infinite sphere metaphor in order to describe and celebrate the

intensive infinity of each person and each thing in the cosmos.

While chapter two on singular uniqueness responds to the problem of erasures of

individual identity, chapter three on sociality and community responds to the problem of the

anonymous mass. I begin by explaining the social dimensions in Cusanus's treatise on

visionary experience. Building on the work of Michel de Certeau and Jonathan Z. Smith, I

explain how the group exercise around an all-seeing portrait in the preface of *On the Vision

of God* models the emergence of modern community, whose social contracts are founded on

discourse and belief—belief that is required when verification is limited. I argue that

Cusanus's prescription of a secularized, mathematical liturgy that transcends the topoi and

temporal structures of the Christian calendar enables him to offer more generalizable lessons about how to generate practices of reciprocity, commensurability, and social intelligibility that nonetheless retain individual differences and a remainder of mystery. The testimony, empathy, listening, and preservation of multiplicity in the communal contemplative practice of *On the Vision of God* is in many ways a more appealing model than the anonymous crowd of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Adorno's modernity.

The aporia in Cusanus's portrait exercise about how to reconcile uniqueness with communal commensurability relates to the problem of how to give an account of the social dimensions of authenticity in Heidegger's *Being and Time.* In the second half of chapter three, I address this difficulty by laying out and then intervening in the debate in the journal *Inquiry* between Hubert Dreyfus, Fredrick Olafson, and Hermann Philipse about how best to interpret the meaning of Heidegger's concepts of *das Man* (the "they") and *Mitsein* (Being-with) in *Being and Time*.

In my fourth and final chapter, I present Nicholas's and Heidegger's accounts of creativity as potential antidotes to both the mechanization associated with technological enframing and the aesthetic deterioration caused by the culture industry. Both Heidegger and Cusanus celebrate distinctively *human* making, as opposed to automaticity. I begin with a treatment of the interrelated themes of creation and creativity in Nicholas's thought, especially in *Idiota de Mente (Layman on the Mind)* and *De Visione Dei (On the Vision of God)*. I then draw on Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art," to explore the relationship between creation, production, and world-building, especially the estranging yet revelatory function of great works of art that produce normative totalities for their communities. In this sense, the temple of Heidegger's "Origin" essay resembles the all-

seeing portrait of Nicholas's group exercise, which founds the community and gives things their look. I then turn to Heidegger's "Building Dwelling Thinking," which explains human craft and creativity in terms of placemaking. Certain forms of artistic and architectural building can do the ongoing work of revealing new meaningful modes of comportment. These sorts of buildings can be sites of dwelling and unsettling, which demand not closure but creative, onward thinking.

Chapter 1: Anonymous Sociality and Modern Erasures of the Individual

Introduction

The threats that anonymous publicity and machine automaticity pose to self-determination and collective life have remained with us since they were first investigated by the German intellectuals famous for their criticisms of mass culture, rigid bureaucracy, and modern technology: Martin Heidegger, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno. Why include Adorno and Horkheimer in an analysis of these themes? As my addendum on the critical appropriation of Heidegger will indicate, some scholars have suggested that Heidegger's philosophical diagnosis of modernity is completely tainted by his Nazi politics. However, Adorno and Horkheimer, who are explicitly anti-Nazi, anti-fascist thinkers, offer similar diagnoses of modern conformism, and the destructive effects of certain forms of thoughtless mechanization.[1] The fact that Adorno the anti-Nazi shares many thematic concerns with Heidegger—the value and fragility of individual uniqueness, the inadequacy of positivism, and the transcendent power of the art—underscores the utility of Heidegger's thought for edifying rather than dangerous philosophical projects. Including Horkheimer and Adorno rounds out and gives a fuller picture of this period of intellectual history; their criticisms of unfettered capitalism and of unregulated libidinal instincts provide a materially situated level of analysis that some of Heidegger's diagnoses lack. By displaying the tragedy and violence caused by social conformism, Horkheimer and Adorno's assessments of modernity expose

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[1]For Adorno's anti-Nazi, anti-fascist writing, see "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 137–73. See also Adorno's *Authoritarian Personality*, (New York: Verso, 2019). He argues that fascism and right-wing extremism continually emerge in liberal democracies, and that treating fascism requires psychoanalysis.

the need to reimagine something like Nicholas of Cusa's early modern celebration of the individual—a valorization that Heidegger's existential analytic explores from a different perspective. Also, Horkheimer and Adorno's concern to recover aesthetic excellence in the face of the deteriorating effects of the culture industry casts into relief the enduring relevance of Nicholas's Renaissance aesthetics, and his account of distinctively human artistic creations—themes that are addressed in subsequent chapters.

Heidegger and these Frankfurt School theorists subscribe to and modify Max Weber's rationalization narrative in various ways; they fault an unfettered form of calculation and quantification for its corrosive effects not only on philosophical reflection but also on human freedom and the organization of daily social life. The emergence of mathematical modeling and its certitude, according to these disenchantment theses, is one element responsible for our present alienation from the natural world, our communities, and ourselves.[2] In this chapter, I focus on three themes of concern to these thinkers: the effacement of the individual, mass anonymous sociality, and machination as the dominant form of production.

How we reached this point of crisis is a matter of highly contested genealogical development. I begin with expositions of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche on the

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[2] It is important to note that Heidegger's primary objection to what he sees as an overemphasis on quantitative reasoning and mathematical modeling is not numeracy or counting in a literal sense, but rather the fact that "mathematics" comes to designate that which is indisputable, obvious, and already understood, not in need of investigation, disputation, revision or disruption: "*Ta mathemata* means, in Greek, that which, in his observation of beings and interactions with things, man knows in advance: the corporeality of bodies, the vegetable character of plants, the animality of animals, the humanness of human beings. Along with these, belonging to the already-known, i.e., 'mathematical' are numbers. When we discover three apples on the table we recognize that there are three of them. But the number three, threeness, we know already. That is to say: the number is something 'mathematical.' Only because numbers represent, so to speak, the most striking of the always-already known, and therefore the best-known instances of the mathematical, is 'the mathematical' directly reserved as a name for the numerical. The essence of the mathematical, however, is in no way defined in terms of the numerical" but rather as whatever is "specified in advance as that which is already known" ("Age of the World Picture," in *Off the Beaten Track,* ed. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 59).

theme of anonymous sociality and its erasure of individual personhood in order to provide a

backdrop and conceptual context for the way this theme is taken up by Horkheimer and

Adorno. More specifically, I show that *equivalence* in Horkheimer and Adorno is an

analogue to Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's concepts of *leveling* and to Nietzsche's criticisms

of the herd. In my discussion of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, I explain that *rationalization*, not

rationality, is the primary target of criticism, in order to demonstrate the inadequacy of a

pessimistic reading of their excurses on the root causes of modern alienation. That is, I show

that the recovery of reflective self-determination is the path to a more liberated, less

conformist social arrangement. Adorno's psychoanalytic reading of the *Odyssey* illustrates

that the development of a reflective self requires discipline and a repression of certain

instincts, and that our modern attempts at psychological self-mastery—including our

commercial and political activities—are often self-defeating in that they imprison us rather

than free us. Thus, there is a need to recover mimetic practices that respect the integrity and

alterity of the objects we encounter. This parallels Heidegger's concern to let things be things

rather than objects constituted by and dependent upon projective subjects.

The destructive potential of mechanization as the dominant form of production is

most extensively diagnosed by Heidegger, who writes explicitly about the attitudes that

undergird modern technology. Horkheimer and Adorno share his concerns insofar as they

object to the aesthetic consequences of industrial production and the pervasiveness of

market-based formulas, which degrade art and language usage. In the final section of this

chapter, I explain the debate among anglophone philosophers of technology about how best

to interpret Heidegger's position on the threats posed by machination as the prevailing mode

of production. Though some read him as a romantic reactionary who fails to make necessary

distinctions between devices, social insertion, and labor management, I highlight the middle-voiced framework of Heidegger's late essays, including "The Thing," "What Are Poets For?," and "Question Concerning Technology," in order to show that his perspective on the technological condition, though often critical, is ambiguous and mystically inflected. If *poiésis* remains absent*,* technological modes of revealing threaten to destroy humans, the things they bring forth, and the earth.

Kierkegaard on Anonymous Sociality

Søren Kierkegaard's writing had a profound influence on both Heidegger's and Adorno's diagnoses of modernity's crises, especially the aesthetic deterioration they saw as an unintended consequence of new forms of mass communication.[3] The leveling that Kierkegaard denounces in *The Two Ages* is a forerunner to the conformity of mass capitalist society that Adorno and Horkheimer describe in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and it inspires Heidegger's discussion of *das Man* in *Being and Time*.

What precisely is leveling? The spatial connotation of the term is important. Rather than a variegated, textured surface, or a landscape with many figures, all is flattened and motionless. Leveling characterizes epochs and cultural movements, not individual people. "Where a passionate age accelerates, raises up and overthrows, elevates and debases, a reflective apathetic age does the opposite, it stifles and impedes."[4] Stagnation is the

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[3] On Kierkegaard's reception in the German-speaking world, see Habib C. Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997); Heiko Schulz, "A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard." *Kierkegaard's International Reception*, edited by Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 307–419. On Kierkegaard's Jewish reception see Joanna Nowotny, "*Kierkegaard ist ein Jude*!": *Jüdische Kierkegaard-Lektüren in Literatur und Philosophie* (Wallstein Verlag: Göttingen), 2018.

[4] Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age: A Literary Review*, ed. Howard V Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 84.

watchword. As opposed to the "volcanic explosion" that sounds during an insurrection, with leveling there is "a deathly stillness in which a person can hear himself breathe, a deathly stillness in which nothing can rise up but everything sinks down into it, impotent."[5] Deliberate action is stymied; character formation and cultural production cease. Kierkegaard attributes leveling to envy, analogous to Nietzsche's concept of *resentiment*, which seeks to eradicate excellence in order to be free of the threat to one's relative sense of value and accomplishment.[6] No one can be outshined if everyone is equal. Passivity and powerlessness are so diffuse in leveling that even it cannot be attributed to a particular someone; no agent can be held accountable nor labeled responsible for leveling.[7] That is, "no particular individual can take the lead in leveling, for then he would, after all, become the commander and escape the leveling."[8] Leveling is itself an anonymous force, "a reflection-game in the hand of an abstract power"[9] and it also turns others into an anonymous mass. Leveling is "abstraction's victory over individuals."[10]

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[5] Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 84.

[6] See Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 83–84: "Characterless envy does not understand that excellence is excellence, does not understand that it is itself a negative acknowledgement of excellence but wants to degrade it, minimize it, until it actually is no longer excellence, and envy takes as its object not only the excellence which *is* but that which *is to come*."

[7] Self-deception plays a central role in the perpetuation of leveling abstraction, much like the anaesthetizing comfort offered by absorption in everyday norms and activities that Heidegger describes in *Being and Time*. For Kierkegaard, the deferral to the anonymous crowd creates a vacuous public nonentity that supersedes the sum of its parts: "While the individual egotistically thinks he knows what he is doing, it must be said that they all know not what they do, for just as inspired enthusiastic unanimity results in a something more that is not the individuals', a something more emerges here also. A demon that no individual can control is conjured up, and although the individual selfishly enjoys the abstraction during the brief moment of pleasure in the leveling, he is also underwriting his own downfall" (*Two Ages*, 86).

[8] Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 84.

[9] Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 86.

Who carries out the work of leveling, who levels? The "phantom" public is who levels, and this public is "a monstrous abstraction, an all-encompassing something that is nothing, a mirage."[11] The ghostly, illusory quality of this public envelops and creates "a corps, outnumbering all the people together, but this corps can never be called up for inspection; indeed, it cannot even have so much as a single representative, because it is itself an abstraction"[12] even though the public "becomes the entity that is supposed to include everything."[13] Ordinary names and concepts that we have for association do not describe the public, which is unique in its non-responsibility. That is, "A generation, a nation, a general assembly, a community, a man still have a responsibility to be something, can know shame for fickleness and disloyalty, but a public remains the public."[14] Anonymity reigns not because the thing exceeds the limits of naming and language, but because there is nothing to name; changes of opinion are without consequence, and commitments to particular ways of life disappear.

Numeracy, an inappropriate application of mathematics to the social realm, is a defining feature of leveling; only through amalgamation and quantitative accumulation does someone become a person: "it is merely a matter of getting the proper number—and then one has significance. . . .The trend today is in the direction of mathematical equality, so that in all

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[10] Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 84. "the abstraction of leveling is a principle that forms no personal, intimate relation to any particular individual, but only the relation of abstraction, which is the same for all" (88).

[11] Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 90.

[12] Ibid., 91.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 92.

classes about so and so many uniformly make one individual."[15] Geometrical metaphors abound in Kierkegaard's description of this anonymous homogenization: "Just as one computes the diagonal in a parallelogram of forces, so also can the law of leveling be computed, for the individual who levels others is himself carried along, and so on."[16] We become caught in a matrix of untraceable pressures so that quantification of that which ought to be qualitatively assessed dominates our appraisals and decision-making. Though some might herald the shift from aristocracy to representative democracy as a movement toward increased individual freedom, Kierkegaard sees the "logical implementation" of a certain type of equality as its own kind of prison, a forced homogeneity rather than a genuine collectivity, "the negative unity of the negative mutual reciprocity of individuals."[17] This false unity is in part a function of "the ascendancy of the category 'generation' over the category 'individuality.'"[18] The hegemony of the collective happens through misapplied quantification.

Unsurprisingly, Kierkegaard considers this state of affairs to be a kind of sickness, not an acceptable form of social life. The public is not a polis and it is not a robust civil society. It "creates no situation and no community," even when there is a readership who shares a set of texts.[19] In fact, print media and periodical publications, according to

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[15] Ibid., 85.

[16] Ibid., 86.

[17] Ibid., 84: "The majority perceive themselves in the representative and are liberated by the awareness that he is representing them in a kind of self-consciousness."

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 91.

Kierkegaard, only exacerbate and perpetuate the problem of collective anonymity. The phantom public "develop[s] with the aid of the press, when the press itself becomes a phantom."[20] This phantasmic abstraction "alienates individuals instead of helping them."[21] This alienation means no one is familiar. When one adopts public opinion, there is no one with whom to agree or disagree, no one with whom to acknowledge error if the opinion turns out to be wrong. "[A]lthough no majority has ever been so positively sure of being in the right and having the upper hand as the public is," my adoption of this public opinion is but a "deceptive consolation."[22]

Much like the inanity and frivolousness of the culture industry that so irks the Frankfurt School authors, Kierkegaard laments the inactivity of the "calculating sensibleness" of his and our "age of miscellaneous announcements: nothing happens but still there is instant publicity."[23] Publishers publicize for the public, and the public keeps in circulation what is publicized. Publicity as an industry and a phenomenon is for the audience that we name the public. The trivial is trumpeted as if it were profound; the most trifling celebrity gossip is circulated with the urgency of a wartime dispatch.

Does Kierkegaard see any solution to this problem of abstraction's erasure of the individual? Yes, in shadowy, tenuous form. If the individual can retain herself and resist destruction, she can "be educated by this very abstraction" and can "make up [her] own mind instead of agreeing with the public" and in so doing "find rest within [her]self, at ease before

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[20] Ibid., 90.

[21] Ibid., 91.

[22] Ibid., 92.

[23] Ibid., 70.

God, instead of counting and counting."[24] Making up one's own mind and recovering

reflective self-determination is the best hope for regaining a proper sense of personhood in

the face of all that threatens it. Community must be based on the coming together of

authentic individuals. Notably, however, Kierkegaard himself remained despondent about the

possibility of real social connection, valorizing an ethical stance that largely remains *at odds*

with or in withdrawal from the world, so that the point at which meaningful community can

gather is in deferral.[25] Whether the cultivation of a strong identity is even possible in our

temporally distended, fragmented existence is a question that Heidegger will pick up from

Nietzsche, who is distressed by the conformism he sees to be operative in the slave morality

that characterizes much of Western thought.

Nietzsche's Herd

While Kierkegaard and Heidegger apply the label 'leveling' to a certain type of

conformism, and while Horkheimer and Adorno call this type of conformism 'equivalence,'

Nietzsche identifies conformism with what he calls 'the herd'. The herd opposes the

cultivation of genius, striving to eliminate anything outstanding from its organized

mediocrity. The genius takes risks, welcomes danger, celebrates strong drives (the lust to

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[24] Ibid., 92.

[25] Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 106: "It is very doubtful, then, that the age will be saved by the idea of sociality, of association. . . . In our age the principle of association (which at best can have validity with respect to material interest) is not affirmative but negative; it is an evasion, a dissipation, an illusion, whose dialectic is as follows: as it strengthens individuals, it vitiates them; it strengthens by numbers, by sticking together, but from the ethical point of view this is a weakening. Not until the single individual has established an ethical stance despite the whole world, not until then can there be any question of genuinely uniting." Again, isolation seems to be Kierkegaard's primary solution: The skepticism of leveling "can be halted only if the individual, in individual separateness, gains the intrepidity of religiousness" (Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 86). In this respect he is much more anti-social than the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, who presumes and explains the variegated features of a shared hermeneutic world.

rule, rapacity, craftiness), maintains distance from others, thrives in solitude, and freely

exerts a will to power, a will to strength.[26] The herd, by contrast, exerts a "will to mutual aid"

because of a sickly "instinct of weakness" which is exploited by the ascetic priestly types

who shepherd this maladjusted flock.[27] Rather than investigating the ways that social

engagement and group membership allow joy and celebration of life, Nietzsche highlights

the dulling effects and the mere survival benefits accrued to those who surrender themselves

to the horde out of cowardice. Though elsewhere Nietzsche celebrates the collective

effervescence possible in the bacchanals and reveries of Dionysian cults, in *Genealogy of*

Morals, he presents " 'love of one's neighbor,' herd organization, and the awakening of the

communal feeling of power through which the individual's discontent with himself is

drowned in his pleasure in the prosperity of community" as coping mechanisms that a genius

would reject "in the struggle with displeasure."[28] The genius would not settle for a communal

feeling of power; the genius creates an individual feeling of power.

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[26] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 113.

[27] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 135. "All the sick and sickly instinctively strive after a herd organization as a means of shaking off their dull displeasure and feeling of weakness: the ascetic priest divines this instinct and furthers it; wherever there are herds, it is the instinct of weakness that has willed the herd and the prudence of the priest that has organized it." Nietzsche is not alone in this sense that group psychology is based on a herd instinct that drives people to surrender their autonomy and their individual desires. Sigmund Freud says of military and religious organizations "that the intense emotional ties which we observe in groups are quite sufficient to explain one of their characteristics—the lack of independence and initiative in their members, the similarity in the reactions of all of them, their reduction, so to speak, to the level of group individuals" (*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, ed. James Strachey [New York: W.W. Norton, 1990], 62).

[28] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 136.

Levelers, in their efforts to create democracy, oppose free spirits.[29] Levelers strive for "the universal green-pasture happiness of the herd, with security, lack of danger, comfort, and an easier life for everyone; the two songs and doctrines which they repeat most often are 'equality of rights' and 'sympathy for all that suffers'—and suffering itself they take for something that must be *abolished*."[30] Nietzsche opposes the levelers' efforts to eradicate anguish and to guarantee ease and comfort because he believes so strongly in the *pedagogy* of suffering, that is, in the way that suffering facilitates the development of human skills and genius. The herd—which Nietzsche considers to be the only type of community that modern democracy can produce—regards passionate, strong, above-average individuals as dangerous and evil. The herd demands conformity, neighborliness, mediocrity, commonness.[31] Nietzsche opposes the social equality that liberal institutions, democratic political movements, and (certain types of) Christian ethics seek to establish and protect. These equalizing activities eliminate the "pathos of distance" that allows for plurality and tension; leveling forces that are applied to achieve equality instead produce "herd animalization" and a loss of will to power.[32]

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[29] See Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 54: In Europe and America there is now "a very narrow, imprisoned, chained type of spirits" who "belong, briefly and sadly, among the *levelers*—these falsely so-called 'free spirits'—being eloquent and prolifically scribbling slaves of the democratic taste and its 'modern ideas'; they are all human beings without solitude."

[30] Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 54.

[31] See Nietzsche, *Beyond*, 113–14, 117, 118, 217.

[32] See Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 540–41: "Equality, as a certain factual increase in similarity, which merely finds expression in the theory of 'equal rights,' is an essential feature of decline. The cleavage between man and man, status and status, the plurality of types, the will to be oneself, to stand out—what I call the *pathos of distance*, that is characteristic of every strong age. The strength to withstand tension, the width of the tensions between extremes, becomes ever smaller today; finally, the extremes themselves become blurred to the point of similarity. . . . Liberal institutions cease to be liberal as soon as they are attained: later on, there are no worse

Rationalization, Conformity, and Freedom in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

> What is at stake is not conservation of the past but the fulfillment of past hopes.
> —Horkeimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Horkheimer and Adorno undoubtedly share with Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger many apprehensions about the shape and quality of modern life, and all of these thinkers express their concerns in grand metanarratives that diagnose modernity's problems as the outworking of millennia. As Dana Villa puts it, "If we merge the "dialectic of enlightenment" narrative with Adorno's developed critique of identity thinking, we get a genealogy of a power-rooted and power-centric *ratio* that more than matches Heidegger's deconstruction of Western metaphysics in terms of sheer historical depth and inclusiveness."[33] Horkheimer and Adorno's radicalization of Weber's rationalization thesis diverges in important ways from Heidegger's genealogy of nihilism. For example, while Horkheimer and Adorno believe myth and enlightenment to be co-constituted forces operative since earliest human history, Heidegger draws epochal distinctions between pre-Socratic, medieval, and modern forms of thought that each respond differently to questions about truth and purposefulness. Nonetheless, Adorno, and Heidegger's interests also overlap at many points. Espen Hammer enumerates their mutual concerns as follows:

> While explaining its genesis in radically different ways, they both aim to criticize the predominance of formal-instrumental reason. They both seek to delimit the rational applicability of science and to resist the naturalization and reduction that is entailed by the predominance of natural sciences in ontological disputes. They both try to overcome the Cartesian emphasis on abstract methodology and foundationalism,

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and no more thorough injurers of freedom than liberal institutions. Their effects are known well enough: they undermine the will to power; they level every mountain and valley, and call that morality; they make men small, cowardly. . . . Liberalism: in other words, herd-animalization."

[33] Dana Villa, "Weber and the Frankfurt School," in *The Routledge Companion to the Frankfurt School*, ed. Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, and Axel Honneth (New York: Routledge, 2020), 272.

aspiring instead to make philosophy concrete and dynamic. Finally, they are both deeply hostile to modern mass culture, and even though Adorno's investment in high modernism sets him apart from Heidegger's idiosyncratic romanticism, they both seek to counter what they view as degenerate cultural and political expressions with more authentic forms of art and writing.[34]

As Hammer's observations show, both Adorno and Heidegger understand aesthetic issues as ethical issues, so that questions of culture and style have substantive consequences for the health of communal life, and they both regard the encroaching pervasiveness of quantitative reasoning as a threat to reflective self-determination. Some readers interpret Adorno's thought as politically conservative, since *Dialectic of Enlightenment* criticizes techno-scientific enlightenment in ways similar to Heidegger, for whom, according to Hammer, "civilization itself suffers from a tragic fault; thus the only acceptable stance consists in rejecting the values of the Enlightenment (progress, freedom, emancipation, technology, secularization, equality, and so on) in favor of that which it somehow threatens or suppresses. . . for Heidegger, Being (*Sein*) as opposed to enframing (*Gestell*))."[35] While Heidegger certainly criticizes a certain version of subject-oriented humanism with origins in Enlightenment-era self-confidence, it is an oversimplification of his views on technology to say that he rejects the values of freedom and equality wholesale. Similarly, Horkheimer and Adorno's criticisms of civilization's barbarism should not be reduced to the idea that all civilization is barbarism without redemptive potential.

Given that Horkheimer and Adorno present instrumental reason—and the alienation from self, others, and world that it causes—as something fundamental to and enduring

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[34] Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 108.

[35] Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 44.

throughout human history, it is understandable that readers such as Jürgen Habermas would take the appraisal of modernity in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to be irredeemably pessimistic.[36] However, Hammer argues that the goal of the genealogical uncovering of contemporary means-ends rationality is not to reject wholesale that form of rationality, but rather to point out its inadequacy and the danger it poses when it is allowed to run amuck. The solution to reason's having become *purely* instrumental, says Hammer, is "to anticipate a more complete conception of reason. Clearly, such a conception would focus on the notion of mimesis."[37] The 'right kind' of mimesis, one that preserves rather than erases particularity, rejects a certain interpretation of Kantian intuition. "Rather than being appropriated by being brought under a universal, the subject responds non-subsumptively to the object by likening itself to it."[38] Getting us to acknowledge that our dealings with the world and others are *responsive* rather than wholly self-generated is of course a central concern of Heidegger's, too.

Habermas' worry about the pessimism of *Dialectic* springs from his fear that it leads to nihilism. Without a set of ideals that can direct instrumentation and the instinct for self-preservation, "it becomes impossible to arrive coherently at any account of ethical, moral, political, and cognitive normativity."[39] However, Hammer argues that in the section on

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[36] The Habermasian reading, according to Hammer, sees *Dialectic* as "a study of the destructive consequences of the historical predominance of 'instrumental reason'" revealing that "human reason necessarily is calculative, oriented towards efficiency and obtaining the best and most precise means to achieve given ends, but that it contains no intrinsic conceptual resources for deliberating about ends. On this reading, the book extends Weber's thesis concerning the predominance of purposive-rational action in the most rationalized societies of the West to world history in general" (Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 43). Hammer, by contrast, thinks the book is about *identity* rather than about *instrumentality*.

[37] Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 47.

[38] Ibid., 48.

Marquis de Sade, Horkheimer and Adorno roundly criticize *instrumentalized* reason (on display in orgiastic pyramids that, in their fervor for utilitarian efficiency, leave no orifice unpenetrated), as nihilistic, where "no end, and therefore no prohibition, can be sacred: whatever serves to increase the subject's capacity for domination, including murder, is rational."[40] That the modern mind can construe murder as rational in this way is precisely why Adorno's normatively inflected excoriation calls reason to "criticize itself and thus uncover dimensions that, while necessary for any orientation in the world, are repressed both by philosophy and by Western culture at large. . . . For Adorno . . . it is the integrity of the object, its vulnerable uniqueness, which ultimately forms the source of ethical, moral, political, and even epistemic normativity."[41] In order to allow the integrity of the object to provide this normativity, we must exercise a more mimetic and more liberated type of rational reflection.

Despite its reputation for unrelenting pessimism,[42] Horkheimer and Adorno explicitly state in the preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that in criticizing modern mass capitalist society and its genealogical development, they do *not* mean to reject the enlightenment values of reason and freedom. Quite the opposite; the book is a rescue mission "intended to prepare a positive concept of enlightenment which liberates it from its entanglement in blind

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[39] Ibid., 153.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 154.

[42] See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), 106–30, for example, where Habermas interprets *Dialectic* as fundamentally pessimistic.

domination."[43] They mean to sound an alarm, to steer the tanker that is modern civilization onto a new course before it crashes into the craggy cliffside toward which it is hurtling. Jettisoning rationality is precisely what *not* to do, since the human capacity for reason is the source of healing, containing the redemptive potential that has been covered over as of late. As they put it, "What is at issue here is . . . the necessity for enlightenment to reflect on itself if humanity is not to be totally betrayed."[44] *Reflection* is the antidote to the problem, but that reflective capacity is often blocked by precisely the forces from which we need to be liberated.[45] Brian O'Connor explains that "the spontaneous behavior of the 'normal' person" is already "framed by the institutional norms of capitalism" because through socialization, people have internalized exchange as the only way to exercise autonomy.[46] Far from throwing his hands up in resignation or withdrawing into pessimistic quietism, however, it is from this point that "Adorno sets out to identify a weakened capacity for self-determination and how, from that position, we might begin to think about the prospects for autonomy."[47] This is why the first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* concludes with a glimmer of hopefulness. Bleak though the circumstances are, each social and technical development—

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[43] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xviii. As Espen Hammer points out, "Habermas fails to distinguish between a dialectical critique of the enlightenment from within, which is Adorno's position, and a counter-enlightenment rejection from without, which would be Nietzsche and Heidegger's position" (*Adorno and the Political*), 153. As I will show, Heidegger's relationship to enlightenment is more complex than a simple rejection.

[44] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, xvii.

[45] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 2: "Ruthless toward itself, the Enlightenment has eradicated the last remnant of its own self-awareness."

[46] Brian O'Connor, "The Neo-Hegelian Theory of Freedom and the Limits of Emancipation," *European Journal of Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2012): 185.

[47] O'Connor, "Neo-Hegelian," 185.

however seemingly catastrophic—contains liberatory potential. That is, "Each advance of civilization has renewed not only mastery but also the prospect of its alleviation."[48] This alleviation must be actionable, not only conceptual; it must be "a true praxis capable of overturning the status quo."[49] A *true* praxis unites the intellectual and the active; new concepts and new activities are both required because the problems with modernity include false ideas as well as bad practices. As Jay Bernstein points out, the problem with rationalization in its late capitalist form is not that it is intensely reasonable but rather that reason has been "eviscerated"; enlightenment, which is supposed to champion shrewd thinking and dispel superstition, has instead led to an irrational state of affairs through "the *rationalization of reason* itself."[50] This is the animating idea of Max Weber's thesis on capitalism and disenchantment, and it is the unacknowledged backdrop of the whole first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

The Problem of Equivalence

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[48] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 32.

[49] Ibid., 33.

[50] J. M. Bernstein, "'The Dead Speaking of Stones and Stars': Adorno's Aesthetic Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. Fred Rush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 144. In *Max Weber and Karl Marx,* Karl Löwith observed this same phenomenon. He explains that Weber diagnoses the self-undermining tendency of modern rationality, one which "gives rise to the senseless 'irrationality' of self-sufficient and arbitrary 'conditions' which dominate human conduct. The rational total organization of the conditions of life produces, of itself, the irrational arbitrary rule of organization" (*Max Weber and Karl Marx*, trans. Hans Fantel [Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1982], 48). This irrationality is a perversion of the ideals of our institutions. "The ultimate purpose of all human institutions is not the institutions themselves, but man. Everything else is merely a 'means' for 'human' purposes. . . What began as a means towards a religious end [i.e., the famous Protestant work ethic] now serves other, profane purposes. Not only this, the but mode of economic behavior has become so autonomous that, despite all its apparent rationality, it no longer has any clear relation to the needs of human beings as such" (Löwith, *Weber*, 50).

Mastery, and not simply liberation, by means of disenchantment, is the project of Enlightenment.[51] However, the attempt to attain liberation and mastery through reason has had the unintended consequence of discarding meaning, reducing everything to interchangeable equivalences, erasing particularity and uniqueness. This erasure happens in large part through the mathematical overtaking of all realms of thinking, according to which "the concept is replaced by the formula, the cause by rules and probability."[52] *Qualities* are to be extirpated or else must be reduced to *quantities*. The equivalence that rules bourgeois society performs this reduction of qualities to quantities in service of exchange and substitution, making "dissimilar things comparable."[53] This is true in the economic register, where capitalism reduces use-value to exchange-value, and in the more rarified intellectual register, where Vienna Circle positivists reduce what counts as reality to that which can be mathematically accounted for: "For Enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion; modern positivism consigns it to poetry."[54] Of course, quantification is not a new tendency dependent on the emergence of modernity; it has its antecedents in authors as ancient as the presocratics, whose zeal for oneness already acted

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[51] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 1: "Enlightenment . . . has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. . . . Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge."

[52] Ibid., 3.

[53] Ibid., 4.

[54] Ibid., 4. Mathematics, on this account, played a crucial role in the instrumentalization of all forms of reflection, contemplation, and consciousness: "Thought is reified as an autonomous, automatic process, aping the machine. . . . Mathematical procedure . . . despite its axiomatic self-limitation, installed itself as necessary and objective: mathematics made thought into a thing—a tool, to use its own term" (19). Of course, Nietzsche's complaints about quantification predate and inform these complaints. One cannot (or ought not) try to count music, for example. It would be absurd to estimate "the *value* of a piece of music according to how much of it could be counted, calculated, and expressed in formulas"—one would have grasped nothing of what music is in doing so" (*The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Vintage Books, 1974], 336).

as a demythologizing force: "Unity remains the watchword from Parmenides to Russell. All gods and qualities must be destroyed."[55] The transition from magic to modern science, according to this narrative, entails a transition from the "specific representation" and "the abundance of qualities" to empty generalities.[56] This emptying process is inflicted on the environment and on the human subject, both of which are hollowed out by the conceptual abstraction of scientific or legal taxonomies: "Nature, stripped of qualities, becomes the chaotic stuff of mere classification, and the all-powerful self becomes a mere having, an abstract identity."[57] How, precisely, does rationalization strip away particulars if it begins as a pursuit to understand particulars? Because, as Jay Bernstein explains, we come to see particulars only "as instantiations of recurring properties and concatenations of properties"; the abstraction of practical knowledge is a two-part process of "the *subsumption* of particulars under universals, and the *ascent* from narrow universals (which may remain dependent on particular sensory phenomena) to wider, more unconditioned ones."[58] The general is further and further generalized until the relations between reasons and justifications, and between principles and instances, are no longer clear.

The calculative, utility-based means of control that characterizes Enlightenment thought is opposed to, though also genealogically dependent upon, older forms of control

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[55] Ibid., 5.

[56] Ibid., 6.

[57] Ibid.

[58] See Bernstein, "'The Dead Speaking,'" 144: "By means of this aeons-long process of abstraction, practical knowledge ('wood good for a boat') becomes mathematical physics, local exchanges become the capitalist subsumption whereby the qualitative use-values of all particulars are set within the uniform, quantitative system of exchange (monetary worth), and reason itself is eviscerated from concrete social rules into method and deduction, a priori rules and universal principles."

such as *mimesis*, the imitative, magical approach to the manipulation of matter through rituals and sacrifices. The difference between magic and science, or between enlightenment and mimesis, comes down to the issue of uniqueness. Though both sacrificial rites and functional sciences depend to some degree on substitution, only the former preserves the ipseity of things. In the ceremonial slaughter of a sheep or the crucifixion of a messiah, "the uniqueness of the chosen victim which coincides with its representative status distinguishes it radically, makes it non-exchangeable even in the exchange."[59] By contrast, in modern science "Representation gives way to a universal fungibility" and because "the differences are so fluid that everything is submerged in one and the same matter, the scientific object is petrified."[60] Rather than uncovering the dynamism and diversity of natural phenomena, positivist science homogenizes them and alienates us from the world, reducing "the manifold affinities between existing things" to "the single relationship between the subject who confers meaning and the meaningless object, between rational significance and its accidental bearer."[61] This criticism of idealism as a wrongheaded philosophy of the autarchic subject who projects meaning onto a blank reality is of course a concern that Horkheimer and Adorno share with Heidegger, despite Adorno's attempt to distance himself from the latter's purported 'jargon of authenticity.'

Myth and Enlightenment remain entangled, since the instinct of self-preservation in myth also drives the rationalizing activities of Enlightenment. Both myth and Enlightenment

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[59] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 7. In magic, "What is done to the spear, the hair, the name of the enemy, is also to befall his person; the sacrificial animal is slain in place of the god. The substitution which takes place in sacrifice marks a step toward discursive logic" (6).

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 7.

risk ossifying the status quo, limiting the range of possible events—both natural and cultural—to the repetition of a known set of rules and phenomena. Myth is not benighted superstition which high-minded reason eventually overcomes in the development of human consciousness. Rather, "the myths which fell victim to the Enlightenment were themselves its products," insofar as premodern myths "sought to report, to name, to tell of origins—but therefore also to narrate, record, explain."[62] Myth and magic are already products of Enlightenment in that they attempt this kind of calculative, predictable manipulation.[63] Myth too already operates according to "the principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition" and it includes "the sanction of fate" which "reinstates what always was."[64] This impulse, of both myth and Enlightenment, to control through repetition and standardization, is born out of fear of the unknown. Enlightenment radicalizes the mythical fear of the unknown, perceiving as a threat *any* unexplained or unaccounted for remainder, and so seeks to eliminate that remainder by encompassing all that is counted as real within a rationally calculable 'inside'. To overcome fear, all must be reduced to or taken within the bounds of that which is known, and "[n]othing is allowed to remain outside."[65] Of course,

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[62] Ibid., 5.

[63] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 5: "Each ritual contains a representation of how things happen and of the specific process which is to be influenced by magic."

[64] Ibid., 8.

[65] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 11. "Humans believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown. This has determined the path of demythologization, of enlightenment, which equates the living with the nonliving as myth had equated the nonliving with the living. Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is nothing other than a form of universal taboo" (11). Horkheimer and Adorno follow Nietzsche in attributing knowledge acquisition and its motivation to a powerful, instinctual fear of the unknown. Both science and magic are ways of coping with the threats and dangers of the natural world. As Nietzsche puts it in *The Gay Science*, "Something strange is to be reduced to something familiar. And we philosophers—have we really meant more than this when we have spoken of knowledge? What is familiar means what we are used to so that we no longer marvel at it, our

examples of dangerous unknowns abound in our ordinary lives, and not all pursuits to know them should be met with criticism. When a lethal new virus emerges, we seek to learn its genetic makeup to render it not only *comprehensible* according to our most up-to-date theoretical paradigms of virology—its facts and patterns—but also to render the virus *manipulable* in vaccine form, so as to inoculate ourselves from infection. Robert Harrison observes that this kind of productive tension between neophobia and neophilia is the source of our distinctively human ingenuity.[66]

However, one perilous consequence of the totalizing process of mathematical rationalization is its demand for social conformity. That is, Horkheimer and Adorno's criticism of the extreme form of Enlightenment they find operative in mass capitalist society has political implications; positivism's insistence on a certain narrow form of immanence is a problem not only because of its corrosive effects on intellectual activity and its violent mastery of the natural but because it results in social domination of the subject, both her interior and exterior dimensions. Each individual is brought under the predictive control of market forces, behavior and choices are standardized, and people are made universally fungible and interchangeable. The "verdict which critically sets the boundaries of possible experience" is that of leveling uniformity, so that "whatever might be different is made the

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everyday, some rule in which we are stuck, anything at all in which we feel at home. Look, isn't our need for knowledge precisely this need for the familiar, the will to uncover under everything strange, unusual, and questionable something that no longer disturbs us? Is it not the instinct of fear that bids us to know? And is the jubilation of those who attain knowledge not the jubilation over the restoration of a sense of security?" (300–1).

[66] See Robert Pogue Harrison, *Juvenescence: A Cultural History of Our Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 12: "Where there is life there is neophobia, for in the natural world the new usually entails disruption and danger. Yet here too human beings are exceptions, for alongside our natural, self-preserving neophobia, there coexists a counterstrain of neophilia."

same."[67] The prohibition of an outside or a remainder means that Enlightenment "amputates the incommensurable," both the incommensurability of a suprasensible divine being with respect to rule-governed empiricism and the incommensurability of my thoughts with respect to the party line.[68] This amputation negatively affects subjectivity. Self-alienation, estrangement from my own personhood, results from Enlightenment's unfettered equivalence: "The identity of everything with everything is bought at the cost that nothing can at the same time be identical to itself."[69] In not being myself, I become the nebulous, liquidated 'we' of the crowded factory floor, or the swarms at the amusement park.

Echoing ideas from Kierkegaard's "The Present Age," as well as from Nietzsche's third essay in *Genealogy of Morals*, and explicitly citing Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Horkheimer and Adorno link industrial enlightenment with resignation to thoughtless obedience: "Under the leveling rule of abstraction, and of industry . . . the liberated finally themselves become the 'herd', which Hegel identified as the outcome of enlightenment."[70] While Enlightenment does jettison the hierarchical power imbalance of premodern political arrangements such as feudalism, and thus "dissolves away the injustice of the old inequality

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[67] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 8. In "What Are Poets For?," Heidegger makes a similar point about the flattening effect of overly rigid and formulaic kinds of production: "What threatens man in his very nature is the view that technological production puts the world in order, while in fact this ordering is precisely what levels every *ordo*, every rank, down to the uniformity of production, and thus from the outset destroys the realm from which any rank and recognition could possibly arise" (in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter [New York: Harper Perennial, 2013], 114).

[68] Ibid., 9.

[69] Ibid., 8.

[70] Ibid., 9. Freud too recognizes that the stability of herd participation, and obedience to strong authority figure, offers palliative comfort to group members: "Opposition to the herd is as good as separation from it, and is therefore anxiously avoided. But the herd turns away from anything that is new or unusual. The herd instinct would appear to be something primary, something which cannot be split up." *Group Psychology*, 64.

of unmediated mastery"[71], this comes at the cost of the dissolution, by "universal mediation,"

of a distinctive sense of self. Not only must tormented rabbits undergo vivisection in the lab,

but human behavior and self-identity must be made commensurate with the market's utility-

based formulas. This process of standardization can unfold only through force, not through

freely chosen assent to certain standards. We are the patients and not the agents; something

or someone else acts on us to conform us to the correct shape. As Adorno and Horkheimer

put it, "Because the self never quite fitted the mold, enlightenment throughout the liberalistic

period has always sympathized with social coercion. The unity of the manipulated collective

consists in the negation of each individual and in the scorn poured on the type of society

which could make people individuals."[72] The subject herself, not just the plastic on the

assembly line, is imprinted with brand logos; machination requires that workers too,

alongside the machines they use, become cogs in factory operations, for whom standardized

behavior is the only acceptable kind. "Individuals define themselves now only as things,

statistical elements, successes or failures" and are measured only by the criterion of

"successful or unsuccessful adaptation to the objectivity of their function and the schemata

assigned to it.[73] Everything which is different, from the idea to criminality, is exposed to the

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[71] Ibid., 8.

[72] Ibid., 9.

[73] See Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 63, where the author ridicules the statistical reduction of human life along similar lines: "When someone offer statistical surveys of the proportions of sinfulness, draws a map of it in color and relief, so as to guide the eye quickly in its perspicuity, he makes an attempt at treating sin as a peculiarity of nature that is not be annulled but is to be calculated just as atmospheric pressure and rainfall are. The mean and the arithmetical average that result are nonsense of a kind that has no comparison in the purely empirical sciences. It would be very ridiculous abracadabra if anyone should seriously suggest that sinfulness averages 3 3/8 inches in every man or that in Languedoc the average is merely 2 1.4 inches, while in Bretagne it is 3 7/8."

force of the collective, which keeps watch from the classroom to the trade union."[74] The new, the anomalous, the exceptional, even the excellent are deemed threats to be eliminated or incorporated, or eliminated *through* incorporation. Because of this anonymous public enforcement, consumers and producers[75], managers and floor workers, test-administers (once known as teachers) and test-takers (once known as students) "shrink to the nodal points of conventional reactions and the modes of operation objectively expected of them," dominated and thereby estranged from themselves and the world because "industrialism makes souls into things."[76]

Instrumentalized Language and the Erasure of Polysemy

Equivalence has deleterious effects not only on the natural world, political organization, and individual subjectivity; it also degrades *language*, which is reduced to an instrument of survival, just as the forest is reduced to timber supply or people are reduced to their labor output. Espen Hammer points out that in a certain respect, language at its very

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[74] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 22.

[75] See Andrew Feenberg, "Philosophy of Technology at the Crossroads: Critique of Heidegger and Borgmann," in *Philosophy of Technology*, 369. Feenberg explains in concrete terms how positioning, a reifying moment in the primary instrumentalization process, allows for an almost law-like control of producers and consumers: "Technical action controls its objects through their laws. . . . Location, as they say in real estate, is everything: fortunes are made by being in the right place at the right time. By positioning itself strategically with respect to its objects, the subject turns their inherent properties to account. The management of labor and the control of the consumer through product design have a similar situational character. There are no natural laws of worker and consumer behavior that would allow one to design them as one would a machine, but one can position oneself so as to induce them to fulfill preexisting programs they would not otherwise have chosen."

[76] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 21. In "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," Heidegger, like Horkheimer and Adorno, criticizes the way that the practice of education falls prey to technology and market forces, so that knowledge is reduced to information transmission and storage. As Iain Thomson puts it, "the increasingly ubiquitous quantification of education . . . preconceives of students as *Bestand*, not as human beings with intrinsic talents and capacities to be identified and cultivated, but rather as educational "outcomes" to be "optimized" in uniformly quantifiable terms, shackling educators to systems of standardized testing to which they must conform" (*Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 158).

earliest origin is instrumental, because to think at all requires using conceptual language, which "is geared towards identifying, controlling, and organizing a hostile and potentially dangerous environment. To think, and hence to liberate oneself from nature, is to identify and reduce complexity."[77] Language allows us to take this distance from nature, to take a step back from the flowing stream of experience so as to organize and name it. But this comes at a cost. Predication itself presents a threat to particularity. Hammer explains that predication reduces "the determinations of the particular to the universal determination implied by the predicate terms" and thereby "distorts and mystifies the particular. As a result, language, or at least simple predicative (affirmative) sentences, makes us prone to disregard the infinite potential for experience and intuition that is proper to this particular object."[78] This disregard for the potential of each object becomes so extreme that it is carried to the point of crisis under industrial late capitalism and the advertising jargon it spews.

Horkheimer and Adorno's observation about the self-preservational function of language (which according to Hammer is "inspired by the radical, if not cynical, naturalism

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[77] Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 45. David Foster Wallace offers a concrete example of the necessity of language norms for basic bodily survival; we communicate in a ruled-governed way about edible versus poisonous organisms in order to signal what is and is not safe to eat, based on previous experience: "Norm-wise, let's keep in mind that language didn't come into being because our hairy ancestors were sitting around the veldt with nothing better to do. Language was invented to serve certain specific purposes. "That mushroom is poisonous"; "Knock these two rocks together and you can start a fire"; "This shelter is mine!" And so on. Clearly, as linguistic communities evolve, over time, they discover that some ways of using language are "better" than others—meaning better with respect to the community's purposes. If we assume that one such purpose might be communicating which kinds of food are safe to eat, then you can see how, for example, a misplaced modifier might violate an important norm: "People who eat that kind of mushroom often get sick" confuses the recipient about whether he'll get sick only if he eats the mushroom frequently or whether he stands a good chance of getting sick the very first time he eats it. In other words, the community has a vested practical interest in excluding this kind of misplaced modifier from acceptable usage" ("Tense Present: Democracy, English, and the Wars over Usage," *Harper's Magazine,* April 2001, 47–48).

[78] Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 46.

of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Freud"[79]) is meant to show not that survival is a wrongheaded goal but that civilization comes under threat when language is used *only* for the purpose of survival. The businesspeak of the culture industry and its marketing agencies, which also infects the speaking habits of its customers, is responsible for much of the degradation of language that our Frankfurt School theorists see as the self-destructive outworking of the late stages of enlightenment. As language is "demythologized," all elements of polysemy, polyvalence, and ambiguity are removed in favor of a one-to-one correspondence between word and thing, or more specifically, between brand name and consumer product. Thanks to the "blindness and muteness of the data to which positivism reduces the world," language "is limited to registering those data."[80] Perhaps surprisingly, Adorno and Horkheimer consider this a process of reversion to magic, where names function like spells with "a power of adhesion and repulsion" in branding and sales; these seemingly enlightened calculations are "practices of a kind of sorcery" such as when "the name of a diva is concocted in the studio on the basis of statistical data" about consumer trends.[81] It is in this way that "the name, to which magic most readily attaches . . . is being transformed into arbitrary, manipulable designations, the power of which, although calculable, is for that

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[79] Ibid., 45.

[80] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 134.

[81] Ibid. This criticism of press and print media resembles Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's complaints: "In the influential American magazines *Life* and *Fortune* the images and texts of advertisements are, at a cursory glance, hardly distinguishable from the editorial section. The enthusiastic and unpaid picture story about the living habits and personal grooming of celebrities, which wins them new fans, is editorial, while the advertising pages rely on photographs and data so factual and lifelike that they represent the ideal of information to which the editorial section only aspires" (132).

reason as willful as that of archaic names."[82] Again, our authors reiterate that this labeling

power is put solely in service of profit margins or political coercion, so that "the blind and

rapidly spreading repetition of designated words links advertising to the totalitarian slogan"

and language everywhere, even in personal interactions and literary outlets, "takes on the

coldness which hitherto was peculiar to billboards and the advertising sections of

newspapers."[83]

Adorno laments that communication overtakes expression: "[t]he more completely

language coincides with communication, the more words change from substantial carriers of

meaning to signs devoid of qualities; the more purely and transparently they communicate

what they designate, the more impenetrable they become."[84] Espen Hammer explains this

distinction between language that "contains an expressive element which mimetically reveals

the particularity of the object, thus highlighting an elective affinity between the knower and

the known" and language with "a communicative element which reifies the meaning of the

utterance by transforming it into an exchangeable item."[85] While cognition requires *some*

tension between these communicative and expressive elements, the complete overtaking of

the expressive by the communicative leaves us with nothing but desiccated remnants of

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[82] Ibid., 134. Espen Hammer astutely links this diagnosis of names as instrumentalized means of survival with the claims made by Nietzsche's "On Truth and Falsity in an Extra-Moral Sense" and Benjamin's "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (*Adorno and the Political*, 46).

[83] Ibid., 135. Like Orwell's complaints about euphemism and Newspeak, and like Heidegger's description of idle talk, Horkheimer and Adorno explain that "Countless people use words and expressions which they either have ceased to understand at all or use only according to their behavioral functions, just as trademarks adhere all the more compulsively to their objects the less their linguistic meaning is apprehended."

[84] Ibid., 133.

[85] Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 92.

cultural forms, and with tragedy and loss we do not even recognize because so inured to the

commercialized dross that has replaced image-rich carriers of meaning.[86]

Commercialization is not the only threat to language; positivism degrades language

with its own conceptual techniques, reducing statements to syntactical equivalents that can be

interchangeably substituted within a closed system without affecting truth values. As Julian

Roberts explains, "the function (the statement) is indifferent to the individual characters of

the entities that enable it to perform its job. For the function, the only thing that matters is the

system within which it operates," and that system is "a network of self-sufficient, preexisting

statements."[87] For example, "in the statement 'frozen rain makes the fields white', 'snow'

can be substituted for 'frozen rain' without affecting the truth-value of the statement. Hence

'snow' and 'frozen rain' are equivalent" in terms of the role they perform, even though they

intend and express two different things.[88] This means that "the only difference a concrete

thing can make, coming from the outside, is to trigger a 'yes' or a 'no' value from some

function. The function in the above case is 'x makes the fields white.'. . .'Snow', 'frozen

rain', 'white paint', 'detergent foam'—they are all satisfactory values for this particular

'function', however much they may differ in themselves."[89] If the fields are white because

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[86] Heidegger, like Horkheimer and Adorno, laments the way that commercialization destroys other ways of using and conceiving of language: "Only when language has been debased to a means of commerce and organization, as is the case with us, does thought rooted in language appear to be a mere 'philosophy of words,' no longer adequate to the 'pressing realities of life.' This judgment is simply an admission that we ourselves no longer have the power to trust that the word is the essential foundation of all relations to being as such" ("On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις in Aristotle's *Physics* B, 1," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeil [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 214).

[87] Julian Roberts, "The Dialectic of Enlightenment," in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, 63.

[88] Ibid. 63.

[89] Ibid.

they are covered in white paint rather than snow, there might be cause for real alarm about the toxification of the landscape, but a closed system of functions cannot register this concern, just as it cannot register the particular skills and needs of the human beings who perform equivalent functions within a bureaucracy.

Whence the origins of this type of instrumental reasoning, and the departure from a more animated mimesis? Horkheimer and Adorno locate it in Odysseus's strategic, manipulative use of language as "designation," which exploits "the distinction between word and object."[90] Previously, on their account, deities were thought to issue "unalterable edicts of fate" through "the spoken word" such that "the word was thought to have direct power over the thing, expression merged with intention."[91] Odysseus dissolves this "contract," in his famous dissimulation with the cyclops, punning on the word for anonymity so as to conceal his identity from his foe. "Odysseus becomes aware of dualism, as he discovers that an identical word can mean different things. Since the name *Udeis* can mean either 'hero' or 'nobody', the hero is able to break the spell of the name."[92] From this narrative moment we learn the tragic (Foucauldian, or Sophist, or Cratylus-inspired, or post-structuralist) lesson that once detached from the objects they represent, words become implements for deception and for the exertion of power, rather than revealing truths. The detachment that Odysseus discovers becomes "what in fully developed bourgeois society is called *formalism,*" so that the "perennial ability" of words "to designate is bought at the cost of distancing themselves

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[90] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 47.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

from any particular contents, both to nobody and to Odysseus himself."[93] The linguistic

plasticity discovered in the Polyphemus encounter leads the way to increasingly vacuous

modern schematizations of language. From the infinite interchangeability of names under

formalism "emerges nominalism, the prototype of bourgeois thinking. Self-preserving guile

lives on the argument between word and thing."[94] Here Horkheimer and Adorno insist again

that the origins of modern calculative reasoning predate the Enlightenment by millennia;

Homeric antiquity already contained the germ of these sophisticated forms of verbal cunning.

Odysseus and the Origins of Alienation from Self, Others, and Nature

Homer's Odysseus narrative, according to Horkheimer and Adorno's reading, is a parable

about the exercise of clever deceit in the perennial human struggle against the dangers and

vagaries of the world; the mythic tale should not be regarded as an antiquary from a bygone

epoch in need of *ressourcement* for the sake of political propaganda. Contrary to what

"devotees of the archaic" who wish to "liquidate enlightenment" in favor of "the fraudulent

myth of fascism" have asserted about the romantic heroism of Odysseus, Horkheimer and

Adorno aver that in this protagonist's story "no work bears more eloquent witness to the

intertwinement of enlightenment and myth."[95] As already laid out in "The Concept of

Enlightenment," and as indicated by the title of the book, the central claim is of course that

myth and enlightenment are *dialectically* co-constituted; they are not discrete stages of

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[93] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 47–48: "Odysseus's two contradictory actions in his meeting with Polyphemus, his obedience to his name and his repudiation of it, are really the same thing. He declares allegiance to himself by disowning himself as Nobody; he saves his life by making himself disappear. This adaptation to death through language contains the schema of modern mathematics."

[94] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 47.

[95] Ibid., 37; emphasis added.

civilization. Enlightenment arises from myth, which already contains impulses that come into

sharper if transmuted forms in enlightenment, and enlightenment never sheds myth entirely

but rather reverts to it repeatedly in its attempts to master perceived threats. Classifying the

Odyssey strictly as a mythical genre skips over its many enlightened elements, and believing

enlightened modernity to be free of mythic blind spots is naïve hubris. To conceive of history

as a linear march of progress is the height of delusion, as is reading Homer as a spokesperson

for the Reich's ideal manly citizen. As Julian Roberts puts it, Horkheimer and Adorno's

adverse reading of the *Odyssey* "is concerned to subvert the sentimental and nationalistic

readings of pre-Hellenic Greek culture hawked around by reactionary Germans."[96]

The central claim of the excursus is that *The Odyssey* displays, in incipient form,

three types of alienation that characterize bourgeois modernity: alienation from one's own

self, from other people, and from the natural world. Odysseus, in virtue of his "unwavering

self-assertion," is "the hero of the adventures" who "turns out to be the prototype of the

bourgeois individual."[97] How, the skeptical reader might ask, could Odysseus's capitalist

exemplarity be anything but anachronistic, given the pre-capitalist, enchanted lifeworld in

which the epic unfolds? The question of anachronism is superseded because, as far as profit-

seeking, survivalist trickery goes, there is nothing new under the sun. Thanks to "his

unambiguous purpose of self-preservation, of returning to his homeland and fixed property"

Odysseus manages on his journey to overcome the "dangerous temptations deflecting the self

from the path of its logic," a triumph also achieved by the individuated ego of the modern

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[96] Roberts, "The Dialectic of Enlightenment," 64.

[97] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 35.

burgher.[98] Like the bourgeois individual, whose primary motivation is strategic wealth acquisition, Odysseus as "[t]he lone voyager armed with cunning is already *homo oeconomicus*, whom all reasonable people will one day resemble."[99] He, like Robinson Crusoe, is forced into circumstances which can be survived only with a spirit of rugged individualism, without recourse to a *polis* or a cooperative community. "Abandoned to the vagaries of the waves, helplessly cut off, they are forced by their isolation into a ruthless pursuit of their atomistic interest."[100] Odysseus's notorious cunning evidences the fact that instrumental, means-ends reasoning is not an outgrowth of industrial society but has been operative in human life since the beginning. The gift anticipates exchange[101]; the navigator anticipates the compass.[102]

Related to these concerns about the early emergence of market behavior is another foundational idea of Adorno's excursus, namely identity formation, or the development of self-reflective, purposeful subjectivity. Adorno's account of subject-formation is at once deeply Hegelian (because the subject gains self-consciousness only through conflict and struggle with another or with the outer world, as in the famous master-slave dialectic of *Phenomenology of Spirit*)[103] and Nietzschean-Freudian (because the subject becomes a self

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[98] Ibid., 38.

[99] Ibid., 48.

[100] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 48. In this way, Odysseus and Crusoe "embody the principle of the capitalist economy even before they make use of any worker."

[101] Ibid., 36.

[102] Ibid., 38.

[103] Here I am making a modest claim about a structural similarity, fully aware that Adorno's relationship to Hegel is a site of scholarly debate into which I do not intend to enter. Espen Hammer has lucidly documented the competing lines of interpretation on this matter: "Martin Jay and Jay Bernstein happily assert

through the repression of some instincts and the cultivation of others; the subject comes to

selfhood through the internalization of sacrifice). Julian Roberts and Joel Whitebook see

obvious Freudian dimensions in Adorno's Odysseus excursus, too. Roberts traces the

emergence of identity through each phase of the epic journey, which requires

> disengagement from the identity of the primitive or natural self in favor of a
> conceptual version (the Polyphemus myth; 'My name is Nobody'), the foundation of
> a *historically* based identity to underpin that of the sentient present (the Sirens), and
> the installation of a repressive superego to enforce order on the newly emerged and
> unstable self (Calypso, Circe, and the various themes of sexual discipline).[104]

Joel Whitebook agrees that Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* is psychoanalytic and

Nietzschean, and is at base about the human process of instinct repression that results in the

capacity for strategic manipulation of the material environment.[105] In addition to these

psychoanalytic resonances, there are of course many Hegelian reverberations in Adorno's

commentary. As Hegel locates incipient ego-formation in the life-threatening conflict

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the essential Hegelianism of Adorno while Lyotard and Nägele think Adorno is more influenced by an anti-Hegelian thinkers such as Benjamin, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. . . . In the works of Robert Pippin (1989), Terry Pinkard (1996), and John McDowell (1994), a new and postmetaphysical Hegel has emerged, a Hegel vastly different in both scope and intention from the totalizing masterthinker Adorno criticizes. Thus being "too Hegelian," "not Hegelian enough," or perhaps embodying "a latent Hegelianism," says very little unless it is made reasonably clear which Hegel one has in mind." Most importantly, Hammer points out that "the debate between those who do and those who do not regard him as a Hegelian is sterile: Adorno is neither a Hegelian nor an anti-Hegelian. Indeed, his approach to Hegel's work is eminently bipolar, involving both passionate rejection and painstaking defense . . . both the Hegel he rejects and the Hegel he defends are, from the standpoint of current scholarship, extreme: the one a die-hard rationalist whose philosophy represents the culmination of Western idealist metaphysics; the other a self-divesting spokesman, by no means dissimilar to Adorno's portraits of Benjamin, of mimetic nonidentity" (Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 99).

[104] Roberts, "The Dialectic of Enlightenment," 64.

[105] See Joel Whitebook, "The Marriage of Marx and Freud: Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, 177: "By bringing the disorderliness of [Odysseus's] internal nature under the control of the unified ego—that is, by repressing his unconscious-instinctual life—he could outwit the law of equivalence and survive the numerous dangers that awaited him on his journey home. These dangers represent the regressive pleasures of the archaic world—the forms of gratification offered by each stage of development—that threaten to divert the relatively immature ego from its developmental goals."

between master and slave, so this reading of the *Odyssey* traces ego-formation through the subject's multi-faceted (and often violent) dealings with the natural world and social world. "The hero's peregrinations from Troy to Ithaca" show an archetypal protagonist "still in the process of formation as self-consciousness," not yet in full possession of selfhood.[106] Only through the self-exertion required to survive the harsh elements—hostile seas, monstrous aggressors, famine—can the subject come to enjoy an identity in harmony with itself and its surroundings. Adorno cites Hölderlin to express the benefit accrued by exposure to suffering and struggle: "'But where danger threatens/That which saves from it also grows.'[107] The knowledge which makes up his identity and enables him to survive has its substance in the experience of diversity, distraction, disintegration . . . the self does not exist simply in rigid antithesis to adventure but takes on its solidity only through this antithesis."[108] Fragmentation and dispersal of the self are required to achieve endurance and character. Courage in the face of menacing danger is required to be a person at all because, in a phrasing with an especially Hegelian ring to it, "the knowing survivor is also the man who exposes himself most daringly to the threat of death, thus gaining the hardness and the strength to live."[109] Only such confrontations with fatal risks can produce the self-consciousness that distinguishes the self-possessed human subject from the meandering, frantic animals who lack the ingenuity to

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[106] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 38.

[107] Heidegger cites this same Hölderlin quote in "The Question Concerning Technology."

[108] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 38.

[109] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 38: "Odysseus throws himself away . . . in order to win himself; he achieves his estrangement from nature by abandoning himself to nature, trying his strength against it in all his adventures."

transcend their circumstances. As Robert Harrison puts it, "Only man [sic] in his [sic] outrageous self-transcendence can terrify himself [sic] into consciousness. Only from the fissure between prudence and reckless daring can anthropos, in all his [sic] strangeness, break forth into the realm of meaning."[110] Adorno articulates this same idea of violently bursting into one's own self-awareness by noting that in the Homeric epic "the identical, enduring self . . . is itself the product of" the experience of labor as well as of "sacrificial ritual in which the human being, by opposing its consciousness to its natural context, celebrates itself."[111] Rejecting mythical mimetic, animistic postures toward nature, Odysseus instead distances and 'opposes his consciousness' to it, which allows him to escape its many perils.

This (toxically masculine?) character formation comes at a cost, however, because the mastery Odysseus gains over himself and the natural world have an ultimately alienating outcome, especially once instrumental reasoning reaches its zenith in spiritless modernity. Alienation not only from one's own self but from other people is a thematic centerpiece of the Homeric narrative. Social practices, such as gift-giving, that seem on their surface to be done out of benevolent hospitality are in fact calculated economic maneuvers.[112] Host and guest are each turned into instruments, rather than remaining friends or subjects of mutual

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[110] Harrison, *Juvenescence*, 15.

[111] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 42.

[112] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 39. "The gift of the host anticipates the principle of equivalence: the host receives really or symbolically the equivalent value of the service he has performed, while the guest takes away provisions which, in principle, are intended to enable him to reach home." In this same spirit, Derrida famously goes on to call gift-giving an impossibility; gifts always imply debt, and always entangle us in economies of exchange.

respect. The natural world, too, is brought by Odysseus under greater control, even though his domination and rendering things submissive is not as thoroughgoing as modern forms of technological mastery. "The primeval world is secularized as the space he measures out" on his sojourn from islands and caves to lotus utopias and agrarian settlements, and "the adventures bestow names on each of these places, and the names give rise to a rational overview of space."[113] Partitioning and labeling a hitherto nameless ocean of chaos, his nautical mishaps are read by Adorno as evidence of a proto-modern navigational prowess that does not bow to the forceful whims of Poseidon but "aims to undermine the ruling powers" with instruments (ships) that can weather storms.[114]

As has already been noted, scholars continue to debate about how pessimistic the outlook of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* really is. How destructive versus how harmonious is Odysseus's instrumentality?[115] How closely does his instrumental reason cleave to the present-day application of such powers? Though the answers to such questions remain elusive, what Adorno does make clear is that by the time we reach the developmental point of "class society" in the twentieth century, our supposedly enlightened means-ends rationality falls into paradox or contradiction: it strangles what it is supposed to support. The strangulation and estrangement happen to the individual, the social fabric, and the natural

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[113] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 38.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Roberts argues that in Adorno's view "Odysseus is not a marauding blond beast, subduing nature and his fellows to some abstract obsession with power; he is a parable of that resourcefulness and cunning which goes just far enough to ward off the perils of natural existence, but no further" and that his version of self-preservation "does not exclude the reconciliation of concept and nature at some terminal point. Under the regime of market equivalence, however, human concepts break free and acquire a momentum of their own" ("The Dialectic of Enlightenment," 65).

world. Though we (bourgeois liberals) no longer perform ritual sacrifices in the mode of the ancients, the self in class society suffers its own diminishment. Modern self-preservation comes at the cost of "a denial of nature in the human being for the sake of mastery over extrahuman nature and over other human beings," one consequence being that "not only the *telos* of the external mastery of nature but also the *telos* of one's own life becomes confused and opaque."[116] Denying our instincts for bodily pleasure, curiosity, community, we lose sight of the *raison d'être* of our rules, institutions, and technological inventions, which master us instead. Odysseus wanted not to drain the sea altogether but to master the practice of seafaring, in order to return to a beloved landscape and to enjoy feasts with family. We, by contrast, forget the landscape and the social ties, trapping ourselves in windowless, air-conditioned concrete multiplexes for 60-hour workweeks, drinking Soylent for lunch, to accrue abstract financial resources (or worse, and more hauntingly present in Adorno's mind, we efficiently extinguish the lives of millions in windowless concrete gas chambers). In these ways and others, we unnecessarily sublimate desires according to "the principle of bourgeois disillusionment" which "admits defeat in advance and makes survival virtually dependent on death."[117]

The psychological cost of self-mastery, understood as the achievement of an ordered hierarchy of impulses, is too expensive to justify; it results in "the annihilation of the subject in whose service that mastery is maintained, because the substance which is mastered,

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[116] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 42.

[117] Ibid., 45. Capitalism ceases to be a tool for distributing necessary resources like food and shelter, and instead becomes a weapon of coercion: "The antireason of totalitarian capitalism, whose technique of satisfying needs, in their objectified form determined by domination, makes the satisfaction of needs impossible and tends toward the extermination of humanity" (43).

suppressed, and disintegrated by self-preservation is nothing other than the living entity, of which the achievements of self-preservation can only be defined as functions."[118] We destroy the vitality of consciousness in the attempt to preserve it, segmenting the *anima* into a set of machine capacities. Though we think that we, as enlightened moderns, have replaced animistic mimesis with reason, we in fact continue to enact mimesis in other covert and dehumanizing forms. "Imitation enters the service of power when even the human being becomes an anthropomorphism for human beings."[119] Even our humanness, or what we mistake as such, is a simulation projected by advertising agencies or government bureaus or mathematical formulas and digital algorithms, a bad copy, estranged from the original. And as we demythologize the forces of the natural world, attributing them to cause and effect relations governed by the principles of physics rather than to the unpredictable whims of gods and goddesses, we in our scientific outlook "maste[r] spiritless nature only by imitating its rigidity," becoming spiritless ourselves.[120]

Heidegger and the Technological Condition

Though he approaches the problem from a different genealogical angle, Heidegger agrees with Horkheimer and Adorno that the modern industrial relationship to nature, in

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[118] Ibid., 43.

[119] Ibid., 44.

[120] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, 44. Nature remains a force that we perceive as threateningly powerful, which is why we continue to try to subdue it. "The superiority of nature in the competitive struggle is repeatedly confirmed by the very mind which has mastered nature. . . . all power in class society is beset by the gnawing consciousness of its powerlessness in face of physical nature. . . . Only deliberate adaptation to it brings nature under the power of the physically weaker." As Joel Whitebook puts it, the price of survival and "for victory over the dangers posed by external nature" is in fact "the reification of the self. Insofar as the ego distances itself from its archaic prehistory and unconscious instinctual life, it loses its mimetic relation to the world. In another, perverted sense however, mimesis is preserved in the process, for an objectified self mimics the reified world it has objectified" ("The Marriage of Marx and Freud," 77–78).

which machination is the dominant form of production, poses threats to the health of self, community, and earth. Heidegger's writing on technology has inspired interpretive debates about the applicability and relevance of his diagnoses to our contemporary situation. Because his assessment of the modern technological condition is so thoroughgoing, commentators such as Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, and Robert Pippin have at various points regarded Heidegger as an anti-modern reactionary who presents enframing and standing reserve as totally pervasive attitudes toward the environment from which there can be no escape.[121] Andrew Feenberg, though initially frustrated by what he considered Heidegger's technological essentialism and fatalistic despair about the modern condition, sees in Heidegger a powerful diagnosis of the problems that unreflective uses of mechanization and machine production can create, even if Heidegger does not offer entirely satisfactory solutions to these problems. Robert Scharff defends Heidegger by suggesting that his analyses of technological devices be read as formal indications rather than as ontological categorizations. Iain Thomson takes a similar approach, arguing that Heidegger treats technology historically, not as an abstract structure, and that his treatment is driven by a concern to recover a certain kind of human artistry and creativity, rather than surrendering in despondency to forces now beyond our control. Whereas Thomson accepts Heidegger's claim that the essence of technology is nothing technological, Feenberg is not sympathetic to or persuaded by this distinction. David Lewin, invoking the mystical traditions that inform Heidegger's thought, argues that both Feenberg and Thomson misinterpret Heidegger as fatalistic because they do not recognize his use of middle discourse.

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[121] See Robert P. Pippin's *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)*, 375–416.

After presenting these interpretive debates, I contextualize and fill out Heidegger's mystically inflected assessment of the technological condition through brief analyses of his essays "The Thing" and "What Are Poets For." I then offer my own reading of "The Question Concerning Technology," which shows how closely that essay aligns with Feenberg's descriptions of autonomization, decontextualization, and quantification in the instrumentalization process, and which shows that Heidegger's medial definitions of freedom and destiny are thorough-going in the essay. Use of this middle discourse is the central feature of Heidegger's notion of enframing, a fact that Feenberg's understandably exasperated accusations of technological essentializing gloss over. What is medial about technology, and the questions concerning it, is that there are both active and passive elements, both projective and receptive dimensions to these unveiling occurrences.

To understand what exactly Heidegger sees as threatening about industrialized technology, it important to grasp how his ideas were shaped in response to Weber's and Nietzsche's analyses of modern life. How does Heidegger receive and modify Weber's rationalization thesis in his exploration of our technological condition? In his 1992 article "Democratic Rationalization: Technology, Power, and Freedom," Andrew Feenberg presents both Weber and Heidegger as "romantic anti-dystopian"[122] diagnosticians who each in their own ways fail to recognize that machine design and the bureaucratic administration of technologies are socially and historically relative. Acknowledgment of an alternative path for rational bureaucracy and technological development would leave open the possibility that

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[122] Feenberg, "Democratic Rationalization: Technology, Power, and Freedom," in *Philosophy of Technology*, 707.

those social formations and tools are redeemable, rather than universally undesirable.

Feenberg follows his teacher, Herbert Marcuse, by arguing that Weber's "concept of rationalization confounds the control of labor by management with the control of nature by technology. The search for control of nature is generic, but management only arises against a specific social background, the capitalist wage system."[123] Weber thus fails to imagine democratic solutions to authoritarian (because hyper-rationalized and hierarchical) social arrangements because he does not recognize that a specific version of capitalism is to blame for the alienation he observes in modernity. Feenberg charges Heidegger with a similar failure, claiming that he is a technological essentialist who falls prey to a fatalistic pessimism about the constraints of technological modernity and its erasure of individual freedoms.

In a chapter from 2000, Feenberg again argues that Heidegger takes too despairing a position on modern technology, one which is hopeless about the ways that human agents might intervene to redirect the course of machine-driven, digitally programmed existence. On Feenberg's reading of Heidegger, "the functionalization of man and society is thus a destiny from which there is no escape. Heidegger calls for resignation and passivity rather than an active program of reform that in his view would simply constitute a further extension of modern technology. As Heidegger explained in his interview, 'Only a god can save us' from the juggernaut of progress.'"[124] Feenberg goes on to claim that Heidegger "rejects technical

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[123] Ibid., 711.

[124] Feenberg, "Philosophy of Technology," 363. Feenberg makes this same criticism in a previously published article: Heidegger's "originality consists in pointing out that the ambition to control being is itself a way of being and hence subordinate at some deeper level to an ontological dispensation beyond human control. But the overall effect of his critique is to condemn human agency, at least in modern times, and to confuse essential differences between types of technological development" ("Democratic Rationalization," 715).

regression while leaving no room for a better technological future."[125] Though Heidegger certainly enters into apocalyptic despair in his interview remarks, in "Question Concerning Technology" he employs a middle discourse to describe freedom and destiny, a rhetorical aspect that Feenberg's summary misses, which I will address in more detail below.

Feenberg also argues that Heidegger fails to understand the social mediation that shapes specific technologies and instead "reifies modern technology as something separate from society, as an inherently contextless force aiming at pure power."[126] For Feenberg, Heidegger manages to be both inadequately historicist *and* overly emphatic about epochal distinctions. Feenberg sees more continuity between pre-modern and modern technical practices than does his Heidegger. Feenberg claims, in a spirit reminiscent of Horkheimer and Adorno's dialectic, that "there is nothing unprecedented in [modern technology's] chief features, such as the reduction of objects to raw materials, the use of precise measurements and plans, the technical control of some human beings by others, and large scales of operation" and that it is the "centrality and consequences" of these features, not the features themselves, that are "without precedent."[127] Thus Heidegger's claims, in 'Age of the World Picture' and elsewhere, that ancient and medieval cultures had fundamentally different attitudes about the natural world and appropriate modes of production than we do in modernity, misses the fact that instrumentalization and tool usage are perennial human activities.

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[125] Ibid., 364.

[126] Feenberg, "Democratic Rationalization," 716.

[127] Ibid.

Feenberg's views on Heidegger have evolved over time. In his 2005 book, he argues that Heidegger and the Frankfurt School inherit Weber's pessimism about modernity because they all regard that era as an age defined by the triumph of formal rationality over substantive rationality. Similar to the distinction between *techné* and *empeiria* in Plato's *Gorgias*, Feenberg's Weber understands substantive rationality, characteristic of most pre-modern cultures, as that which "begins by positing a good and then selects means to achieve it."[128] By contrast, says Feenberg, "formal rationality is concerned uniquely with the efficiency of means and contains no intrinsic reference to a good" and is thus value-neutral.[129] Whereas Weber regards markets and bureaucracies as the primary instruments of modern rationalization, Feenberg argues that Heidegger sees technology as its main driver. Feenberg thinks that whereas Adorno, Horkheimer, and Weber accept the fact-value distinction and "the common-sense distinction between substantive and formal rationality," Heidegger does not.[130] For Heidegger, *techné* is a mode of revealing, not simply an instrument, and thus our craft practices bring out something of the objective truth or form of the materials we employ in production.[131] By contrast, Weber, Horkheimer, and Adorno accept that value-commitments are separate from the instruments used to achieve self-given ends.

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[128]Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 13.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid., 15.

[131] According to Feenberg, Heidegger "starts out from the assumption that the world is initially revealed through techné and does not preexist it in the form of a collection of present-at-hand things taken up by human technical activity in a contingent manner, for example, on this or that occasion to fulfill this or that passing need" (*Heidegger and Marcuse*, 15). Feenberg continues, "Every aspect of being he uncovers in the study of techné is thus originally posited by techné. This even includes the raw materials of technical work. These materials are understood from being out of their place in production rather than as preexisting objects" (16).

Iain Thomson shows that Heidegger's reception of Weber's rationalization thesis is complicated, and that Heidegger shifts from a Nietzschean-Spenglerian romantic view of the university to an ascetic Weberian one, after which he attempts to synthesize these two positions. According to Thomson, Weber's sober vocation lectures were intended as interventions *against* Oswald Spengler's popular *Decline of the West* and its call for heroic politico-spiritual German leadership, which is why Weber instead commends a strict separation between teaching and punditry, between scholarship and politics.[132] Heidegger's response to Weber's scientific ideal, on Thomson's account, is complex; Heidegger "does reject as unrealistic Weber's idea that academic researchers could maintain a 'purely theoretical objectivity,' but he nevertheless appropriates this Weberian vision of value-free science as a kind of regulative ideal, a goal to be constantly pursued if only occasionally attained."[133] Though he accepted this regulative ideal, Heidegger did not accept Weber's vision for university reform wholesale, instead retaining "the ideal of the German university as a place in which life and research are harmoniously integrated, a dynamic communal institution with a shared sense of its own substantive, unifying mission."[134] Life and

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[132] See Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 95: "From the margins of the academy, Spengler had issued a dramatic Nietzschean call for a heroic intellectual response to the historical crisis, and Weber, from a leading position within the university, countered with a resolute refusal to forsake scientific objectivity in order to answer this call. The competing positions in the debate over university reform were thereby established. Those influenced by Spengler wanted academics to intervene actively in cultural politics, whereas Weberians sought to isolate the university from the political turbulence of the times." Thomson rightly points out that "Weber's defense of value-free scholarship was not politically neutral, of course, but favored the postwar political status quo, the representative government of the Weimar Republic Weber had himself influenced" (95).

[133] Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 96n37; see also Heidegger's "Critical Comments on Karl Jaspers's Psychology of Worldviews," in *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 9 (2009): 119–43) where Thomson finds him to affirm Weber's adoption of the fact/value distinction for "the historical sciences of culture," but resists prematurely extending this distinction to other domains of knowledge" (96).

[134] Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 99. Heidegger's view of the university here contrasts with Weber's. Weber "played the role of an intellectual collaborator" who "presents the invading forces of

Wissenschaft could be reunited if the vital impulse of each discipline could be recovered

through philosophical inquiry. As Thomson puts it, Heidegger "accepts the Nietzschean–

Spenglerian call for heroic intellectual leadership, but characterizes this leadership in terms

of a modified Weberian view of the task of science."[135] Heidegger modified that Weberian

view by insisting on knowledge as a kind of poiésis, not simply as instrumentalized facts.

In addition to Weber, Nietzsche is an important influence on Heidegger's treatment of

the dangers latent in modernity's obsession with utility and efficiency. Both Hubert Dreyfus

and Iain Thomson argue that Heidegger's diagnosis of late modern technological life rests on

his interpretation of Nietzsche's nihilistic metaphysics. Our present understanding of Being

tends toward not simply a will to control the world nor even to satisfy our desires, but rather

toward practices of "flexible ordering for the sake of more ordering and reordering without

limit, which, according to Heidegger, Nietzsche expresses as the eternal return of the

same."[136] The essences and identities previously attributed to people and things are replaced

by an understanding of them as standing reserve or resources. This way of treating the world

and each other, says Dreyfus, "makes possible endless disaggregation, redistribution, and

reaggregation for its own sake. As soon as he sees that information is truly endlessly

transformable Heidegger switches [from electricity and hydropower] to computer

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"rationalization" rhetorically as American and French, then firmly counsels his audience to lay down their arms, as it were, and accept as an irreversible historical fact that these forces of rationalization have now rendered "fictitious" not just the reality but the very idea of the modern German university" (99).

[135] Ibid., 97–98.

[136] Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Spinosa, "Heidegger and Borgmann on How to Affirm Technology," in *Philosophy of Technology*, 352; see also Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 104–9.

manipulation of information as his paradigm."[137] Heidegger is aware of the need to

distinguish between different types of technological tools and so highlights that digital

computing in particular has an infinite disaggregating potential, distinct from other energy-

converting modern processes.[138] Iain Thomson, like Dreyfus, identifies Nietzsche as the

primary influence on Heidegger's worry over the fact that the techno-modern will-to-will is

endless, without limit, with "forces coming together and breaking apart with no end other

than the self-augmentation by which these underlying forces perpetuate themselves."[139] This

limitless Heraclitan flux brought to light by Nietzsche is what "encourages us late moderns

implicitly to understand, and so generally to treat, all the entities with which we deal,

ourselves included, as intrinsically meaningless *Bestand*, mere "resources" standing by to be

optimized, ordered, and enhanced with maximal efficiency."[140] In this sense, technology is

nihilistic. Control is no longer even the goal of some autarchic or Herculean subject, because

even the subject, dissolved into fragments by the analyses of Darwin, Nietzsche and Freud,

has been transformed into "just another intrinsically meaningless resource awaiting

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[137] Dreyfus and Spinosa, "Heidegger and Borgmann," 351; see also Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: HarperSanFransico, 1982), 132; and "Memorial Address," in *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper), 1966), 43–57.

[138] Dreyfus argues that Heidegger distinguishes different types of technology, whereas Andrew Feenberg points out places where Heidegger asserted naïve or absurd equivalences between tools that ought to be distinguished from one another: "Unfortunately, Heidegger's argument is developed at such a high level of abstraction he literally cannot discriminate between electricity and atom bombs, agricultural techniques and the Holocaust. In a 1949 lecture, he asserted: 'Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry, in essence the same as the manufacturing of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockade and starvation of nations, the same as the production of hydrogen bombs.' All are merely different expressions of the identical enframing which we are called to transcend through the recovery of a deeper relation to being" ("Democratic Rationalization," 715).

[139] Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 44.

[140] Ibid., 44.

optimization."[141] Such self-optimization is now available "cosmetically,

psychopharmacologically, genetically, or even cybernetically."[142]

Robert Scharff sheds light on several important aspects of Heidegger's writing on

technology. Against critics who consider Heidegger's later essays to be a wrong-headed

departure from his earlier analysis of everyday practices in *Being and Time*, Scharff argues

for a deep continuity in Heidegger's treatment of issues such as enframing and tool usage:

"Heidegger's account of the rise and current dominance of technoscience is neither abstract

nor dystopian; and his later questioning of technology is not only consistent with SZ but

depends on it."[143] What stakes are there in this interpretive debate about a 'turn' or not in

Heidegger's thinking? If Scharff is correct in defending continuity, that could provide a basis

for resuscitating the later Heidegger from accusations of romantic, anti-modern nostalgia,

luddism, and resigned pessimism. Heidegger's diagnosis in "The Question Concerning

Technology" is more powerful if consistent with *Being and Time* because then, enframing

could be rightly understood as one possibility among others, one hermeneutic lens among

others; the embodied, socially and historically particular practice-based analysis so

fundamental to the early Heidegger would be the best version of his thought to apply to

technological issues.

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[141] Ibid., 60.

[142] See Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 56.

[143] Robert C. Scharff, "Technoscience Studies after Heidegger? Not Yet," in *Philosophy of Technology*, 573. While Scharff's search for continuity in Heidegger's attitude toward technology is appealing, it is not uncontested, and it goes against the grain of some of Heidegger's writing, such as his "Letter on Humanism," which highlights passivity/receptivity in a way that is at odds with the agency and decision-making so central to *Being and Time*.

Scharff argues that, despite what commentators such as Andrew Feenberg have claimed, Heidegger is neither a technological essentialist nor a regressive Luddite because his "descriptions of technoscientific life" ought to be taken as "formal indications" rather than as "essentialist pronouncements" about the extent to which technoscience currently shapes how we encounter being and beings.[144] Scharff argues that Heidegger by no means opposes the call for a humanized technology. Non-dominating possibilities for ordering and conceiving of the world remain within reach, which is shown in Heidegger's idiosyncratic use of essence or *Wesen* as "a verbal not a substantive noun."[145] The essence of technology contains both danger and a saving power because its essence characterizes "how things most strongly tend to be, not how they cosmically have to be."[146] Though limited by some constraints, human decisions can play a role in shaping and reshaping the deployment of the technological, through our already-present recognition of alternative paths—ones that are not instrumentalizing, enframing, and stock-piling.[147] Heidegger's central point, according to Scharff, is that describing *how* we experience things other than as an enframed stockpile of useful items will be quite difficult because of the pervasiveness of *Gestell* and *Bestand* as interpretive templates, "in just the way SZ showed it is hard to give non-objectifying accounts of the stuff of everyday praxis. The central ontological fact of our age is that the

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[144] Ibid., 574.

[145] Ibid., 575.

[146] Ibid.

[147] See Scharff, "Technoscience Studies," 575: "Indeed, if there were no potential 'saving power' in our experience—that is, if we did not already have a strong sense that our relations with various technologies speak of other possible ways in which things are not just enframed and life is not just set up mostly as 'one' instrumentally conceives it—we could not recognize these other possibilities as 'other' at all. Things would simply 'be' knowable and usable—and we would just 'exist' with them—as knowers and users of stockpiled things."

'materially pervasive' presence of technology" is a blessing but is also "existentially

intrusive."[148] In short, on Scharff's reading, technology and the ways of thought that it

encourages pose real threats, but Heidegger does not view those threats as insurmountable.

   Iain Thomson takes an approach similar to Scharff and explains that, where some

readers find only wordplay and the nonsensical personification of abstract nouns,

Heidegger's claim that "the essence of technology is nothing technological" is something

akin to Wittgenstein's paradox of the measure. As Thomson puts it, "Height is not high,

treeness is not itself a tree . . . that which defines the measure cannot be measured

meaningfully by the metric it defines, on pain of circularity."[149] What defines, measures, or

establishes technology, if not the technological? Thomson agrees with Scharff that the

answer to that question becomes clearer when we understand essence, *Wesen*, as a verb,

expressing the way in which things "essence" or "remain in play."[150] This means that

essence—including the essence of technology—can change and can undergo historical

transformations because " 'essence' picks out the extension of an entity unfolding itself in

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[148] See Scharff, "Technoscience Studies," 575: "We can love our information technologies and we can analyze their power and promise and fun just as concretely as we like—as long as we also consider how all this power and promise and fun happens in an ontological atmosphere that encourages us to *define* "knowledge" as information processing, to *define* "thought" as neural networking, and to *reduce* "intelligence" to having a big memory and an ability to manipulate symbols very fast."

[149] See Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 52: "As Heidegger puts the point in *Being and Time*: "If an ordering principle is genuine, it has its own content as a thing [*Sachgehalt*], which is never to be found by means of such ordering, but is already presupposed in it" (*BT* 77/*SZ* 52). In other words, that which establishes a system (or defines a concept) cannot be grounded by the system it establishes (or the concept it defines), no more than an axiom can be proved by theorems derived from it."; cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim, Schulte, 4th ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 28^e–29^e.

[150] Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," quoted in Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 144.

historical intelligibility."[151] Our present reality is not permanent; we will keep responding to circumstances and keep building worlds in light of what continues to unfold; the hope is that we will do so with an awareness of the dangers that our current technological moment makes apparent about certain forms of instrumentalization. Thomson explains that Heidegger describes our current network of intelligibility by using the polysemic term "enframing" (*das Gestell*) "because, by etymologically connoting a gathering together ("Ge-") of the myriad forms of *stellen* ("to set, stand, regulate, secure, ready, establish," and so on), it succinctly conveys his understanding of the way in which our present "mode of revealing" – a "setting-upon that challenges forth" – forces the "presencing" (*Anwesen*) of entities into its metaphysical "stamp or mold" (*Prägung*)."[152] However, such stamping, molding, setting and challenging has not always been the human way of revealing, nor must it be so in the future. We can have a free relation to technology if we recognize our historical situation, its clearing, and the other possible ways that being might show itself. As Thomson puts it, "to recognize our current constellation of intelligibility as the way being as such happens for us is to recognize our ongoing ontological receptivity in addition to our active role as disclosers of what-is. If we can incorporate an appropriate sense of this receptive spontaneity into our practices, he suggests, we can learn to relate to things with a phenomenological comportment open to alterity and difference."[153] This receptive spontaneity that leaves us open to alterity is what Adorno seeks, too; we need to cultivate mimetic practices and relations in order to

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[151] Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 145.

[152] Ibid., 148.

[153] Ibid., 72.

respect the integrity of the object (or what Heidegger would call the thing, which he distinguishes from the object. As I will discuss in more detail below, Heidegger's 'thing' is self-standing, whereas objects lack alterity in that they are constituted by domineering subjects).

Thomson considers this to be an adequate response to Andrew Feenberg's criticisms of Heidegger as a thinker concerned with merely our *attitudes* toward technology rather than with the *devices*—including their design and their social insertion—themselves. Thomson does not simply wave away Feenberg's concerns about the rule of technocracy and the profound need for democratized technological design, though he suggests that Feenberg's criticisms and reform proposals operate at the 'ontic' rather than the 'ontological' level.[154] Thomson argues that a certain kind of teaching is needed in order to achieve the ends Feenberg proposes. That is, we can combat the most pernicious forms of technocracy only through "a larger pedagogical project aimed at the level of what the Greeks called *paideia*, the Germans *Bildung*, that is, an educational project specifically envisioned to encourage the recognition, cultivation, and development of humanity's distinctive world-disclosing skills one important species of which will be those skills necessary for making appropriate democratizing interventions in the technological design process."[155] On Thomson's view, many of Feenberg's concerns and goals are compatible with those of Heidegger. For example, it may be the case that changes in attitudes and tool design are mutually reinforcing, so that "those devices which expand the arena of democratic decision making

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[154] Ibid., 63, 75.

[155] Ibid., 68.

also serve the cause of ontohistorical revolution (and vice versa) . . . Heidegger would agree with the general intuition guiding Feenberg – viz., that devices that help us expand our possibilities are to be preferred over devices that narrow our range of free decisions."[156] This insight of Thomson's is powerful because it is constructive. Though Heidegger did write with the sense a darkening cloud of doom, a sense that dominating relationships to the environment would be very difficult to alter, his valorization of *poiésis* is based on an affirmation of the possibilities still available through human activities of making.

While Feenberg's neo-Marxist background motivates the questions he brings to Heidegger's texts, David Lewin approaches the interpretive debate from the perspective of the mystical traditions that shape Heidegger's thought. He argues that we can best understand Heidegger's treatment of the modern technological condition by understanding his use of the middle voice, "an ancient linguistic mode that places agency between activity and passivity."[157] Lewin cites terms of art from across Heidegger's corpus that are expressed in a middle discourse: "appropriation (*Enowning*), unconcealment (*Aletheia*), event (*Ereignis*) and releasement (*Gelassenheit*); along with more dynamic expressions such as 'the thing things' and the 'region regions.'"[158] This grammatical construction, employed especially in ancient Greek texts, including Aristotelian and early Christian literature, "can express the sense in which our freedom is constituted in relation to what is given, and so structuring or

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[156] Ibid., 75.

[157] David Lewin, "The Middle Voice in Eckhart and Modern Continental Philosophy," *Medieval Mystical Theology* 20, no. 1 (2011): 32.

[158] Ibid., 43.

constituting elements can be located within such a realm."[159] Lewin offers several

illuminating uses of the middle voice in sources that predate and influence Heidegger's own

thinking about human agency and receptivity: ancient Greek verbs present "human making as

a fostering of what nature grants, a bringing-forth of things into their own nature" within a

teleological cosmology.[160] In appeals to visits from the muse, "poets and artists commonly

describe their relation to the work of art in terms of a form of passive activity, or less

commonly, active passivity. Michelangelo . . . suggests that the statue emerges from the

marble."[161] The insistence on the middle voice is in a sense an insistence that we accept a

fundamental ambiguity when trying to identify causal relations, relations between causes and

effects, relations between actors, conditions, actions, and reactions. In addition to the medial

artistry in the "attentive responsivity epitomised by certain Renaissance figures,"[162] Lewin

references the use of the middle voice in the command, in the book of Acts, to have oneself

be baptized, noting that "[r]eligious rituals provide probably the best examples of the

intermingling of activity and passivity. . . . Clearly the religious act cannot be complete if it

simply expresses the determinate agency and will of the autonomous subject—we cannot

simply cleanse ourselves."[163] What does ritual washing and the employment of middle

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[159] Ibid., 41.

[160] Lewin points out that in Aristotlian thought, "nature's own intentionality is creatively borne in the event of *poiesis*—or bringing forth. The teleological structure of Greek ontology is entirely consistent with its linguistic adherence to the middle voice, since intentionality resides not only within the interested subject, but the cosmos itself is replete with an order akin to intentionality."

[161] Ibid., 31.

[162] Ibid., 32.

[163] Ibid.

discourse have to do with technological fabrication and the self-assertive worldview of the modern age, one might ask? Lewin argues that our contemporary concept of human agency is shaped by and exposed in our departure from these older verbal forms. That is, "the withdrawal of the middle voice in modern languages reflects the sedimentation of the Cartesian and Kantian subjectivity that constitutes the autonomous agent of modern metaphysics."[164] Heidegger hopes to recover an alternative, writing the gymnastic sentences that he does, in an effort to break away from the dichotomy of freedom and determinism that pervades the linguistic and conceptual structures of modernity. As Lewin aptly observes, the use of the middle voice is "less a case of overcoming than undercutting" the "subject–object structure" by "addressing the ground from which the subject–object structure emerges."[165] Subjective metaphysics is the ground of that structure.

Furthering the debate sketched out above, Lewin argues that Thomson and Feenberg misinterpret Heidegger's analysis of technology as "both essentialising and fatalistic," so that "we are left helpless before the destiny of modern technology. We are slaves to a technological rationality that we ourselves are engaged in, and it is our passionate and intensifying technological engagement that makes us blind to the fatalism behind technological enframing."[166] Lewin argues that Thomson's and Feenberg's misinterpretations rest on a failure to recognize Heidegger's idiosyncratic conception of agency, one which presumes "the mutuality of being and human-being . . . a mutuality that is centrally

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[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid., 41.

[166] Ibid., 39; see also Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 47–52; Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, 14–17.

concerned with the will."[167] Such mutuality is present in the idea that "the self-showing of Being always involves the partnership of human being"; Heidegger's problem with the technological age is that "a particular form of Being's self-showing and human being's disclosive looking has become predominant. It is a looking, or revealing, that places the world at the disposal of human being."[168] Strikingly, as Lewin points out, it is the earth *itself* that "reveals itself as resources for human consumption" to the human onlooker; in this sense, Heidegger's perspective absolves individual people from bearing, on their own, the full weight of their exploitative interactions with the natural world, because he acknowledges that the exploitative disposition of the age precedes any given person.[169] And yet, despite his talk of the "destiny" of technology, resignation is not the position Heidegger recommends, because our activities contribute to the self-showing of Being in and beyond the technological age.

The Fragility of Things

In his essay "The Thing," Heidegger offers an idiosyncratic criticism of the widespread trend of reification, arguing that modern thought obscures the thingness of things by reducing them to objects of the subject's representation. That is, he rejects the attempt to equate 'object' with 'thing'. Objects are posited by representing subjects, whereas things

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[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid., 40.

[169] See Lewin, 40: "It is not simply the case that human beings disclose the earth in terms of resources. Nor are human beings inactive in this disclosure. They are the agents doing the 'disclosive looking' but equally, they are the passive agents, in receipt of Being's self showing as resource."

exhibit a "self-supporting independence."[170] According to Heidegger, modern science sees

only objects, and in so seeing, scientific knowledge "annihilate[s] things" so that "the

thingness of the thing remains concealed, forgotten. The nature of the thing never comes to

light, that is, it never gets a hearing."[171] Heidegger hopes to recover the thing, such as the

jug—a vessel for pouring libations—which is not an object.[172] This recovery can be

accomplished through an alteration in our thinking, that is, by stepping back "from the

thinking that merely represents—that is, explains—to the thinking that responds and

recalls."[173] Such responding lets "things appear as things."[174] This posture of letting and

releasing, of awaiting and replying, rejects the dominating self-assertion and the pretense to

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[170] "An independent, self-supporting thing may become an object if we place it before us, whether in immediate perception or by bringing it to mind in a recollective re-presentation" ("The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 164–65. He continues: "the thingly character of the thing does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of the objectness, the over-againstness of the object" (165).

[171] Ibid., 168. Heidegger draws on Eckhart's use and definition of 'thing' as a mystical, enigmatic term, and a term of endearment and affection: "the term *thing* or *dinc* are words denote anything whatever that is in any way. Accordingly, Meister Eckhart uses the word *thing (dinc)* for God as well as for the soul. God is for him the 'highest and uppermost thing.' The soul is a 'great thing.' This master of thinking in no way means to say that God and the soul are something like a rock: a material object. *Thing* is here the cautious and abstemious name for something that is at all. Thus Meister Eckhart says, adopting an expression of Dionysius the Areopagite: love is of such a nature that it changes man into the things he loves" ("The Thing," 174).

[172] "The jug is a thing neither in the sense of the Roman *res*, nor in the sense of the medieval *ens*, let alone in the modern sense of object. The jug is a thing insofar as it things. The presence of something present such as the jug comes into its own, appropriatively manifests and determines itself, only from the thinging of the thing." Ibid., 175. David Lewin notes that "in contrast to technological revealing, Heidegger's famous image of the jug that gathers the fourfold does so through a providential act, an act achieved not simply by the maker, or by the jug itself, but by the gathering that is made present in the unity of the jug and the world." (40)

[173] Heidegger, "The Thing," 179.

[174] Ibid.

an unconditioned and limitless human will, a pretense that instrumentalizes both the earth

and people as "raw material."[175]

The fullness of Heidegger's criticisms of techno-modernity and the substance of his

objections to a certain type of calculating reasoning can be grasped only by recognizing that

he is as critical of the subject-object frame as he is of standing reserve. For example, in the

essay "What Are Poets For?," Heidegger cautions that we ought to avoid conflating machine-

use with technology as an epoch-defining mode of comportment. Technology's

distinguishing feature is not mechanization but rather it is the framing of the human as a

subject and the world as object.[176] In this essay, these problems in modernity are all rooted in

an excess of human self-assertion, which is an excess of human willing and producing, and

this excess also means that we neglect or deny as legitimate anything outside that human

willing.[177]

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[175] See "What Are Poets For," 109: "human willing too can be in the mode of self-assertion only by forcing everything under its dominion from the start, even before it can survey it. To such a willing, everything, beforehand and thus subsequently, turns irresistibly into material for self-assertive production. The earth and its atmosphere become raw material. Man becomes human material, which is disposed of with a view to proposed goals."

[176] "Generally the utilization of machinery and the manufacture of machines is not yet technology itself—it is only an instrument concordant with technology, whereby the nature of technology is established in the objective character of its raw materials. Even this, that man becomes the subject and the world the object, is a consequence of technology's nature establishing itself, and not the other way around" (Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?," 110).

[177] "The willing of which we speak here is the putting-through, the self-assertion, whose purpose has already posited the world as the whole of producible objects. This willing determines the nature of modern man, though at first he is not aware of its far-reaching implication. . . . By such willing, modern man turns out to be the being who, in all relations to all that is, and thus in his relations to himself as well, rises up as the producer who puts through, carries out, his own self and establishes this uprising as the absolute rule. The whole objective inventory in terms of which the world appears is given over to, commended to, and thus subjected to the command of self-assertive production" (Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?," 108–9).

In contrast to this particularity-effacing, endlessly substitutable subject-object

relation—a relation that is perpetuated financially as well as technically[178]—Heidegger hopes

to cultivate a relation between mortal humans and fragile things. As Thomas Carlson puts it,

Heidegger is deeply troubled by the fact that self-assertive modern technological metaphysics

pursues and maintains a "culture where the security of replication and replacement eclipses

the fragility of the singular and the transient."[179] Disposability—in the sense of trash, and in

the sense of putting at one's disposal, dis-posing what was once posed before us—reigns.

The single-use plastic fork (an object), thrown out and then replaced by an identical plastic

utensil at the next meal, overtakes silverware (a thing). Heidegger describes the momentum

and increasing speed at which these sorts of "thought-contrived fabrications of calculated

objects," are "produced and used up. The more quickly they are used up, the greater becomes

the need to replace them ever more quickly and more readily" and thus "what is constant in

things produced as objects merely for consumption is: the substitute—*Ersatz*."[180] The only

enduring characteristic of these consumable objects is that they can be so easily interchanged

with replicas, so that what is constant is precisely inconstancy, ephemerality. Heidegger

suggests that an alternative to this self-assertive culture of disposability and calculated

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[178] "In place of the world-content of things that was formerly perceived and used to grant freely of itself, the object-character of technological dominion spreads itself over the earth ever more quickly, ruthlessly, completely. Not only does it establish all things as producible in the process of production; it also delivers the products of production by means of the market. In self-assertive production, the humanness of man and the thingness of things dissolve into the calculated market value of a market which not only spans the whole earth as a world market, but also, as the will to will, trades in the nature of Being and thus subjects all beings to the trade of a calculation that dominates most tenaciously in those areas where there is no need of numbers" (Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?," 112).

[179] Thomas A. Carlson, *With the World at Heart: Studies in the Secular Today* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019), 112.

[180] Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?," 127.

fabrication that followed rationality down a destructive path is Pascal's logic of the heart, a

logic that, as Carlson puts it, "will attend to things in their fragility and to persons in their

mortality."[181] A turn toward this logic of the heart may be the kind of turn that Heidegger

hopes for us to take, a turn away from the abyss over which the groundless modern age

hangs, the age "for which the ground fails to come" and which is therefore a "destitute

time."[182]

How pessimistic is Heidegger about modernity and the possibility of alternative, less

destructive forms of technologically mediated forms of life? He hopes to avoid both sides of

the binary of affective extremes in his diagnosis insofar as he says that "we must think of the

world's night as a destiny that takes place this side of pessimism and optimism."[183] However,

the reader would be forgiven for taking him to be more melancholic than he admits here,

given the tragic tone of his nocturnal metaphors, which question whether we have reached

the worst point of crisis (signaled by the detonation of the atom bomb) and can begin to look

toward dawn, or whether the worst is yet to come, an even darker hour, a yet more horrific

catastrophe still on the horizon: "Perhaps the world's night is now approaching its midnight.

Perhaps the world's time is now becoming the completely destitute time. But also perhaps

not, not yet, not even yet, despite the immeasurable need, despite all suffering, despite

nameless sorrow, despite the growing and spreading peacelessness, despite the mounting

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[181] Carlson, *With the World at Heart*, 113.

[182] Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?," 90.

[183] Ibid., 91.

confusion."[184] Destitute though our time may be, Heidegger gestures to a redemption of sorts: a turn. Who can take that turn? Not humans, but 'the world.'[185]

Attention to Heidegger's use of middle discourse in "What Are Poets For" clarifies what turning away from destitution might entail. Rather than assigning agency to humans who venture, actively, or who dare and who exercise their will, Heidegger instead phrases venturing and daring as receptive verbs, conditioned by a grammatical subject that makes them possible, stating that "Being each time 'gives' particular beings 'over to venture.' Being lets beings loose into the daring venture. This release, flinging them loose, is the real daring. The Being of beings is this relation of the flinging loose to beings."[186] He goes so far as to say that "Being . . . ventures us, us humans. It ventures the living beings."[187] Is this claim evidence of a residue of divine providence, of divine will in Heidegger's thinking?

Perhaps even more surprising than the claim that Being ventures us is the claim that even the "unconditional self-assertion" of the techo-modern human that he regards as so destructive is not in fact wrought and instituted *by* humans. Rather, the establishment of the self-assertion "by which the world is purposefully made over according to the frame of mind of man's command" is the result of a personified technology, or in Heidegger's phrasing, "is a process that emerges from the hidden nature of technology." The nature of that technology

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[184] Ibid.

[185] Ibid., 90: "Assuming that a turn still remains open for this destitute time at all, it can come some day only if the world turns about fundamentally—and that now means, unequivocally: if it turns away from the abyss."

[186] Ibid., 99.

[187] Ibid.

in our era is all-encompassing and seemingly irresistible, fateful.[188] Receptivity is the solution to the problem of an excess of self-assertion, according to this essay. Even creating is an activity he construes as passive to some degree, never as wholly self-generated and autonomous: "To create means to fetch from the source. And to fetch from the source means to take up what springs forth and to bring what has so been received."[189] This flowing from the source or the fount, this fluid, liquid metaphor, is familiar to readers of the mystical tradition, reminiscent as it is of Eckart's *ebullito* and the flowing sources and springs of the Godhead in the Pseudo-Dionysian texts from which he draws. In this essay, the Eckhartian and Heideggerian will does not manufacture; the will receives: "The more venturesome daring of the willing exercise of the will manufactures nothing. It receives, and gives what it has received. The more venturesome daring accomplishes, but it does not produce. Only a daring that becomes more daring by being willing can accomplish receiving."[190]

Similarly, in "Age of the World Picture," Heidegger criticizes the excessive anthropocentricism and subject-oriented autarchy that he believes to be operative in the modern scientific view of the world. He also criticizes the self-assuredness, the rigid proceduralism and the predictive calculation that he believes undergird modern research. The projection of a "ground-plan" to which all data must conform is a projection that "maps out in advance the way in which the procedure of knowing is to bind itself to the region that is

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[188] "Only in modern times does this nature begin to unfold as a destiny of the truth of all beings as a whole; until now, its scattered appearances and attempts had remained incorporated within the embracing structure of the realm of culture and civilization" (Ibid., 109).

[189] Ibid., 118.

[190] Ibid.

opened up."[191] Surprises become impossible because nature is so tightly regulated by the laws that have been posited, according to which nature is presented as "the closed system of spatio-temporally related units of mass."[192] Deviation from the system is unacceptable: "every natural event must be viewed in such a way that it fits into this ground-plan of nature."[193] Furthermore, the ground plan which determines the sphere of objects "provides the standard and constrains the anticipatory representation of the condition" in empirical experimentation.[194] The calculation and prediction posit a necessary course from which nothing can deviate: "The modern research-experiment is . . . the kind of methodology for the verification of law within the framework and in the service of an exact projection of nature."[195] Human subjects generate this exact projection of nature.

Thus, Heidegger argues that the ascendence of the human subject happens in tandem with the conception of the world as a picture—these two movements occur together and mutually reinforce one another.[196] Heidegger objects to the objectification of objects and of beings, "accomplished in a setting-before, a representing [*Vor-stellen*]" that issues in the state of affairs in which "truth has transformed itself into the certainty of representation."[197] This

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[191] Heidegger, "Age of the World Picture," 59.

[192] Ibid., 60.

[193] Ibid.

[194] Ibid., 61.

[195] Ibid., 62.

[196] "That the world becomes picture is one and the same process whereby, in the midst of beings, man becomes subject" (Ibid., 69).

[197] Ibid., 66.

objectification and certainty are possible because humanity has risen to too sovereign a position, as the measure of all things, as "the primary and genuine *subiectum*" who is the "being upon which every being, in its way of being and its truth, is founded. Man becomes the referential center of beings as such."[198]

Heidegger is disturbed by the way in which the modern subject stands "over-and-against" that which is represented, disturbed by the way the subject relates to the object so as "to force it back to oneself as the norm-giving domain."[199] Heidegger explicitly connects or associates humanism with the world conceived as picture; humanism is a variety of anthropology, "that philosophical interpretation of man which explains and evaluates beings as a whole from the standpoint of, and in relation to, man."[200] By 'picture' Heidegger means "the collective image of representing production [*das Gebild des vorstellenden Herstellens*]. Within this, man fights for the position in which he can be that being who gives to every being the measure and draws up the guidelines."[201] Modernity is characterized by our setting the measure.

By contrast, Heidegger argues that in the mode of Greek antiquity, the human "is *metron* (measure) insofar as he [sic] accepts restriction to the sphere of unconcealment

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[198] Ibid., 66–67. Horkheimer and Adorno make a very similar claim in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "In order to escape the superstitious fear of nature, enlightenment has presented effective objective entities and forms without exception as mere veils of chaotic matter and condemned matter's influence on the human agent as enslavement, until the subject, according to its own concept, had been turned into a single, unrestricted, empty authority. The whole force of nature became a mere undifferentiated resistance to the abstract power of the subject" (70).

[199] Ibid., 69.

[200] Ibid., 70.

[201] Ibid., 71.

limited after the manner of the I; and, as a consequence, acknowledges the concealment of beings and that their presence or absence, together with the visible appearance of what is present, lies beyond his power of decision."[202] Some things are not subject to human manipulation; some things cannot be decided by us, conformed to our wishes, or altered according to our plans. Some things must be accepted as facts beyond our dominating aspirations. Heidegger seeks a way to articulate how humans receive their measure from the world, rather than only projecting their own self-generated measurements.

Revealing and Freedom in "The Question Concerning Technology"

Heidegger's position on modern technology, his assessment of its benefits and its dangers, is by no means straightforward, not least because he considers the modern technological condition to be defined by a certain hermeneutical lens as much as by certain tool usages. Complicating matters further, he considers the perils and promises of technology to be neither within the full control of human activity, nor completely beyond it. In "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger argues that the respectful poesis or occasioning of the craftsperson, who responds to the givenness of the natural world and brings forth creations from it in a cooperative manner (using natural materials to the create a chalice, giving a new form to the existing forms of nature), is threatened by modern science's treatment of the world as standing reserve, as raw materials at our disposal. Rather than building windmills into the existing context of the natural landscape, we aim to master the wind. An attitude toward technology that views the entire world as already unconceal*ed*, as immediately known and calculable, cuts off the potential for genuine human technological

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[202] Ibid., 79.

creativity, the *techné* or craft that does the ongoing work of reveal*ing* new realities through our cooperative activities within the existing environment.

Heidegger's most contentious claim in "The Question Concerning Technology" is that modern technology (as opposed to and contrasted with the *techne* of the silversmith who brings forth a silver chalice) is a mode of revealing, and that mode of revealing in fact covers up some possibilities and realities even as it unveils others.[203] The revealing of modern technology is a "setting-upon that challenges" everything to become "standing reserve," so that no thing retains its character as a thing. That is, even the process of objectification—treating living organisms such as trees strictly as sources of paper, for example—fails to capture just how much power is accrued to the people or the machines doing the objectifying. Things, which are turned into objects by representing subjects, lose their ability to push back on us. As Heidegger puts it, "[w]hatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object."[204]

Andrew Feenberg offers several examples of what it means, within a paradigm of technical autonomization, for things to cease being things in relation to human subjects. In a

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[203] See Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," in *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977), 17: "What has the essence of technology to do with revealing? The answer: everything. For every bringing-forth is grounded in revealing. . . . The possibility of all productive manufacturing lies in revealing." See also Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 13: "Whoever builds a house or a ship or forges a sacrificial chalice reveals what is to be brought forth. . . . This revealing gathers together in advance the aspect and the matter of ship or house, with a view to the finished thing envisioned as completed, and from this gathering determines the manner of its construction. Thus what is decisive in *techne* does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that techne is a bringing-forth."

[204] See Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 17n16: Heidegger "wishes to stress here not the permanency, but the orderability and suitability of objects. *Bestand* contrasts with *Gegenstand* (object; that which stands over against). Objects indeed lose their character as objects when they are caught up in the 'standing-reserve.'"

paradigm of standing reserve, the actor and the object no longer operate within the same system and thus do not experience a proverbial Newtonian 'equal and opposite reaction' to each action, because enframing interrupts this feedback. In autonomized situations, "[i]n an apparent exception to Newton's law, the technical subject has a big impact on the world, but the world has only a very small return impact on the subject. The hunter experiences a slight pressure on his shoulder as the bullet from his gun strikes the rabbit; the driver hears a faint rustling in the wind as he hurtles a ton of steel down the highway."[205] Heidegger himself provides several examples of the ways in which things that used to exert a degree of independence are now subdued and constituted by the challenging, setting-forth ordering that enframing imposes: "The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather the river is dammed up into the power plant. What the river is now, namely, a water power supplier, derives from out of the essence of the power station."[206] We determine the meaning and essence of the river according to our uses; there is little response to the given aquatic ecosystem, little to no reception of the existing boundaries of the place, and though we exert a great force on the landscape by inserting a hydroelectric dam, we rarely feel an equal and opposite reaction from the water, because its energies are converted and directed elsewhere. Similarly, the mechanized food industry, which "*sets* upon [*stellt*] nature" and challenges the soil has replaced previous agricultural methods that "cultivated and set in order [*bestelle*]" so as to

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[205] Feenberg, "Philosophy of Technology," 368–69.

[206] Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 16.

"take care of and to maintain."[207] The farmer no longer "places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase" but instead sets upon the field.[208] These examples of hydroelectricity and mechanized farming need not be taken as implicit demands to return to older, less efficient, more precarious methods of acquiring heat sources and food. There is nothing romantic or attractive about famine, dehydration, frostbite, or the many other afflictions of pre-industrialized life that have been greatly reduced because of the technical innovations and interventions of the last century. Instead of criticisms, these can be read as descriptions of how we now most usually conceptualize and encounter places—as power plants and crop harvest sites, rather than as rivers and fields.

Feenberg labels this type of instrumentalization *decontextualization*: "To reconstitute natural objects as technical objects, they must be de-worlded, artificially separated from the context in which they are originally found so as to be integrated into a technical system."[209] Feenberg explains that "inventions such as the knife or the wheel take qualities such as the sharpness or roundness of some natural thing, a rock or tree trunk, for example, and release them as technical properties. The role these qualities may have played in nature is obliterated in the process."[210] Similarly, the river must be decontextualized from the species and the surroundings in which it flows in order to become the dam. Once decontextualized, Feenberg points out, things are then subjected to *reductionism*, that is "de-worlded things are

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[207] Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 15.

[208] Ibid.

[209] Feenberg, "Philosophy of Technology," 368.

[210] Ibid.

simplified, stripped of technically useless qualities, and reduced to those aspects through which they can be enrolled in a technical network."[211] Heidegger provides several examples of such reductionism: "Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium."[212]

As my earlier analysis showed, Horkheimer and Adorno criticize positivism because this reduction process is most powerful—and often most destructive—when it is achieved through quantification. Feenberg observes that "Quantification is the most complete reduction to primary qualities. . . . The tree trunk, reduced to its primary quality of roundness in becoming a wheel, loses its secondary qualities as a habitat, a source of shade, and a living, growing member of its species. The Heideggerian enframing is the reduction of all reality to such primary qualities."[213] That is a succinct, readily applicable definition of enframing, though it does not quite capture all that Heidegger means by the term. "*Ge-stell*" is "that challenging claim which gathers man thither to order the self-revealing as standing-reserve."[214] Enframing gathers us; enframing frames us to do the framing, too. It sets upon us to set upon the real in a certain instrumentalizing way. "Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the

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[211] Ibid.

[212] Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 15. This reductive, transferable process is perpetual and ongoing, in Heidegger's view: "The revealing that rules throughout modern technology has the character of a setting-upon in the sense of a challenging-forth. The challenging happens in that the energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up is, in turn, distributed, and what is distributed is switched about ever anew. Unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing, and switching about are ways of revealing" (16).

[213] Feenberg, "Philosophy of Technology," 368.

[214] Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 19.

real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve."[215] Enframing positions *us* and challenges-forth *us*.[216] Most dangerously, enframing "banishes" us "into that kind of revealing which is an ordering" and also "drives out every other possibility of revealing" so that other, less instrumentalizing ways are inaccessible and the "regulating and securing of the standing-reserve mark all revealing."[217] This banishment to a purely utilitarian sphere of objectless functions means that "Enframing . . . blocks *poiesis*."[218]

In "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger defines the revelatory impact of technology as a medial phenomenon: "Does this revealing happen somewhere beyond all human doing? No. But neither does it happen exclusively *in* man, or decisively *through* man."[219] The human actively "drives technology forward" and so "takes part in ordering as a way of revealing," but that activity transpires in a realm not constructed by the human, that is, "the unconcealment itself, within which ordering unfolds, is never a human handiwork."[220] The verbs used throughout the essay are paired with antonyms and are conjugated in a way that preserves the ambiguity between agency and reception. For

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[215] Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 20.

[216] See Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 24: "Enframing is the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in a position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. As the one who is challenged forth in this way, man stands within the essential realm of Enframing."

[217] Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 27.

[218] Ibid., 30.

[219] Ibid., 24.

[220] See Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 18–19, 21: "Modern technology as an ordering revealing is, then, no merely human doing. . . . In Enframing, that unconcealment comes to pass in conformity with which the work of modern technology reveals the real as standing-reserve. This work is therefore neither only a human activity nor a mere means within such activity."

example, when the human actively "reveals that which presences, he merely *responds* to the call of unconcealment even when he contradicts it," and when the human actively "ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already *been claimed* by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research."[221] How literally or how metaphorically we should understand this 'call' of unconcealment remains unclear. There is no doubt that the natural world sets limits on human activity, some of which we cannot ever overcome, however much we expand our capacities for manipulation.

Echoing the inverted meanings and uses of destiny and fate that he introduced in division II of *Being and Time,* here too Heidegger connects "destining" with freedom. Though destining "holds complete sway over" the human, destining "is never a fate that compels. For man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to the realm of destining, and so becomes one who listens and hears [*Hörender*], and not one who is simply constrained to obey [*Höriger*]."[222] Listening is active; constrained obedience is passive. We are neither subservient to an immutable external plan nor capable of limitless possibility. Rather, in this essay, liberty with respect to the technological development is somewhere in the middle. "Freedom is the realm of the destining that at any given time starts a revealing upon its way."[223] We freely create the destiny that cooperates with what is already revealed.

Heidegger ultimately commends action, not resignation. We must resist the threat of enframing becoming all-pervasive, so that it does not "thrust" us "into the danger of the

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[221] Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 19.

[222] Ibid., 25.

[223] Ibid.

surrender of [our] free essence" and so that our granting capacities "may come to light."[224]

Our essence is free so long as we do not surrender it. Resisting the dangers of enframing does

not mean rejecting technology; rather, "the coming to presence of technology harbors in itself

what we least suspect, the possible arising of the saving power."[225] Feenberg is right that

Heidegger recommends *reflection* on our technological condition, though Feenberg misses

the fact that such pondering and reflecting may issue in our subsequently changing actual

devices and their social insertion. Because the realm of art is both "akin to" and

"fundamentally different from" the essence of technology, it is within the realm of art that

reflection must happen.[226] The realm of art is the realm of *poiésis*, a realm of distinctively

human creations, a realm in which we may be able to make more apparent what is already

present, and to "let what is not yet present arrive into presencing."[227] Though the essay

begins with an Aristotelian meditation on the craft of a silversmith's chalice, it ends with the

hope—however faint—that aesthetics and instrumentation may be harmonized. Though

Heidegger himself was less than enthusiastic about the violent uses to which the machinery

of his day had been put, we in the present can recognize what he only faintly gestured

toward: that advanced technological acuity and the revelatory powers of art, if placed in

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[224] Ibid., 32.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Ibid., 35. In 'What Are Poets For,' Heidegger gestures to an omniscient perspective that might lead to an artistic appraisal of the world, from a realm outside the purely pragmatic: "an eye that looks out upon the integral whole of beings will receive a hint from the phenomena of rising technology, directing it toward those realms from which there could perhaps emerge a surpassing of the technical—a surpassing that would be primordially formative" (110).

[227] Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," 10.

proper relation to each other, might continue to bring forth worlds, rather than predatorily setting upon this one.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on three major problems identified by Horkheimer, Adorno, and Heidegger: the erasure of the individual, the anonymity of mass culture, and the ascendence of automized, utility-driven production. These features of modern social life, and the dominance of quantification, continue to threaten rational reflection, cooperative community-building, and poetic making. Our attempts to master ourselves and our threatening environments often result instead in an existence so repressed, so authoritarian, or so bureaucratically administered that it is hardly recognizable as something human. Alienation from the natural world, our neighbors, and ourselves persists, though these ailments are not without possible treatments. As I explained in my discussion of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the recovery of reflective self-determination is the path to a more liberated, less conformist social arrangement. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the equivalence and substitution operative in both positivism and the culture industry can be replaced by updated, non-mythical forms of mimesis that respond to alterity with respect, rather than subsuming the unfamiliar within a predictive system of control. For Heidegger, the enframing instrumentalization of the technological mode of engagement potentially can be turned from its path of destruction through aesthetic reconsiderations of the things we cooperatively bring forth. Darkness looms, but we have not yet reached the end of history.

My remaining chapters respond to the three major problems diagnosed here. In chapter 2, I show that Cusanus at the origins of modernity and Heidegger at the end of modernity offer us two different but complementary ways to understand the uniqueness of

the individual. In Chapter 3, they show us the ineluctably social dimensions of our human existence. In Chapter 4, I show that Cusanus's portrait and Heidegger's temple offer two different but complementary ways to understand the kinds of poiésis that can institute and sustain a community.

Chapter 2: Singularity in Nicholas of Cusa and Martin Heidegger

This word "unique" is a negative term signifying what is mentally inapprehensible. The absolutely unique is, by definition, indescribable.

—Arnold Toynbee

Introduction

As my first chapter demonstrated, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Heidegger see in modernity a pathological type of equivalence or enframing that reduces everything and everyone to interchangeable quantities, seeking to eliminate or incorporate alterity into a predictable, uniform, unified system. In the face of such homogenization, what alternative ways of imagining the world might be available to the modern mind? How can singularity be rescued, reconceived, reappreciated?

Why pair Nicholas of Cusa with Heidegger in response to these questions? Because he writes at the origins of modernity, and because he writes from within the mystical tradition that Heidegger received, Nicholas of Cusa's late-medieval thought yields fruit when read alongside Heidegger, whose concern for singularity he shares.[1] As a diplomat working to broker peace in an increasingly multi-cultural political situation, and as a geometer and astronomer reckoning with the meaning of the vast expanse of universe, Nicholas's philosophical inquiries were motivated by the need—still relevant to the contemporary

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[1] On Cusanus's reception of Meister Eckhart, see Donald Duclow, "Nicholas of Cusa in the Margins of Meister Eckhart: Codex Cusanus 21" in *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom*, ed. Christianson and Izbicki (Leiden: Brill, 1991). See also Elizabeth Brient, "Meister Eckhart's Influence on Nicholas of Cusa: A Survey of the Literature" in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). On Heidegger's reception of Meister Eckhart, see Ian Moore, *Eckhart, Heidegger and the Imperative of Releasement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019).

moment—to conceptualize diversity and uniqueness.[2] As opposed to the effacement of the individual diagnosed in chapter one, Cusanus's mystical thought celebrates the singular, non-interchangeable quality of finite particulars and of each human being. Cusanus at the origins of modernity and Heidegger at the end of modernity offer us two different but complementary ways to understand the uniqueness of the individual. Nicholas bases his account of unique individuals on the notion that the fullness of infinity is given to each and all—to each finite thing in the cosmos, and to each finite person, who is commanded to be free and to be one's own self. This model of selfhood, I argue, shares affinities with the concepts of 'mineness' and authenticity in Heidegger's account of the individual, whose uniqueness is defined by mortal finitude and the experience of the call of conscience. Additionally, both Cusanus and Heidegger use language that evokes an image of an infinite sphere in order to describe and celebrate the intensive infinity of each thing in the world or the cosmos.

My analysis of these themes builds on previous treatments of this broad sweep of intellectual history. For example, on the question of the individual, Reiner Schürmann also sees Cusanus and Heidegger as bookends to the epoch of modernity. The new valuation of the 'I' in Cusanus's late-medieval thought, in which the individual's normative power is freed for greater (though not limitless) self-expression, ends with a warning from Heidegger not to forget the interplay of autonomy and heteronomy, lest we over-assert ourselves. Cusanus's 'I' asserts itself as other than nature, though still belongs to it, and there is a

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[2] For an introduction to Cusanus's ecumenical work and thought, see James Biechler, "Interreligious Dialogue" in *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to the Renaissance Man*. For an introduction to Cusanus's mathematical thought, see Tamara Albertini, "Mathematics and Astronomy" in *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa*.

"heterogenous anchorage" of self to infinite spirit.[3] Similarly, Heidegger resists the notion of

modern self-possession in favor of a play between autonomy and heteronomy.[4]

I begin this chapter with an analysis of *De Docta Ignorantia*, which treats

individuality in terms of the spatial location, enumeration, and species membership of each

entity in the universe. Despite what some social critics have claimed about the deleterious

effects produced by the emergence of modern science, a careful reading of Nicholas's text

demonstrates that within the paradigm of *De Docta Ignorantia*, the quantification and

mathematization of the universe do *not* entail a flattening or homogenization of existing

entities.[5] Rather, it is precisely through the spatial and mathematical conceptualization of the

world, and the exploration of numerical principles, that individuality is repeatedly

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[3] Schürmann describes Cusanus's philosophical innovations as follows: "The I begins to assert its primacy—that is, its spontaneity—through a certain creative power and a certain freedom. To nature's anchorage in God another anchorage is thus opposed, neither a rival nor, strictly speaking, even a comparable one, but a heterogeneous anchorage. Thereby we belong and do not belong to the grand organization of ends which is nature. We belong to it since finite spirit, after the fashion of absolute spirit, contains all forms rolled up in it and can unfold them.

     In this we imitate God, who deploys nature by "explications" and "complications" of forms: number deploying the one; the complex, the simple; extension, the point; movement, rest; time, the now; diversity, identity; etc. Nature links regions together by gradual involutions. Accordingly, in the spirit that carries the forms, be it divine or human, opposites coincide. Hence the need for a "better I" above the individual I to ward off dispersion and chance, the arbitrary and the meaningless. This ideal power (the individual *posse*, not the absolute *possest*) that singularizes me is normative, a singularity that does not allow itself to be swept away by the great explicative-implicative tides. I assert myself as other than nature, an otherness that is guaranteed ideally. Here as well, then, denial is weakened, and the singular emerges from ostracism" (*Broken Hegemonies,* 272).

[4] Schürmann says of Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy* that "heteronomy (as will be seen concerning the law) and receptivity . . . say something truer than modern self-possession. Autonomy and heteronomy, then, must not be construed as the two cases of one genus, but as two traits—a discordant play of attraction and retraction—marking our pathetic site as well as the tragic condition of being that this site reveals" (Ibid., 532).

[5] Horkheimer and Adorno make a version of this claim in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "When in mathematics the unknown becomes the unknown quantity in an equation, it is made into something long familiar before any value has been assigned. Nature, before and after quantum theory, is what can be registered mathematically; even what cannot be assimilated, the insoluable and irrational, is fenced in by mathematical theorems" (18).

emphasized by Nicholas. In his mystical metaphysics, Nicholas preserves diversity rather than demanding an ultimate unity; difference is necessary for explaining, and makes it possible to conceptualize, singular individuals in the cosmology of *De Docta Ignorantia* and in the optical theory of *De Visione Dei*. Both of these texts, as I discuss below, abandon the hierarchical element of the Neoplatonic metaphysics that were so central to Nicholas's *De Concordantia Catholica*. I then turn to his meditations on optical experience in *De Visione Dei*, where spatiality is explored not in terms of the abstract extension of objects, as is the case with *De Docta Ignorantia*, but rather is explicitly addressed in terms of human perspective. Human individuality born of agency in response to givenness is a theme that I draw out from the optical theories of *De Visione Dei*, as well as from *De Ludo Globi*—a peculiar and amusing dialogue in which a bowling game serves as an elaborate metaphor for the journey of life. As I note below, both Cusanus and Heidegger describe the human will as set in motion by something beyond it, using metaphors of orbiting and rolling to explain the dynamism of the inner life.

In the final section of the chapter, I lay out Heidegger's account of individuality and authenticity in *Being and Time*, which centers around anxiety, mortality, and conscience. While both Nicholas and Heidegger emphasize human individual freedom, they indicate too the limits to autonomy, recognizing that our existence is a gift not wholly of our own doing or making. Their conceptualizations of singularity offer ways to reappreciate particularity in the face of homogenization.

Metaphysical Uniqueness and Diversity in the Infinite Cosmos

De Docta Ignorantia, or *On Learned Ignorance*, is an early work of Nicholas of Cusa's and is divided into three books: on God as absolute maximum (and the disjunction between God

and human mind); on the universe as contracted maximum (and the disjunction between world and mind), and the incarnation as absolute and contracted maximum (which allows humans to overcome these disjunctions). I emphasize the uniqueness and individuality that the treatise presents at the cosmological and metaphysical level. Difference and diversity are preserved despite the cosmological monism that characterizes earlier uses of the Neoplatonic sources that inform the treatise.

Unique ignorance, or epistemic singularity, is the opening theme of the treatise. As the title—*De Docta Ignorantia*—suggests, the central claim put forward is that absolute, complete, precise, certain knowledge is not accessible to the finite human mind. Rather, one must come to know one's unknowing, and become learned about one's ignorance. As Giorgio Agamben points out, "while humans have reflected for centuries on how to preserve, improve, and ensure their knowledge, we lack even the elementary principles of an art of ignorance."[6] Nicholas does not offer an apologia for radical skepticism nor a condemnation of curiosity, however. In the argumentation of *On Learned Ignorance*, it is not the case that nothing can be known nor that the pursuit of truth and the effort of investigation are utterly futile; knowledge can be and is acquired through inquiry.[7] As Elizabeth Brient explains by referencing one of Nicholas's own geometric metaphors, "learned ignorance here is not a simple act of resignation in the face of our inability to attain to absolute truth, but rather a way of approaching truth by means of approximations which may indeed be considered

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[6] Giorgio Agamben, *Nuditites,* trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 113–14; cf. David Newheiser, *Hope in a Secular Age: Deconstruction, Negative Theology, and the Future of Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 149n76.

[7] "The sound and free intellect knows as true that which, from an innate searching, it insatiably longs to attain and apprehends in a loving embrace" (Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond [New York: Paulist Press], 88).

better or worse, just as an inscribed polygon with a thousand sides better approximates a circle than one with only a hundred sides."[8] Still, there are limits to what can be known, a remainder of imprecision and an ineluctable inadequacy of measurement with respect to the measured. Given this fact, it is incumbent upon the learner continually to internalize the lesson of ignorance and limits, the further into the thickets of wisdom they venture. Learned ignorance is deeply personal, and must be taken up by each ignoramus for herself, as that which is her own. Cusanus reminds us that "nothing more perfect comes to a person, even the most zealous in learning, than to be found most learned in the ignorance that is uniquely one's own. One will be the more learned, the more one knows that one is ignorant."[9] Learned ignorance is a singularizing force; my awareness of the limits of my knowledge is unlike any other person's awareness of their limited knowledge. It is particular to me.

Our learned ignorance is not the only respect in which we each exhibit our own selfhood; the interior life and its expression in our activities are unique to each of us as well. Because each person is singular in their experience of embodiment and consciousness, their creative production is also unique, so that even devoted efforts to replicate a style will result nonetheless in newness, reflective of and particular to the artist. That is, "since no one person

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[8] Brient, "Transitions to a Modern Cosmology: Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa on the Intensive Infinite," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 37, no. 4 (October 1999): 599.

[9] Cusanus, *On Learned Ignorance*, 89. To what extent is learned ignorance a kind of holy foolishness? The ignorance that Nicholas celebrates is not without precedent in early Christian writings. For example, there is the adage that wisdom of the world is foolishness in God's sight, in 1 Corinthians 1:17–25. Robert Harrison points out that the wisdom of the fool is consistent with the many other inversions at play in the gospel narratives: "This apology for holy foolishness is no foolish piece of rhetoric. Note how its sermon is patterned upon the figure of the cross, with its chiastic inversions. On the crux of its revelation everything is turned around, such that the loftiness of worldly wisdom is now revealed as the fool's self-deception, while the foolishness of faith is revealed as otherworldly wisdom. Such is the truth of the crucifixion: on its cross the lowest becomes the highest, the weakest becomes the strongest, the most humble becomes the most glorious. Its theology turns the world upside down such that only a conversion, a literal turning-oneself- around, can set things straight" (Harrison, *Juvenescence*, 84).

is like another in anything, not in sense, or imagination, or intellect, or in an activity, whether writing, painting, or a craft, even if for a thousand years someone zealously attempted to imitate another in anything, one would never arrive at precision."[10] Our bodily senses, imaginative capacities, and intellectual insights leave a personal signature in the work we produce. We each write in our own voice; we paint with our own brushstrokes.

Pauline Watts argues that Nicholas echoes the Scholastic and the Franciscan dictum, *facere quod in se est*, in book III in a discussion of individual faith.[11] In that section, Nicholas says that "although one person's faith does not attain the degree of another's, because equality is impossible, just as a visible object cannot be seen equally the same by many, yet each one, so far as possible, must actually believe maximally."[12] Devotion is singular too; what it means to have an authentic connection to one's religious practices varies from person to person, so piety can never be expressed in a standardized, homogeneous way.

In addition to epistemological, artistic, and devotional singularity, Nicholas also describes the uniqueness of finite objects in a metaphysical register, through the concepts of *unfolding* (*explicatio*), *contraction* (*contractio*), and *inequality*. *Inequality* operates somewhat like a synonym for non-identity or difference. No two entities in the universe are identical to one another. Though some things may share some similarities in features such as "gender, species, place, influence, and time," each thing differs in these qualities as well. Specificity at the (meta)physical (temporal, spatial) and cultural levels entails uniqueness, and prevents the

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[10] Cusanus, *On Learned Ignorance*, 129.

[11] Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, 84.

[12] Cusanus, *On Learned Ignorance*, 199. Watts translates this as "this nevertheless is necessary, that each one believe, maximally in act, as much as is within himself" (Watts, *Cusanus*, 84).

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possibility of exact replication. Therefore, "we find equality occurring in degrees" so that "two or more objects cannot be so similar and equal that they could not still be more similar ad infinitum."[13] Difference is insurmountable in the plurality of the universe. To use the Cusan terminology, *aequalitas praecisa* does not occur anywhere within or among the multiplicity of contracted, finite entities. Sameness cannot exist in these conditions; distinctness or individuality is a metaphysical necessity within Nicholas's cosmology. As he puts it in book III, "The many things in which the universe is actually contracted can in no way agree in the highest equality; for then they would no longer be many."[14] Inequality implies difference. Furthermore, the very definitions of difference and of multiplicity imply a conceptual relationship, which requires their concurrence. As Nicholas puts it, "inequality and otherness by nature occur together. Where there is inequality, there is necessarily otherness, and conversely."[15] To exist as a finite creature is to be other; to be other is to be a unique and differentiated thing.

For Nicholas, individuality is a function not only of *inequality*, but also of *contraction* and of *non-coincidence*. Because "all things necessarily differ from one another" and because "each exists in its own number, weight, and measure," it is also the case that "all things . . . are distinguished from each other by degrees, so that no one thing coincides with another."[16] In book III, chapter II, Nicholas notes that though there are species of existing things, no two members of a species constitute the same contracted form as any other. Each unfolds the

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[13] Cusanus, *On Learned Ignorance*, 90.

[14] Ibid., 170.

[15] Ibid., 95–96.

[16] Ibid., 170.

infinite in its own way, and each has its own proportions. This holds true even as existing

things undergo changes and therefore exhibit different qualities at different times. Nicholas

describes this uniqueness as follows:

> There is nothing in the universe that does not enjoy a certain singularity that cannot
> be found in any other thing. Therefore, nothing prevails over all others in every
> respect or over different things equally, just as there can never be anything in every
> way equal to another. Even if at one time one thing is less than something else and at
> another time greater, it makes this transition with a certain singularity so that it never
> attains an exact equality with the other.[17]

Identity between two things never occurs in the universe. There is a fundamental non-

interchangeability that persists among finite creatures. Equivalence is impossible.[18]

Nicholas devotes significant portions of the treatise to the discussion of inequality as

it arises in the quadrivium. David Albertson lucidly describes the ways in which, for

Cusanus, the mathematical measurements of the quadrivium "provide a negative index of

transcendent Equality":

> Astronomical calculations are inherently imprecise because the motions of planetary
> bodies never repeat themselves but introduce perpetually new, inequal particulars. In
> geometry, although we may understand the equality of two triangles abstractly, their
> material figures never attain that precise measurement. Paradoxically, no geometer
> has ever actually experienced equality, but only more or less defective simulacra. In

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[17] Ibid., 172: "Individuating principles cannot come together in one individual with the same
harmonious proportion as in another, so that each thing per se is one and perfect in the way possible to it."

[18] Strangely, this is a reading with which Hans Blumenberg disagrees. He says of this passage of *De
Docta Ignorantia*, "This conception still gives no inner value to individuality. It only establishes that the great
number of mutually differing individuals is necessary in order, as it were, to demonstrate the *complicatio* of the
kind. Multiplicity, as such, is justified, not the uniqueness of the individual. The latter remains contingent
because the possible variations are not after all exhausted but only played through 'in examples.'" (Blumenberg,
Legitimacy, 523). I see no textual evidence for the claim that individuality is a mere contingency. As I will
discuss below, Elizabeth Brient has shown that the *intensive infinity* of each created particular entails the value
and nobility of the individual in a way that Blumenberg here fails to acknowledge. Blumenberg does go on to
say that freedom is the way that creatures come to be individuals, rather than mere instances of the unfolding of
species. "For the Cusan, the concept of freedom stands in this gap, freedom that over and above the
differentiation of individuality is a special form of self-realization for man, one that breaks through the schema
of 'explication.'" (Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 523).

music, there is no limit to how precisely a harmony can be played, or a pitch perfected.[19]

This imprecision also entails a non-interchangeable singularity of entities in the cosmos. The science and measurement of motion shows us that for any physical object (including the human), "no motion can be equal to another; nor can one motion be the measure of another, for the measure necessarily differs from the measured."[20] In physics, representational replication eludes us, as does flawless application of universal rules, because the exact repetition of movement never transpires. This is true of planetary bodies as well; in astronomy, there is no stable reference point for planetary measurement, since the sun too is in motion. Ultimately, there is a kind of incommensurability suffused throughout the universe, because "no two places precisely agree in time and position."[21] In addition to the idiosyncrasy of motion, Nicholas discusses the uniqueness, or inequality, of geometrical figures, no two of which "can precisely agree in shape or in size."[22] *Definitionally*, figures may be equal, but *actually*, no two figures could ever be exactly the same.[23] This ineluctable difference is true of each extended object and its dimensions and heft,[24] and no exact agreement occurs at the aural or sonic level either. The harmonic proportion between the many different musical instruments available (flutes, bells, human voices) never attains

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[19] Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies*, 182.

[20] Cusanus, *On Learned Ignorance*, 128.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] "Although the rules are true for describing an equal to a given figure as it exists in its definition, yet in actuality equality between different things is impossible" (Ibid., 128).

[24] "No two things agree in weight, length, or thickness" (Ibid., 128).

repeatable precision; pitch can always be perfected in the playing of music. In *De Coniecturis,* Nicholas there too offers a musical metaphor for the uniqueness of each person, directly addressing his audience, Cardinal Julian:

> singularity singularizes all things; specificity specifies all things; generality generalizes all things; universality universalizes all things. For example, in you, O Julian, all things universal, all things general, and all things specific julianize (even as in a lute the harmony lutinizes, in a cithara the harmony citharizes, and so on). This [agreement] cannot be present in someone else in the way it is present in you.[25]

Just as each instrument harmonizes in its own distinctive way, so each person "julianizes" or is personified in her own way. This can be explained by the fact, asserted in *De Docta Ignorantia* and echoed in the above passage from *De Coniecturis,* that the abstract quality of "proportion" exists only in degrees in different human beings, always differing in "time, place, and combination."[26] Put most succinctly, "each thing is in the universe in a different way."[27] The very existence of numbers and counting entails singularity. As David Albertson points out, "because every number in arithmetic is different from every other number, no two relative differences can ever coincide. No number can ever be identified with another, but only related through proportions and harmonies."[28] Interestingly, then, in the paradigm of *De Docta Ignorantia*, the quantification and mathematization of the universe do *not* entail a flattening or homogenization of existing entities; rather, it is precisely through the spatial and

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[25] Cusanus, *De Coniecturis*, in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning, 2001), 1:207.

[26] Ibid., 129.

[27] Ibid., 141.

[28] Albertson, *Mathematical* Theologies, 182.

mathematical conceptualization of the world, and the exploration of numerical principles, that individuality is repeatedly emphasized by Nicholas.

Nicholas's concept of reciprocal folding, which he modifies from Thierry of Chartres, solves a series of classic antinomies: the one and the many, rectitude and curvature, visibility and invisibility. The concept of reciprocal folding solves these antinomies, as David Albertson points out, in a *spatial mode*. Enfolding and unfolding are geometrical, three-dimensional activities that coordinate the finite with the infinite. Albertson summarizes how in *De Docta Ignorantia*, "eternity is enfolded in time; visibility is the invisible unfolding into sight," and also, again deploying examples from the quadrivium, "[n]umber is the unfolding of unity, inequalities (proportions) are the unfolding of equality, quantity is the unfolding of the point, and motion is the unfolding of rest."[29] This unfolding is not an erasure or re-absorption of finite particulars but rather a way of conceptualizing their uniqueness and distinctness.

The cosmology of *De Docta Ignorantia* is based on the highly optimistic, celebratory premise that "every created being finds its rest in its own perfection, which it freely holds from the divine being. It desires to be no other created being, as if something else were more perfect, but rather it prefers that which it itself holds, as if a divine gift."[30] Here, Nicholas affirms both the receptive quality of creatureliness, according to which selfhood or thingliness is a gift from outside oneself, as well as the creaturely capacity to hold one's own self *freely*, rather than by some extrinsic logical or cosmic necessity. Nicholas goes so far as

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[29] Ibid., 184.

[30] Cusanus, *On Learned Ignorance*, 134.

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to say that each finite creature is *perfect* in its individuality, receiving itself from the divine infinite. Creatures are not defective in virtue of their finitude and their otherness from God; rather, these are the sources of their value and dignity. As Nicholas explains in book II, "The infinite form is received only in a finite way; consequently, every creature is, as it were, a finite infinity or a created god, so that it exists in every way in which this could be best."[31] Creatures need not cast off their finitude and particularity to in order to ascend, as Plotinus or Proclus might have it, back to the One; rather, creatures already exist as divinized, in their very creaturehood.

Within this paradigm, creation is described as a plurality of created gods, each existing in its own perfection, and each receiving being *directly* from the divine. This is why scholars such as Ernst Cassirer emphasize the modern sensibility latent in Cusanus's cosmology. For example, Cassirer highlights Cusanus's rejection, in *De Docta Ignorantia,* of a graduated cosmos—present in Aristotelian and various Neoplatonic schemas—in favor of an infinite, centerless cosmos. Rather than subscribing to the notion of a "stepladder" from the sublunary to the celestial world, Cassirer notes that for Cusanus, "in the cosmic order there is no absolute above and below, and that no body is closer or farther from the divine, original source of being than any other; rather, each is 'immediate to God.'"[32] This reorientation emphasizes the irreplaceable value of each finite element within the cosmos, including each human perspective, given that God is a sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere. Each finite position, therefore, has its center within itself and,

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[31] Ibid., 134.

[32] Cassirer, *Individual*, 28. Peter Sloterdijk sees this as a way that Nicholas explores "how to envisage the being-in of finite intelligences in the infinite intelligence of God" (*Bubbles*, 570).

according to Cassirer, "its participation in the divine consists precisely in this centering, in this indissoluable individuality. Individuality is not simply a *limitation*; rather, it represents a particular *value* that may not be eliminated or extinguished. The One that is 'beyond being' can only be grasped *through* this value."[33] Cassirer's reading confirms the idea that Nicholas's cosmology requires and celebrates plurality and difference.[34]

Elizabeth Brient refines Cassirer's insight about the value of individuals within the cosmology of *De Docta Ignorantia* by explaining the ways in which Nicholas inherits and also modifies Meister Eckart's use of the infinite sphere metaphor. Brient notes that Cusanus is the first to transfer the infinite sphere metaphor from God (which is how Eckhart had applied it) to world; that is, the *universe* is now an infinite sphere. The consequences of this alteration are significant:

> With this shift in the application of the metaphor comes a corresponding shift in value. The cosmos and all of its individual parts begin to take on a value and nobility *in themselves*, as worthy objects of admiration and investigation. Interest in the richness and complexity of the newly infinite cosmos is no longer viewed as purely negative dispersal in multiplicity which must be overcome if one is to find rest in divine unity, but rather as an impetus to pursue the spur or track of the divine infinite in the unending hunt for knowledge.[35]

For Eckhart, multiplicity and creaturely particularity must be overcome through divesting oneself of images that, if retained, prevent union with the transcendent One. For Nicholas, by

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[33] Ibid.

[34] There is also a sense in which Nicholas's use of the infinite sphere metaphor anticipates the Derridian idea of playful *differance*. David Newheiser explains that in Derrida's thinking, "no point of presence is exempt from play. Insofar as *difference* is primordial, spatial presence always refers elsewhere, and temporal presence is always compromised by the past and the future. This entails that presence is never self-sufficient. . . . Derrida claims that every signifier refers to others, ahead and behind, and each of those refers elsewhere in turn. In this way, everything is related to that which is different" (Newheiser, *Hope in a Secular Age*, 23).

[35] Brient, "Transitions," 590.

contrast, each finite particular of the universe is a concrete and *creative* image of the divine, so no divestment is required. Rather, the goal is to live in light of the fact that each human is a living image. Brient makes a distinction between two different types of infinity that characterize Nicholas's conception of the infinite universe in *De Docta Ignorantia*. She argues that the universe is infinite *extensively* in that it is spatially unbounded (which is the aspect of Nicholas's thought that has garnered so much attention from modern scholars, who see him as a forerunner to the modern cosmology and astronomy of Kepler and Copernicus); however, it is also infinite *intensively*, that is, the universe is infinitely rich in each part. This intensive infinity is what gives value to each singular and unique particular within the cosmos.

Folding and contraction are the conceptual mechanisms through which Nicholas explains the relationship between creator and created particulars. Each creature is an *unfolding* (*explicatio*) of the divine one; each thing is a unique *contraction* of the whole. Within this cosmology, as Brient puts it, "Each individual creature must itself be recognized as an image of infinite Oneness unfolded or concretized as *this* particular creature."[36] Creatures, therefore, are not conceived as inadequate or lower emanations in need of augmentation, but as bearers of the fullness of infinity. Brient explains that in book II of *De Docta Ignorantia* we learn that "the universe has existence only *as* contracted in individuals . . . only individuals actually exist. But they exist as the contraction of a species, of a genera, and of the categories—that is, they exist only as contractions of the threefold oneness of the universe."[37] The quiddity of particulars—the sun as sun, the moon as moon—is accounted

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[36] Ibid., 595.

for in relation to the infinite cosmos because each one is "a reflection of the whole world in a limited, concrete form. Each actually existing thing is thus a concrete and unique representation of the whole universe."[38] The universe is present, in a contracted way, within each thing.

Hans Blumenberg explains Nicholas's departure from his predecessors in terms of his rejection, in *De Docta Ignorantia*, of a certain kind of form essentialism that is replaced by the aforementioned concepts of folding and unfolding. He says, "the individual is no longer the instance of an essential form multiplied like cookies from a cookie cutter as Aristotle and the Scholasticism that was obedient to him had seen it, but rather arises as the *explicatio* [unfolding] of the *complicatio* [folding together] of the one nature."[39] Blumenberg also links Nicholas's dynamic account of the emergence of individuals, through reciprocal folding and contraction, to a continual actualization of the divine in concrete forms (an idea familiar to modern readers who are versed in Hegelian thought). The concept of *contractio,* or restriction, has a double-sided significance: "on the one hand, it is the opposite of *abstraction*, and then it signifies the concrete object's being characterized by a drawing together of predicates each of which in itself is abstract—and on the other hand, it is the restriction of the individual, which as something actual never exhausts the range of the possibilities of its realization."[40] That is, on Blumenberg's reading, the uniquely composed

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[37] Ibid., 595.

[38] Ibid., 596.

[39] Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 523.

[40] Ibid., 543–44.

limits, boundaries, and restrictions of each thing unfold and never exhaust the absolute maximum.

Like Eckhart and Cusanus before him, in "What Are Poets For?," Heidegger calls to mind a geometric metaphor of an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere, describing the ongoing revealing—not the closed circuitry—that brings each thing into being:

> the Being of beings has from the beginning been thought of with regard to the orbiting . . . what is this encircling unifying as a fundamental trait of being? . . . only Presence itself is truly present—Presence which is everywhere as the Same in its own center and, as such, is the sphere. The spherical does not consist in a circuit which then embraces, but in the unconcealing center that, lightening, safeguards present beings. The sphericity of the unifying, and the unifying itself, have the character of unconcealing lightening, within which present beings can be present.[41]

However, Heidegger's description follows Cusanus more closely than it does Eckhart, because he portrays this lightening sphere as *intensive*, rich in each part. Heidegger describes the way in which the myriad things of the world, including animals, household tools, and even religious symbols, each comply in their own way with the surrounding world. Offering a mystical taxonomy of the ordinary that echoes, in a modern register, the cosmological descriptions of Pseudo-Dionysius and Cusanus, Heidegger says:

> each present thing, modestly compliant, fits into its own being. Inconspicuously compliant is the thing: the jug and the bench, the footbridge and the plow. But tree and pond, too, brook and hill, are things, each in its own way. Things, each thinging from time to time in its own way, are heron and roe, deer, horse and bull. Things, each thinging and each staying in its own way, are mirror and clasp, book and picture, crown and cross. But things are also compliant and modest in number, compared to the countless objects everywhere of equal value.[42]

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[41] Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?," 120–1.

[42] Ibid., 180.

Our love for these many things, and for the dead and for those to come, "belongs to the widest orbit, which now proves to be the sphere of the presence of the whole integral draft."[43] Like the continual unfolding of Cusanus's infinite sphere, Heidegger's lightening shell is open, not closed. That is, it "*does not embrace* since it uncovers and reveals" but instead it "releases, lightening, into Presence."[44] Not only does Heidegger echo Cusanus in describing an intensive richness in each thing, but he also emphasizes that all of this is "a presence of immanence," not of transcendence, and in the interior space of consciousness in which we encounter and love these things, "everything is for us beyond the arithmetic of calculation, and, free of such boundaries, can overflow into the unbounded whole of the Open."[45] Only the infinite sphere or the "lightening shell"—of the cosmos and of the inner heart—could allow such unbounded overflowing.

Like Blumenberg, Elizabeth Brient also identifies creaturely *freedom* as a feature of Nicholas's thought that distinguishes him from the Scholastic and Neoplatonic milieu, though she contrasts Nicholas with Eckhart specifically. Whereas Eckhart depicts the human creature as "a passive reflection of the identical exemplar," in *De Docta Ignorantia*, Nicholas instead "locates the most valuable and most divine aspect of the individual man precisely in his particular independence of action."[46] On Brient's reading, Nicholas identifies free activity

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[43] Ibid., 125.

[44] Ibid., 121.

[45] Ibid., 125.

[46] Brient, "Transitions," 600: "Whereas Eckhart had held that the perfection of human nature and its transformation into a true image of God could only be brought about by complete emptying of the soul's own images (*Entbildung*), for Cusanus this transformation is accomplished only by virtue of the fact that man is a living, creative image of the divine." Derrida quotes from Eckhart to explain the imageless beyond of the Godhead, corroborating Brient's point that Eckhart requires the emptying of images whereas Cusanus does not: "beyond the Trinity, one may say, beyond the multiplicity of images and beyond the created place, the

as the mark of the human, whereas Eckhart prescribes passivity, detachment, resignation, reception. As will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections, Heidegger prescribes both activity and passivity, exploring personal freedom *and* the limits of one's world and time. For Cusanus, and for the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, there is not a dissolving of self that returns to the one as in Eckart, but instead there is an injunction to take up one's own singular being.

Individual Perspective and Agency in *De Visione Dei*

While *De Docta Ignorantia* gives an account of unique particularities in the context of a whole cosmology based on unfolding, contraction, and inequality, in *De Visione Dei*, the existence of finite, singular individuals is explained in terms of an optical theory, that is, in terms of vision. The conceptual apparatus of contraction and the coincidence of opposites appears in *De Visione Dei* as it did in *De Docta Ignorantia*. Both texts consider the spatial relations and spatial dimensions that constitute identity, but in *De Visione Dei*, spatiality is thought of explicitly in terms of human perspective rather than in terms of the abstract extension of objects, and movement or motion is thought of in terms of embodied free will, using the metaphor of a sojourn or a walk across a scene.

Vision is quite explicitly the prevailing theme of Nicholas's treatise, which is in conversation with the longstanding philosophical tradition centered around the metaphorical

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unmovability without form which the Timaeus attributed, one may say, to the khora—is here found to suit God alone: "when all the images of the soul are pushed aside and it contemplates only the unique One [*das einig ein*], the naked being of the soul encounters the naked being without form [*das blose formlose wesen*] of the divine unity, which is the hyperessential Being resting unmoved in itself [*ein uberwesende wesen, lidende ligende in ime selben*]" (ibid., 3:437-438). This unmovability of the formless is the unique and wondrous source of our movability, of our emotions, of our noblest suffering. Thus we can suffer only God, and nothing other than Him" (Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" in *Derrida and Negative Theology,* ed. Coward and Foshay [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992], 120).

and metaphysical power of sight and light. Pauline Watts contextualizes Nicholas within this tradition by pointing out that vision is a mainstay of the Platonic corpus, whether in the erotic ascent of the soul who *beholds* the forms in the *Phaedrus*, or in the ethical and noetic properties of light as the source of the goodness and truth in the *Republic*.[47] Neoplatonic authors of course then develop and modify these elements in various ways. As Bernard McGinn[48] and Louis Dupré[49] have noted, Nicholas's treatment of the theme of vision, both divine and creaturely, resembles, in certain respects, Plotinus's *Nous*. *Nous* is the transcendent first principle in which intelligence coincides with intelligibility, and in which seeing coincides with being seen. This principle is immanent in all things even while remaining beyond vision. Fascinatingly, however, Nicholas reinterprets the visual in a creationist sense: God's creating is God's seeing (rather than God speaking creation into existence, as in the Genesis narrative).

Edward Cranz's schematization of the development of Neoplatonic thought casts into relief other distinctive and innovative features of Nicholas's interpretation of the theme of vision.[50] In Plotinus, there is a tripartite structure according to which (1) the sensible world of images and appearances as well as (2) the intelligible world of eternal and knowable forms derives from (3) the One, which is beyond form, knowledge, and Being. For Plotinus, this

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[47] Pauline Watt, *Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 153.

[48] Bernard McGinn, "Seeing and Not Seeing: Nicholas of Cusa's *De visione Dei*," in the History of Western Mysticism" in *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance,* ed. Peter J. Casarella (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

[49] Louis Dupré, "The Mystical Theology of Nicholas of Cusa's *De Visione Dei*," in *Nicholas of Cusa on Christ and the Church: Essays in Memory of Chandler McCuskey Brooks for the American Cusanus Society*, ed. Gerald Christianson and Thomas M. Izbicki (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

[50] F. Edward Cranz, "The Transmutation of Platonism in the Development of Nicolaus Cusanus and of Martin Luther" in *Nicholas of Cusa and the Renaissance* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000).

tripartite structure is the eternal and *necessary* order of the universe. Proclus stresses the progression of intermediaries that derive from the one, and the dependence of what is lower on what is higher in the series of causes, a long chain of gradations.

In *De Visione Dei,* Nicholas participates in the Neoplatonist traditions he inherits in two important ways. Firstly, rather than emulating the triple structure (of remaining, procession, and reversion in Pseudo-Dionysius; or of sensible, intelligible, and One in Plotinus), Nicholas transmutes these tripartite paradigms into a double structure of coinciding opposites: the absolute and the contracted. A consequence of this shift from a triple to a double structure of coincidence is a greater emphasis on divine immanence. There is an immediacy or directness of God's self-manifestation in and through the visible world, which the portrait exercise allows us to see in microcosm.[51] A corollary of this shift to immediacy and immanence is that Nicholas has therefore also modified the emanationist cosmology broadly shared by Plotinus, Proclus, and Pseudo-Dionysius. That is, Nicholas jettisons hierarchies of being and celestial intermediaries. God, who is both absolute infinity and absolute contraction, is equally present to each finite and contracted creature. This implies the elevation of the individual—a category that in older paradigms would have been subsumed by ultimate oneness.

Nicholas also participates in the Neoplatonist traditions he inherits by rejecting the notion of a highest principle that is subject to necessity. Instead, Nicholas accentuates the *freedom* of God's self-communicative act of creating. The world is not eternal nor necessarily ordered; rather, God, as ab-solute, in the etymological sense of freed from

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[51] Whereas Cranz sees this immediacy and directness and double structure in *De possest* and *De apice theoriae*, I argue that it is present in *De Visione Dei* as well.

limitation, has the unrestricted *power* to create and to in-form everything that is. This divine freedom, thanks to Nicholas's understanding of the *imago dei*, also entails human freedom. Rather than absorption in the One, each individual creature retains its perspective and its distinctive selfhood.

The valuation of the individual is a central theme of this treatise; Ernst Cassirer notes that "The *De visione Dei* taught us that the truth of the universal and the particularity of the individual interpenetrate each other, so that the Divine Being can only be grasped and seen from the infinitely multiple individual points of view."[52] The positions of each viewer of the portrait are not interchangeable or replaceable—each is needed in order to fully image the divine.

Because of the turbulent historical moment of its composition and its instructional purpose, the conceptual apparatus of *On the Vision of God* is linked to and illuminated by the social context in which it was received. Nicholas sent the text, along with an "all-seeing" portrait, to a community of monks at the Tegernsee Abbey in Bavaria. In his most recent work, David Albertson has argued that *On the Vision of God* and its accompanying visual aid were meant, among other purposes, to settle the reignited dispute between Benedictines and Carthusians about the priority of affective versus intellective experience in contemplative prayer.[53] That rhetorical backdrop partially explains the thematic centrality of coinciding opposites and the harmonization of diverse viewpoints in Cusanus's treatment of mystical

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[52] Cassirer, *Individual*, 36.

[53] David Albertson, "Before the Icon: The Figural Matrix of *De Visione Dei*," in *Nicholas of Cusa and Times of Transition: Essays in Honor of Gerald Christianson*, ed. Thomas M. Izbicki, Jason Aleksander, and Donald Duclow (Leiden: Brill 2019), 262.

vision, keeping in mind that reconciliation is a concern that pervades much of his earlier writing as well.

What precisely is the practice recommended by Nicholas, and why does it require both text and image? "Reading" the text and the image as a complementary pair immerses participants in a contemplative exercise that requires seeing, hearing, and speaking. Together, perambulating in a semicircle around this omnivoyant painting, each member of the community is meant to experience the gaze of God following him as he walks, beholding—in time, place, and material conditions—God's vision of him *and* his vision of the face of God. The grammatical ambiguity of the title of the text reflects this reversal, playing, as it does, with the subjective genitive (i.e., God's sight) and the objective genitive (i.e., our sight of God). The observing human subject of the portrait finds himself to be the object of observation, and seems at first to be the sole recipient of that gaze. But as participants ask each other about their individual experiences of movement across this newly created social space, they learn, through listening to and believing the testimony of one another, that the gaze of the portrait has followed each person, coming from opposite directions, encompassing their many perspectives, containing the whole set of spatially limited viewpoints. This "method" with a material object is meant to demonstrate, through the first-hand experience of participants, the theological claims that the rest of the treatise elucidates in more abstract terms.

As for the provenance and status of the image that accompanied the treatise, French commentators Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Falque have recently debated whether or not the visual object was in fact a Byzantine icon, a Veronica image of Christ's face, or simply a

painting of a human visage.[54] These Heideggerian readers of Cusanus offer different answers

to this classificatory question, and their answers affects how one might position Nicholas in

secularization narratives. Marion argues that the painting referred to in the text must be an

icon in both the historical and the phenomenological sense, in order for the monks to receive

instruction in the lesson of divine sight in the form of a human face: "We must specify this

figura as that which bears the universal gaze of God—in this case, the gaze of Christ as an

all-seeing face."[55] However, David Albertson notes that Nicholas uses several different terms

to refer to the visual object in the preface: "The image has three visual moments: it is a

painting (*tabellam*) that contains an all-seeing figure (*figuram*) that can be called an icon

(*eiconam*)."[56] Emmanuel Falque takes a 'profane' interpretive line on this question, arguing

that the painting was likely not a Byzantine-style icon, especially given Nicholas' own

comparisons to other contemporary paintings[57] and given that he never enjoins the

Benedictines to worship the image or pray to it: "À contempler donc, la figure n'est pas à

prier ni même à vénérer."[58] Albertson notes that for Falque, "[t]he key function is the

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[54] Albertson, "Before the Icon," 265–66.

[55] Jean-Luc Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen: Nicholas of Cusa's Contribution in *De Visione Dei*," *Journal of Religion* 96 (2016): 310.

[56] Albertson, "Before the Icon," 264. Emmanuel Falque lays out the terminological debate surrounding the portrait as follows: "Paradoxalement donc, et comme pour en marquer aussi la rupture dans l'usage, ce que le cardinal appelle donc intentionnellement *eiconam Dei* dans le *De icona* ne désigne pas ou plus l'icône, mais l' 'image', elle-même, ou plutôt le 'tableau' tout court." "L'Omnivoyant: Fraternité et Vision de Dieu chez Nicolas de Cues," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 98 (2013): 47.

[57] See Falque, "L'Omnivoyant,"47: "On tiendra d'abord pour un simple fait textuel, ou plutôt d'expérience, que l'ensemble des exemples cités de l'Omnivoyant concerne des figures d'hommes, voire d'anges, mais non pas de Dieu lui-même: le Sagittaire de Nuremberg, l'autoportrait de Roger à Bruxelles, la Veronique de Coblence, l'ange armé de Brixon."

[58] Ibid., 48.

reversal of the gaze," which "reveals the self"; though it is an astonishing painting, "it enables a rare visual experience that could, however, be reproduced in another painting, even if the subject were not Christ, God, or even religious in subject matter."[59]

In my view, the text of *On the Vision of God* supports Falque's classification of the portrait: Nicholas does not say "this is an icon" but rather uses the first person, saying, "this is an image which *I call* [*apello*] an icon of God"—I, the author of the treatise-cum-instruction manual, label it so, I name it as such, and its function follows from my naming.[60] Furthermore, Nicholas begins his preface with an emphasis on the quotidian. He promises to aid his readers in understanding mystical theology not through abstraction, nor through an esotericism that requires special initiation, but through "a very simple [*simplicissimo*] and commonplace [*communissimo*] method [*modo*]," through something ordinary, something of everyday use, namely through an exercise, or *praxis*, with a painted portrait.[61] The quotidian object is dignified by the context of its use, for it is through human means, human artifice, the "subtle art [*subtili arte*]" of the painter, and not through extrinsic divine action, that Nicholas offers to teach his lesson about perspectival vision and the coincidence of multiple viewpoints exemplified in the circumspective portrait. Thanks to the breadth of cultural experiences afforded by his many diplomatic and scholarly travels, he can assure his readers that this particular tableau, out of the many he has seen, is most appropriate for this particular

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[59] Albertson, "Before the Icon," 265.

[60] Nicholas of Cusa, *De Visione Dei*, vol 6., *Opera Omnia Iussu et Auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Heidelbergensis*, ed. Adelaida Dorothea Riemann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2000), 5; *On the Vision of God*, in *Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 235. References to the works of Nicholas of Cusa will be presented in the following order: (1) citation for the critical Latin text and (2) citation for the relevant English translation.

[61] Cusanus, *DVD*, 6; *VG*, 235.

philosophical lesson: "among human works [*humana opera*] I have found no image [*imagine*] more suitable for our purposes than that of an all-seeing [*omnia videntis*] figure."[62] The praxis enjoined by the accompanying treatise "requires a sensible [*sensibilem*] image [*figuram*] of this kind," and would be impossible without it, which is why the text and the portrait are gifted as a set to the Tegernsee community.

Nicholas explains that by traversing across the scene of the all-seeing portrait, "the brother observes how this gaze deserts no one" and thus "he will see that it [the face of the painting] takes diligent care of each, just as if it cared only for the one on whom its gaze seems to rest and for no other, and to such an extent that the one whom it regards cannot conceive that it should care for another."[63] The fullness of the gaze singularizes its recipient, appearing as if no other were included, as if none of its care is diffused elsewhere. Each person is attended to as if she matters most, treated not as an anonymous number in a collective or an indistinguishable member of a great crowd, but as an individual subject (and object or recipient) of attention.[64] Michel de Certeau describes the uniqueness and equality of each person's participation as follows:

> A work relative to each singularity frees, so to speak, and develops (*explicat*) the 'impulsion' that is interior to each singularity and reveals itself to be infinite by the very impossibility of finding a hierarchical unity between singularities. Awakened by the shock between opposites, the philosophical "praxis" *passes* from one positivity to the other, as from one perspective to the other, in thus 'explaining' the 'seeding of infinity' animating each of them.[65]

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[62] Cusanus, *DVD*, 6; *VG*, 235.

[63] Cusanus, *DVD*, 6; *VG*, 236.

[64] As Sloterdijk evocatively puts it, "From a psychological perspective: the maximum-in-minimum idea sets me apart as the only child of the absolute" (*Bubbles*, 575).

[65] De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume 2,* 31. "In this perspective, each particular positivity is no longer defined by its status in an ontologically hierarchized cosmos (a 'stair-step cosmos', or a cosmos in

Nicholas explores this concept of singularity not only by meditating on the direction of the gaze and the perspective of the portrait, but also by considering the perspective of each human participant in the gallery. In chapter six, Nicholas describes how God's face appears to each creature according to the parameters of the viewer. As Nicholas puts it, "Every face which can behold your face sees nothing that is other or different from itself, because it sees there its own truth."[66] Each finite creature has a distinctively contracted sight, restricted to the particularities of not only time and place, but to age and even to species. That is, "A human being cannot judge except in a human way," since human judgment is a function of or is "contracted within human nature."[67] Strikingly, Nicholas extends this explanation of "facial seeing" to other members of the animal kingdom, noting: "if a lion were to attribute a face to you [God], it would judge it only as a lion's face; if an ox, an ox's; if an eagle, as an eagle's."[68] God's face appears within the horizon that is comprehensible to each creature, according to its standards of judgment, its capacities of vision, its range of possibilities. To

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'degrees'), but it is the direct witness of an absolute, like a 'point of view', at once 'total, 'singular', and irreplaceable, whose relation to others manifests its infinite potentiality. In a modality now legal, now speculative, the individual has a value of infinity, whose 'impulsion' itself puts him in relation with others" (28).

[66] Ibid., 243. Some might be tempted to read this as an adumbration of Feuerbachian projection theory, according to which the human makes God in human image, assigning to God the qualities and features that are really true of people. That interpretation is difficult to sustain, given the distinction Nicholas draws in this paragraph between contracted creatures versus God's true, absolute face, which "precedes every formable face" and "has neither quality nor quantity, nor is it of time or place, for it is the absolute form, which is the face of faces" (243).

[67] Ibid., 244.

[68] Ibid.

be visible to the creature, God's face must be familiar and recognizable, rather than totally alien to or incommensurate with creaturely expectations and measurements.

Creaturely perspective changes with age: the young man, "if he wished to conceive" God's face "would fashion [it] as youthful; a grown man as manly; and an older man as elderly!"[69] Creaturely perspective changes even with the moods or affects of the viewer:

> Whoever looks on you with a loving face will find only your face looking on oneself with love. And the more one strives to look on you with greater love, the more loving will one find your face. Whoever looks on you with anger will likewise find your face angry. Whoever looks on you with joy will also find your face joyous, just as is the face of the one who looks on you.[70]

Beholding the face of God, then, depends very much upon the affective conditions of the individual. Vision is ineluctably perspectival, interpretive, and singular. Individual personhood is preserved in Nicholas's paradigm even though God enfolds all things. Creaturely individuality is expressed through the perspectival specificity of each viewer. As Peter Sloterdijk puts it, "the eye of God, equipped with absolute vision, is implanted in my

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 243. "So indeed the eye of the flesh, while peering through a red glass, judges that everything it sees is red or if through a green glass, that everything is green. In the same way, the eye of the mind, wrapped up in contraction and passivity, judges you, who are the object of the mind, according to the nature of the contraction and passivity." Tamara Albertini explains the conditions of the viewer as follows: "Ironically, it takes the experience of watching the image of the omnivoyant—whose painted eyes 'move' as we move—to come to the realization that our point of view always has an impact on the objects we perceive, or rather, on how we perceive them. The lesson learned is that the 'mechanics' of seeing can be mathematically reconstructed and, moreover, that seeing is perspectively determined, a fact of which we are not aware under ordinary circumstances. To use one of Cusanus' technical terms, it is one of many 'contractions' (i.e., one of the many subjective conditions that affect our perception). As sharpness of vision, age, experience, emotions, and states of mind influence objects' appearance to us, we also see things in accordance to optical angle depending on our standpoint" (Albertini, "Mathematics and Astronomy," in *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa: a Guide to the Renaissance Man*, 391).

own eye—in such a way that I am not blinded by its all-seeing nature, but can continue to see in my local and corporeal perspectives in the way I am able."[71]

The difference between an idol and an icon is of course a principal theme of the *De visione dei*, a point which Thomas Carlson elucidates in his comparison of Jean-Luc Marion's philosophy of givenness with Cusanus's perspectival philosophy of vision. Whereas an idolatrous gaze sets its own limits on what can appear and thus creates a mirror of its own thinking and capacities, an icon exceeds my gaze and regards me, calling me to the fact of myself as *adonné*, upending the arrogant illusion of a self-founding ego. Carlson demonstrates that "Cusa's thinking may diverge from Marion's (by affirming the finite—and creative capacities of the self in ways that Marion might count idolatrous) while in other respects resonating deeply with it (most notably by understanding the self to be constituted through iconic relation)."[72] For Marion, the failure to see the invisible or to receive divine grace is due to a failure of the will, a falling short in our finitude before an infinite goodness, whereas for Cusanus, according to Carlson, "the limitation of my vision of God can in fact be the function of the infinite fullness with which God gives his gaze to me rather than the function of my failure of will."[73] That is, my being as a contracted creature does not count as a strike against me; rather, "our finite vision of God's infinity is itself given fully by, and

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[71] Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 574.

[72] Carlson, "Finitude and Sociality of the Self: Reading Cusa's *De visione dei* with Jean-Luc Marion" *Cusanus Society Newsletter* (2015): 10.

[73] Ibid., 12–13.

within, that infinity."[74] The iconicity of Cusanus's exercise elevates rather than denigrates finite perspectives.

In addition to exploring the *perspectival* quality of the individual, *De Visione Dei* also defines the individual as an individual in virtue of her *freedom*. The human imaging of the divine is not static, but dynamic, requiring choice on the part of the contemplative. Though divine immanence pervades the treatise, and though it takes the form of providential seeing in the early chapters, this does not amount to a determinism; Nicholas repeatedly affirms human free will, agency, and decision-making. Neither divine nor cosmic necessity occlude that free will; choice remains. The human receives her being from God, but precisely in virtue of that fact, she is the "living image of [God's] almighty power"; thanks to this *imago dei,* the creature has freedom and agency. This power that we image is "free will." We choose our response to the gift of grace we are given. As Nicholas puts it, addressing God: "By it [free will], I can increase or restrict my capacity for your grace."[75]

In chapter seven, Nicholas articulates a version of creaturely freedom that many readers have pointed to as evidence of his humanism and his prototypically modern understanding of the self. Only by *being one's own* can one be and receive selfhood from God. A sense of one's distinctive identity, separate from and not interchangeable with anyone else's, is a condition not only for communing with God but for being a self at all. The self is not a shadowy illusion meant to be cast away or overcome through ascension to a

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[74] Ibid., 11. Carlson notes that "such reflection, accommodating and affirming the creature and its finitude as inherent to the appearance of the infinite, involves, thus, not idolatrous pretension or metaphysical arrogance calling for the kind of humbling or humiliation that the saturated phenomenon imposes on us but rather the humility of God's infinite goodness" (Ibid., 15).

[75] Cusanus, *VG*, 240.

higher realm, nor through annihilationist union with the Godhead; rather, cultivation of a free

self is the proper response to the gift of existence. Nicholas writes:

> How will you give me yourself if you do not also give me myself? And when I thus rest in the silence of contemplation, you, Lord, answer me within my heart, saying: "Be yours and I too will be yours!"
>
> O Lord, the Sweetness of every delight, you have placed within my freedom that I be my own if I am willing. Hence, unless I am my own, you are not mine, for you would constrain my freedom since you cannot be mine unless I am also mine. And since you have placed this in my freedom, you do not constrain me, but you wait for me to choose to be my own. This depends on me and not on you, O Lord.[76]

The fully-realized person is one who has taken up their ownmost sense of self, aware of their

particular agency and their capacity for the exercise of free choice within a limited, given

range of possibilities. In this sense, Nicholas's account of the individual and her singular

ingenuity diverges somewhat from the repetition that Mark Taylor describes as the hallmark

of *imago dei* theological traditions, which demand that we become simply a copy of a copy,

though it is true that self-relation in the above passage is presented as a means to secure one's

identity.[77]

Ernst Cassirer reads the above passage as a rejection of Pauline-Augustinian

predestination and an affirmation that "the actual religious impulse derives not from without

but from within the soul. For the essence of the soul is the capacity for self-movement and

self-determination."[78] Choosing to be one's own is the only avenue toward beatific joy,

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[76] Ibid., 247.

[77] "[S]ince the human subject's full realization of the *imago dei* necessarily entails the *imitatio Christi*, the self is actually an image of an image, an imitation of an imitation . . . by becoming a copy of a copy, the self paradoxically becomes itself. In struggling to relate itself to itself, the human subject attempts to enact the complex movement of repetition that would fulfill the divine mandate: become what you are!. The aim of this imitative repetition is self-appropriation. By means of the activity of self-relation, the subject attempts to take possession of itself and to secure its identity" (Taylor, *Erring,* 40).

[78] Cassirer, *Individual*, 65.

rather than being an act of rebellion, narcissism, or hubris. As will be discussed in further detail below, this emphasis on choosing one's self, being oneself, taking up oneself, parallels and resonates within Heidegger's account of individual authenticity.

Blumenberg, like Cassirer, observes that this passage of *De Visione Dei* shows that Nicholas's anthropology prizes the human capacity for self-consciousness that entails freedom, and that this framing of the human will is a divergence from the stream of the Christian tradition that emphasizes depravity, lack, or deficiency. As Blumenberg puts it, in *De Visione Dei*, the human discovers while gazing at the infinite gaze of the portrait that the self "is not pure lostness and utter dependence" in the face of the absolute, but is instead a creature open to self-realization.[79] Blumenberg also argues that the Cusan formulation of freedom or autonomy is really presented "as the suspension of a property relation, as a passing over of the property right to one who is 'set free' from the original property relation. God, so says the Cusan, wants man to take over for himself and exercise the original property right of the Creator in his creature."[80] On this reading, my mineness does not arise from a purely self-given law but from a transference of ownership (from God, the author, to me, the new yet still in some sense obedient owner). It seems fair to concede this point to Blumenberg and to recognize that this version of individual human autonomy is not yet of the radical modern variety. More importantly, it is precisely this placing of *limits* on human autonomy that makes Nicholas's account so resonant with Heidegger's account of Dasein, who is thrown and whose being is a gift to which Dasein must respond.

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[79] Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 540.

[80] Ibid., 541.

Nicholas's mysticism is not one of annihilationist union without distinction; selfhood is not only retained, but is a prerequisite for experiencing the fullness of divine love. Nicholas places this creaturely freedom in relationship to divine agency, praying in chapter fifteen: "you draw us to yourself by every possible means by which a free and rational creature can be drawn."[81] Free divine action and free creaturely action are simply understood to be compatible and harmonious; their coexistence is accepted at face value, not requiring further philosophical justification.

Bodies in Motion: Freedom and Repetition in *De Ludo Globi*

This type of axiomatic harmony between freedom and constraint appears as well in *De Ludo Globi*, *The Game of Spheres*. This two-part dialogue is one of Nicholas's late works. Book I is a conversation between Nicholas and John of Bavaria (future bishop of Strasbourg) and book II is a conversation between Nicholas and John's cousin Albert, an aspiring philosopher.[82] The youthfulness of his interlocutors, and the choice to explain his idiosyncratic combination of physics, Christology, and virtue-theory through the metaphor of a bowling game, reflect Nicholas's ongoing interest in and commitment to communicating with ordinary people in the everyday, practical contexts in which they might find themselves. What lessons do we learn in *De Ludo Globi*? Two themes are worth highlighting in the context of the foregoing discussion: first, this dialogue emphasizes the free will of the human individual, which the mechanics of the game illustrate. Second, there is a singularity *spatially* on the gameboard that translates to a singularity or non-replicability in the way each person

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[81] Cusanus, *VG*, 265.

[82] Watts, *Cusanus*, 191.

lives their life. Playfulness and game invention are central to Nicholas's philosophical anthropology; in this dialogue, singularity is expressed through gameplay.[83]

What are the rules of the game, and how does it teach us philosophical truths? The aim is to bowl one's ball so that it rolls in a nearly straight line and comes to rest at the center of the gameboard, a point around which there are nine concentric circles. Pitching the ball in a way that achieves this combination of motion and rest at the right time and place poses a challenge because no ball is perfectly spherical; rather, each one has a hemisphere scooped out, which causes a slight wobble and spiraling motion. If one can work with this irregularity, one can learn, through practice, to pitch the ball closer and closer to the center point, minimizing the disruptive curvature in the path traversed.

The game provides a tangible illustration, almost a concrete instantiation, of a perennially difficult and mysterious philosophical concept: human free will, or consciousness, and its power to move the body. This human freedom is grounded in, or perhaps more appropriately given Nicholas's *imago dei* theology, is a reflection of, God's freedom. God creates the universe according to God's will, which is unconstrained by anything. Not even the possibility-to-be-made that is present in things is a constraint, rule, or

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[83] Nicholas is of course neither the first nor the last philosopher to use play for pedagogical ends. For beautiful exploration of theme of playing and playfulness in Plato, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, see David Krell, "Towards an Ontology of Play: Eugen Fink's Notion of *Spiel*," *Research in Phenomenology* 2 (1972): 62–93. There is conceptual power in the fact that "play mixes the real and unreal: in play the real and unreal rise and fall together" (88). Heidegger asks in *Satz vom Grund,* "Can the essence of play be appropriately determined out of Being as Ground, or must we think Being and Ground, Being as the abyss, out of the essence of play; precisely that play into which we mortals, and we alone, are brought, insofar as we dwell in nearness to death; which enables the outermost possibility of Dasein to be the highest illumination of Being and its truth? Death is the still unthought standard of the immeasurable, that is, of the highest play which brings man to earth and establishes him there" (Heidegger, quoted in Krell, "Towards," 91).

limit to which God is subject, for God *made* that very possibility.[84] The interlocutors of the

dialogue begin by comparing the motion of the stars to the motion of the bowling ball in the

game. The universe may be initially set in motion by God, though it enjoys a degree of

autonomy once it receives its first 'push'.[85] Similarly, the ball rolls along the gameboard

without additional interference from or interaction with the bowler once she pitches it. The

interlocutors move from this discussion of the physics of the cosmos to a meditation on the

individual human mind or soul. They compare the motion of the bowling ball in the game to

the movement of the body in daily life, and they compare the 'throw' of the player to the will

or the soul, which directs the body's movement.[86] The ball moves independently once set in

motion by me, just as the human soul (or mind, or consciousness) moves independently once

brought into existence by God. That is, the human can exercise her will *freely*, through *self-*

movement; the human is not simply an extension or repository of divine spirit, an inert

substrate dependent upon an external force, but has the capacity for self-direction.[87] In "What

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[84]"The world was created as perfect as it could be. For it was created to be that which it could be created to be. Moreover, its possibility-of-being-made was also made. But that-which-was-made's possibility-of-being-made is not the Omnipotent God's absolute power-to-make . . . it is not the case that each thing's possibility-of-being-made is the same thing as God's power-to-make. From this fact we see that God created the world according as he willed to" (Cusanus, *De Ludo Globi*, in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, 2:1190).

[85] "John: How did God create the motion of the outermost sphere [of the heavens]?
Cardinal: In a way resembling how you create the motion of the bowling-ball. For that [outermost] sphere is not being moved by God the Creator or by the Spirit of God—even as the bowling-ball is not being moved by you or by your spirit when you see the ball hastening onwards, even though you have set it in motion when executing your will through a hand-throw and when imparting to the ball the impetus by which, while it lasts, the ball is moved" (Ibid., 2:1192).

[86] "John: The comparison of the bowling-ball to the body and of its motion to the soul is especially pleasing. A man makes a bowling-ball and produces its movement, which he impresses upon it with an impetus; and the [impressed-movement] is invisible, indivisible, and present at no place—even as [is true of the movement of] our soul" (Ibid., 2:1192).

Are Poets For?," Heidegger offers a strikingly similar metaphor to that of Cusanus's bowling game; he speaks of our will as set in motion by something outside us: "When we are touched from out of the widest orbit, the touch goes to our very nature. To touch means to touch off, to set in motion. Our nature is set in motion. The will is shaken by the touch so that only now is the nature of willing made to appear and set in motion. Not until then do we will willingly."[88] In both Cusanus and Heidegger, human freedom and autonomy are presented within a set of limits, rather than being self-founding.

Toward the end of Book I of the dialogue, the Cardinal emphasizes that freedom of will and its attendant powers of judgment are distinctively *human*, allowing us to choose, to know, and to enact the good.[89] It is striking that Nicholas would choose an example so connected to *physics* in order to demonstrate *free will*. In the modern paradigm, physics is the domain in which we seem to have the least freedom, since it is governed by universal rules and principles impervious to human intention; the laws of motion are the laws to which we are subjected, and over which we have no power. Physics is the branch of the sciences most available to mathematical modeling because of its conformity to formulae. Perhaps the choice to stage the drama of human freedom in a board game circumscribed by the rules of motion shows just how committed Nicholas is to a harmonious view of nature; our free will

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[87] "Cardinal: . . . For it is not the case that God is the soul or that the Spirit of God moves a man. Rather, according to the Platonists, there is created in you a self-moving motion: viz., the rational soul, which moves itself, and all that constitutes you" (Ibid.).

[88] Heidegger "What are Poets For?," 123.

[89] "Cardinal: . . . each man has free choice, i.e. the power to will and not to will; he knows [the difference between] virtue and vice, [between] what is honorable and what is dishonorable, what is just and what is unjust, what is laudable and what is reprehensible, what is glorious and what is shameful. And he knows that good is to be chosen, whereas evil is to be shunned; for he has within himself a king and a judge, over those things which, since brute-animals are ignorant of them, belong to man qua man" (Cusanus, *De Ludo Globi*, 2:1211).

can coexist peacefully within the ordering of the cosmos, of which the gameboard is a microcosm.

In addition to the theme of free will, *De Ludo Globi* also presents an image of human singularity, spatially and morally (or, existentially); these two levels are coordinated in the metaphor of the bowling game. Christian traditions have long understood the *life* of Jesus (i.e., his healing activities and his preaching, not simply his crucifixion and resurrection) to be exemplary, a model from which moral lessons can be drawn and which warrants emulation. Much of early Christian literature, especially the canonical gospels, includes discussion of the movement or set of practices inaugurated by Jesus as The Way, as in a pathway, a road, straight and narrow, to be traversed on a journey with crooked byways and divergences to avoid. This metaphor implicitly connects the spatial and the moral. Heidegger and Kierkegaard also frequently invoke the metaphor of a way or a path in their meditations on philosophy as a lifestyle.[90]

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[90] Iain Thomson provides the following fascinating etymology: "As the Oxford English Dictionary recounts, the etymology of "teach" goes back through the Old English tæcan or tæcean. One of the first recorded uses of the word in English can be found in The Blickling Homilies, a.d. 971 "Him tæcean lifes weg." Heidegger would have appreciated the fortuitous ambiguity of weg or "way" here, which, like the Greek *hodos*, means both path and manner. For Heidegger too, the teacher teaches two different "ways," both what and how, subject and method. The Old English *tæcean* has near cognates in Old Teutonic (*taikjan*), Gothic (*taikans*), Old Spanish (*tekan*), and Old High German (*zeihhan*), and this family can itself be traced back to the pre-Teutonic deik-, the Sanskrit dic̦-, and the Greek deik-nunai, deigma. Deik, the Greek root, means to bring to light, display, or exhibit, hence to show by words" (Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 166). Heidegger advises a student to continue his sojourn along the winding path of inquiry: "Everything here is the path of a responding that examines as it listens. Any path always risks going astray, leading astray. To follow such paths takes practice in going. Practice needs craft. Stay on the path, in genuine need, and learn the craft of thinking, unswerving, yet erring" ("Letter to a Young Student," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 184). For Derrida, the desert of the wandering mystic is the unmarked way: "Isn't the desert a paradoxical figure of the aporia? No [*pas de*] marked out [*tracé*] or assured passage, no route in any case, at the very most trails that are not reliable ways, the paths are not yet cleared [*frayés*], unless the sand has already re-covered them. But isn't the uncleared way also the *condition* of *decision* or *event*, which consists in opening the way, in (sur)passing, thus in going beyond? In (sur)passing the aporia?" ("Sauf le Nom," 54); see also Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. Howard V Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 292.

Nicholas makes this connection almost literal in his presentation of the path or way conceived as the trajectory of a moving object on its course toward a center point. The game "symbolizes the movement of our soul from its own kingdom unto the kingdom of life."[91] We have been given an example, in Jesus, of how to roll our own bowling ball so that it arrives at this center of life on the game board. Importantly, however, the goal is not automatic replication of the Christic ideal. Rather, our taking up of this moral example is what singularizes each of us. As the Cardinal in the dialogue explains, "it is impossible that another ball come to rest at the [exact] same center of life at which Christ's ball comes to rest. For within a circle there are an infinite number of places and mansions. For the bowling-ball of each individual comes to rest at its own point and atom, at which no other ball can ever arrive."[92] Even in the context of the virtuous imitation of Jesus, a prescription held out for all members of the Christian community, Nicholas emphasizes the uniqueness of each person, whose life lived cannot be exchanged with any other, and whose place within the circle is its own distinctive locale. Individual uniqueness is also maintained as we attempt to imitate other virtuous people in our lives. This uniqueness is partly a function of our distinctive inner landscapes, our personal histories and desires, our particular foibles and weaknesses.[93] We each perform idiosyncratically, in the microcosm of the game and in the macrocosm of our lives, and none of this is calculable in advance: "one man throws the ball in one manner, another in another manner. . . . In accordance with the varying impulse, the

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[91] Cusanus, *De Ludo Globi*, 2:1207.

[92] Ibid., 2:1207.

[93] "This is the deepest symbolism of this game: viz., that we learn how to straighten out, by the practice of virtue, these inclinations and natural curvatures—to do so in such a way that at length, after many variations and unstable circular movements and curvatures, we come to rest in the kingdom of life" (Ibid., 2:1209).

bowling-ball is moved differently and stops at different places; and before it stops, we never know for sure where it will finally stop."[94] We cannot predict with ironclad accuracy where our efforts will take us, because we are each composed, shaped, and slightly defective in our own ways. Despite being fifteenth-century characters, the two interlocutors describe the human condition in strikingly existential terms:

> John: Each man is his own bowling-ball, curved differently from [any] other bowling ball. Therefore, one man cannot imitatingly follow another.

> Cardinal: That's true. No one can follow precisely the pathway of another. Rather, each man, by exerting himself, must govern the inclinations and tendencies of his own bowling-ball.[95]

Because we each manage a set of inner drives and impulses that are unique to us, we cannot and ought not reproduce the exemplary pathway of anyone else. These two speakers do not assert such radical moral freedom that no conformity to communal rules could ever be achieved, however. Imitation is fruitful, not futile.[96] Through practice and repeated effort, we can each learn to manage our 'curvatures' such that we live virtuously. This is another example of Nicholas's optimism about the human condition and the power and freedom of the human will; we are not so deformed that we rely entirely on divine grace to rescue us from our swerving and devious deviations, as traditions that subscribe to depravity and original sin would have it. Rather, we can cope with our imperfections such that, through training, we can learn to move along a path toward a lifegiving existence.

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[94] Ibid., 2:1209.

[95] Ibid.

[96] "After a while, made temperate in this manner, he strives to find a way whereby the curvature of his bowling-ball does not prevent its arriving at the circle of life. This is the symbolic power of the game: that even a curved bowling-ball can be controlled by the practice of virtue, so that after many unstable deviations of movement, the ball stops in the kingdom of life" (Ibid., 2:1209.)

Individuality and Authenticity in *Being and Time*

Though they approach the task from very different historical vantage points and methodological perspectives, both Nicholas and Heidegger hope to philosophically justify and set forth an account of the uniqueness of the individual. The quandary of personal identity, and the extent to which we have the freedom to construct and retain it, is a central question of *Being and Time*. For both Nicholas and Heidegger, choice or decision in response to givenness is an essential part of what it means to be an individual, to have a self. Whereas Nicholas explores that theme within the framework of a philosophical anthropology that can be described as a kind of Christological Neopythagoreanism, Heidegger explores singular personhood in characteristically modern terms, by focusing on anxiety, mortality and individual conscience. Whereas Nicholas celebrates the infinite, ordered universe and the harmoniously free creatures within it, Heidegger takes into account the suffering and failure that inevitably come with individual freedom.

The 'Being' under discussion in *Being and Time* is in each case personal, or as Heidegger puts it, the Being of any human is "*in each case mine.*"[97] Each human is so singular that they cannot be classified together under a generic or general category, and, when doing a certain kind of philosophical analysis, ought never be taken as "an instance or special case of some genus of entities."[98] This self-possession, this having my own being, entitles me to be treated as a subject, not an object. Once we recognize the uniqueness of each human, we see that we must use language appropriate to and reflective of this kind of

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[97] Heidegger, *BT*, 67.

[98] Ibid., 68.

subjectivity: "Because Dasein has *in each case mineness* [*Jemeinigkeit*], one must always use a *personal* pronoun when one addresses it: 'I am', 'you are'."[99] Every person is *sui generis*. Though freedom is conditioned, not radical, it is still the case that choice is a dimension of Heidegger's definition of Dasein insofar as "Dasein has always made some sort of decision as to the way in which it is in each case mine [*je meines*]."[100] Rather than total passivity or the sense of having fallen victim to fate, Heidegger's initial remarks on mineness emphasize situationally delimited individual decision and some degree of agency as features of human subjectivity.

In the anthropological themes of *Being and Time*—especially those of death, care, guilt, and anxiety—Jacques Derrida sees a reiteration of Christian theological motifs inherited from Eckhart and Kierkegaard, among others.[101] In Division I, section VI, Heidegger explains the individualizing effect of anxiety. Anxiety has a hermeneutic effect that seems to be revelatory, insofar as anxiety "takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself . . . in terms of the 'world' and the way things have been publicly interpreted."[102] Collectively constructed meaning and semiotic consensus drop out. Anxiety

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[99] Ibid. In what seems like an act of irony or performative contradiction, Heidegger goes on for the subsequent several hundred pages of *Being and Time* to refer to Dasein with the impersonal pronoun *it*.

[100] Ibid., 68.

[101] "Despite all the distance taken from anthropo-theology, indeed, from Christian onto-theology, the analysis of death in *Being and Time* nonetheless repeats all the essential motifs of such ontotheology, a repetition that bores into its originarity right down to its ontological foundation, whether it concerns the fall, the *Verfollen,* into the inauthenticity of relaxation or distraction, or the *sollicitudo,* the *cura,* and the care *(Sorge),* or sin and originary guilt *(Schuidigsein)*, or anxiety, and, regarding the texts, whether it concerns St. Augustine, Meister Eckhart, Pascal, Kierkegaard, or a few others. Whatever the enigma of this repetition, as well as of the concept of repetition deployed by Heidegger . . . neither the language nor the process of this analysis of death is possible without the Christian experience, indeed, the Judeo-Christiano-Islamic experience of death to which the analysis testifies" (Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993], 80).

[102] Ibid., 232.

has an interiorizing effect as well; rather than attending to the features of the external world,

such as the ripple of the water and the color of the trees and the sky at the lagoon where one

has taken a stroll, "[i]n anxiety what is environmentally ready-to-hand sinks away, and so, in

general, do entities within-the-world."[103] Anxiety causes social withdrawal and

disconnectedness.[104] Anxiety acts as an almost violent force that "throws Dasein back" upon

its "authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world."[105] Yet anxiety also has clarifying effect:

vision becomes clearer, as if shocked out of stupor and lethargy.[106] *Freedom* is what

"[a]nxiety makes manifest in Dasein" and this anxiety is what "brings Dasein face to face

with its *Being-free for* the authenticity of its Being."[107] Anxiety precipitates and elicits a

face-to-face encounter with one's own freedom, and as a consequence, "anxiety

individualizes Dasein and thus discloses it as 'solus ipse,'" though Heidegger is quick to state

that he does not espouse solipsism.[108]

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[103] Ibid.

[104] "The 'world' can offer nothing more, and neither can the Dasein-with of Others" (Ibid., 232).

[105] Ibid.

[106] Robert Harrison points out the ways that anxiety is the source of our distinctively human cultural production: "we should approach with caution Nietzsche's claim that "the instinct of fear bids us to know," for if fear alone could motivate the will to know, all of living nature would seek after knowledge. It requires a distinct form of anxiety—a tear in the fabric of instinct, reflex, and routine—to jolt a species into conceptual mediation, sense-making, and language" (*Juvenescence*, 12).

[107] Ibid. This sounds strikingly similar to Kierkegaard's description of anxiety as an awareness of freedom and possibility: "anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness . . . in that very moment everything is changed, and freedom, when it again rises, sees that it is guilty" (Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety,* ed. Reidar Thomte [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980], 61).

[108] Heidegger, *BT*, 233.

Does this individualization by and in anxiety withdraw me from the world, or does it insert me back into the world? Or does it somehow do both? On the one hand anxiety is described as a this-worldly kind of awakening to the ordinary and immediate and everyday, as an experience that brings "Dasein face to face with its world as world, and thus bring[s] it face to face with itself as Being-in-the-world."[109] Anxiety brings about a heightened awareness of one's circumstances and one's social and cultural context. On the other hand, only a few lines later, Heidegger describes anxiety as a profoundly alienating experience, one that sounds more like withdrawal and distance than a proximate encounter with the world. "[A]nxiety brings [Dasein] back from [Dasein's] absorption in the 'world.' Everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein has been individualized, but individualized *as* Being-in-the-world. Being-in enters into the existential 'mode' of the 'not-at-home."[110] The central feature of anxiety is that it is revelatory, even if alienating, because the individualization it brings about "makes manifest to [me] that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of [my] Being," possibilities that are ordinarily disguised "by entities-within-the-world." [111] Anxiety reminds us of, or opens a perspective upon, possible ways we can choose to live, ways that are either self-directed and intentional (authentic) or thoughtless, habitual, and in some cases, rigidly conformist to social expectations and mores (inauthentic).

In addition to anxiety, *death* individualizes us. Death shows us how non-interchangeable we each are. No one can step in, replace, or represent me in my death, and

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109 Ibid.

110Ibid.

111 Ibid., 235.

no one can take it over for or from me. Derrida highlights the way in which Heidegger's treatment of death, or mortality, demands that it be the central category through which the human as such is assessed.[112] Derrida also notes that death for any given person, as Heidegger points out, is precisely "the possibility of an impossibility" in the face of which we ask in bewildered puzzlement, "how can we *think* that? How can we *say* it while respecting logic and meaning? How can we approach that, live, or *exist* it? How does one *testify* to it?"[113] Death is thus paradigmatically aporetic. Death is both secret and public, both mundane and inaccessibly mysterious. Insofar as it individuates me and yet stands as something I cannot personally witness, "*death* is always the name of a secret, since it signs the irreplaceable singularity."[114]

Our mortality is a burden we each carry, and which is non-transferable. Heidegger points out that "no one can take the Other's dying away from him. . . . By its very essence, death is in every case mine, in so far as it 'is' at all."[115] Though loved ones may mourn me and be stricken with grief at my transition from life to death, though hospice workers may labor at my bedside tenderly up until the last breath, though someone may even try to die in my stead (for example, by offering an organ transplant so that I can live, or by volunteering themselves for execution in exchange for my release from such a lethal sentence), at its root,

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[112] "If the distinction between (properly) *dying* and *perishing* cannot be reduced to a question of terminology, if it is not a linguistic distinction, for Heidegger (extending well beyond *Being and Time)* it nevertheless marks the difference *of* language, the impassable difference between the speaking being that *Dasein* is and any other living thing. *Dasein* or the mortal is not man, the human subject, it is that in terms of which the humanity of man must be rethought" (Derrida, *Aporias*, 35).

[113] Derrida, *Aporias*, 68.

[114] Ibid., 74.

[115] Ibid., 284

my death is utterly singularizing and unreachable, untouchable, impenetrable by any social supports that sustained me during life. Derrida points out that though we have many communal rituals surrounding death, though many cultural practices arise in response to our incurable mortality, there is not nor can there ever be a rite or a culture of death itself, because death itself is impossible to experience. In this sense, death is profoundly singularizing.[116]

This is why Heidegger can justifiably say that "death reveals itself as that possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped."[117] No other possibility is as distinctive to me as my death, and nothing about my relationships with other people in any way alters this fact. My death "is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there" and if I stand before myself "as this possibility, [I have] been fully assigned to [my] ownmost potentiality-for-Being. When [I] stand before [my]self in this way, all [my] relations to any other Dasein have been undone."[118] There is no denying that the possibility and eventual fact of my ceasing to be is unique to me, and most consequential to me. Death,

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[116] "There can be an anthropology or a history of death, there can be culturologies of demise, ethnologies of mortuary rites, of ritual sacrifice, of the work of mourning, of burials, of preparations for death, of the cleansing of the dead, of the languages of death in general, of medicine, and so on. But there is no culture of *death* itself or of *properly dying.* Dying is neither entirely natural (biological) nor cultural. And the question of limits articulated here is also the question of the border between cultures, languages, countries, nations, and religions, as well as that of the limit between a universal (although non-natural) structure and a differential (non-natural but cultural) structure" (Derrida, *Aporias*, 42).

[117] Heidegger, *BT*, 294.

[118] Ibid. Derrida elucidates this Heideggerian passage as follows: "The impossibility of existing or of *Dasein* that Heidegger speaks of under the name of 'death' is the disappearance, the end, the annihilation of the *as such,* of the possibility of the relation to the phenomenon *as such* or to the phenomenon of the *'as such.'* The impossibility that is possible for *Dasein* is, indeed, that there not be or that there no longer be *Dasein:* that precisely what is possible become impossible, from then on no longer appearing as such. It is nothing less than the end of the world, with each death, each time that we expect no longer to be able to await ourselves and each other *[nous attendre],* hence no longer to be able to understand each other *[nous entendre]*" (Derrida, *Aporias*, 75).

therefore, differentiates me from all others. "Death does not just 'belong' to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death lays claim to it as an individual Dasein."[119]

As with anxiety, the individualization that mortality gives me has a revelatory or clarifying effect, one that "makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with Others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being is the issue."[120] It is understandable that some commentators have read Heidegger as morose and isolationist[121] given lines like this, which say that the individualizing claim of death renders as failures our relations with things, circumstances, practices, activities, and human relationships. In a similar vein, Jean-Luc Marion reads Heidegger's description of resoluteness and self-constancy in *Being and Time* as evidence of an autarchic, non-relational, solitary subject.[122] Against this view, Thomas Carlson argues that the singularity given by our mortality does not entail autarchy; rather, "the mortality Heidegger elucidates is integral to a love that his writing does in fact repeatedly reference."[123] The attentive reader

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[119] Heidegger, *BT*, 308.

[120] Ibid.

[121] For example, Peter Sloterdijk describes the *Dasein* of *Being and Time* as "a lonely, weak, hysterical-heroic existential subject that thinks it is the first to die" (*Bubbles*, 341).

[122] "Dasein therefore exists insofar as itself, and its resolution resolves nothing because there is nothing it has to resolve, since for Dasein it was only a matter of risking itself in its own Being. Selfhood has to do with it alone. Whence a new solipsism, no longer ontic (being-in-the-world preserves it), but ontological (the transcendence of Dasein secures it). This requirement is doubtless based on the neutrality of Dasein (without ethics, face, or sex), but it is also a remnant of the metaphysical transcendental 'subject.' (b) This remnant explains why selfhood can also be understood as a self-constancy-in-person or an autoconstancy (*Selbst-standigkeit*)" (Marion, *Being Given*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002], 260). See also, "Without a doubt, Heidegger abolishes the permanence of *ousia* and the *res cogitans* in Dasein; and yet the autarchy of the Self, which he maintains, goes so far as to just touch the strange title 'constantly present-at-hand ground'" (Ibid).

[123] Carlson, *With the World at Heart*, 116. Carlson goes on to note that the authenticity that an awareness of mortality way provoke is not characterized by withdrawal but by relationality: "My 'authenticity' [*Eigentlichkeit*], which does not mean my 'real' or 'true' self (the one behind all the appearances) but rather my

must also keep in mind Heidegger's remarks from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, in which he insists that our finite individuation need not be always alienating but can instead bring us into closer connection to and proximity with our environment.[124] George Pattison argues that Heidegger, in focusing on human finitude and mortality as the source of individual identity, followed Schleiermacher who "sought to re-envision Christian teaching on immortality in such a way as to give greater emphasis to the infinite quality of life in this world than to speculations on human beings' post-mortem states."[125] In this sense, Heidegger's focus on mortality and death is in fact an attempt to reiterate the value of this-worldly existence.

It is a counterintuitive claim that my most singular potential for *Being* and living is in fact my ceasing to live. Surely each moment of my *life*, rather than the instance of my death, is what is my ownmost? Once I am dead, there is no me to have as mine. Why give death such a special status in bestowing individual identity? There are myriad aspects of my personal existence that cannot be taken over from me by others—isn't the uniqueness of my *lived* experience the central idea of existential philosophy? Heidegger would say it that it is the fact that my life is limited and finite rather than unlimited and ever-ongoing that gives it

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existence in its inescapable and nontransferable character, proves here to be not, indeed, a possession, and still less a self-possession, but a gift given *in and as relation* with another: my existence is most 'my own' when I find it—which is to say when I receive it—*in* the love that gives me to myself in giving me over to one whom I never own or possess" (130–1).

[124] "In becoming finite, there ultimately occurs an *individuation* of man with respect to his Dasein. Individuation—this does not mean that man clings to his frail little ego that puffs itself up against something or other which it takes to be the world. This individuation is rather that *solitariness* in which each human being first of all enters into a nearness to what is essential in all things, a nearness to the world" (Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995] 6).

[125] George Pattison, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Theological Essay* (Burlington: Ashgate), 5.

its meaning and preciousness, that makes each choice count, that makes my time, and the way I choose to spend it, valuable. Because there is no cosmic do-over available, and because there is no going back to repeat this stage of life even if I feel I chose poorly or thoughtlessly on these occasions or that fate dealt me a bad hand, my mortal finitude shows me what I can make of my life as it unfolds and irretrievably slips away. My mortality is what structures my self-directedness and my acceptance of and activities within my circumstances.

It is undeniable that no amount of money, pleasure, achievement, medical intervention (at least with current technology) or friendship can deliver me or save me from the fact of my mortality, my eventual termination, my ceasing to live as this person in this body in this world. Living in light of this fact, rather than in denial or ignorance of this fact, is the form of authenticity and freedom that Heidegger calls *anticipation*. Anticipation accepts rather than evades the inescapability of death such that one can then *choose* the direction of one's life rather than passively submitting to circumstances. "When, by anticipation, one becomes free *for* one's own death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factical possibilities" that lie open.[126] This liberation is a recognition of my mortality, which gives the world and myself back to me so that instead of frittering, treading water, languishing, conforming, or surrendering, I can seize the day. I can self-reflectively choose the direction, mode, and attitude of my life (within the limited range of options available). I can act decisively, aware of my desires, based on my judgments. As George Pattison puts it,

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[126] Ibid.

"Dasein qua capable of freely and resolutely running towards this impossible possibility [death] can, as it were, reclaim and take on its thrownness . . . even the thrown self can be the agent of its own world of meaning."[127]

In addition to the singularizing effects of anxiety and anticipation of death, *conscience* singularizes us. What is conscience? It is a call [*Ruf*], from myself to myself, which summons me to my "ownmost potentiality-for-Being-[my]-Self" and to my "Being-guilty."[128] Conscience is *not* "some psychical faculty such as understanding, will, or feeling," because it does not have such a formal structure.[129] In the call of conscience, "what is it that is talked about" is "[m]anifestly Dasein itself."[130] Conscience operates somewhat mysteriously in Heidegger's account, as a call whose origin, content, and telos remain non-discursive and non-identifiable, even though it is unique to me and generated by me, the self calling to the self. "'It' calls, against our expectations and even against our will. On the other hand, the call undoubtedly does not come from someone else who is with me in the world, nor does it come from an external divine source. The call comes from me and yet from beyond and over me."[131] My voice is the one I hear in the call of conscience even though it is a voice that somehow exceeds or transcends me. "In its 'who,' the caller is definable in a 'worldly' way by nothing at all" because the caller is *me* in my "uncanniness" as the "'not-at-

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[127] Ibid., 47–48.

[128] Ibid., 314. This echoes Kierkegaard's claim in *Concept of Anxiety* that "Freedom succumbs in this dizziness . . . in that very moment everything is changed, and freedom, when it again rises, sees that it is guilty" (61).

[129] Pattison, *Heidegger*, 317.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid., 320.

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home'" and is "something like an *alien* voice."[132] The voice sounds so alien and unfamiliar because of how deeply, in its individualizing effect, it contrasts with the sound of "the everyday they-self" who cannot hear from conscience anything "which might be passed along in further retelling and talked about in public."[133]

This brings us to an essential feature of Heidegger's account of conscience, which is that it calls the hearer *out of* certain default or thoughtless social modes of living. In the auditory metaphor at play, conscience allows the self to hear once again the self's own voice, which had previously been drowned out by the voice of the 'they', by the "publicness and the idle talk of the 'they'" to which the self had been listening.[134] The they-self can distort or block our hearing the call correctly such that the self misinterprets its own voice. That is, "when 'delusions' arise in the conscience, they do so . . . because the call gets heard in such a way that . . . it gets drawn by the they-self into a soliloquy in which causes get pleaded, and it becomes perverted in its tendency to disclose."[135] The revelatory or insightful character of the call is occluded if heard through the garbled signals of a gossiping, chattering, censoring public, or when it is heard as a voice with a specific moral command. The call of conscience is inscrutable, inaudible, unintelligible, uninterpretable to the public and everyday dimension of the self. What is appealed to in the call of conscience is "one's own self. Not to what Dasein counts for, can, do, or concerns itself with in being with one another publicly . . . and because only the Self of the they-self gets appealed to and brought to bear, the 'they'

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[132] Ibid., 321–22.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid., 315–16.

[135] Ibid., 318–19.

collapses."[136] The call of conscience draws forth the authentic self, deflating the inauthentic facades, dismantling superfluous accoutrements, clearing away the chaff. Put most succinctly, "Conscience summons Dasein's Self from its lostness in the 'they."[137] Conscience calls us back from our wandering and misdirectedness. That summons is singularizing and, like death, is understood more authentically "the more non-relationally Dasein hears and understands its own Being-appealed-to, and the less the meaning of the call gets perverted by what one says or by what is fitting and accepted."[138] Hearing the call of conscience is an activity unique to me, and is interpreted without recourse to my relations with others. This does not mean that listening to my conscience necessarily and always issues in anti-social, non-conformist behavior, nor in withdrawal and isolation. It simply means that the hearing of the call is an experience only I can have, and whose meaning is for me only. Emerson expresses a similar idea, a need for an interiority that resides outside of the iterated rules of a social body, the need for a conscientious interpretation of the contracts and regulations explicitly set forth by a community:

> what if unhappily the judges were chosen from the wolves, and give to the laws a wolfish interpretation? . . .These things show that no forms, neither constitutions, nor laws, nor covenants, nor churches, nor bibles, are of any use in themselves. The Devil nestles comfortably into them all. There is no help but in the head and heart and hamstrings of a man. Covenants are of no use without honest men to keep them; laws of none but with loyal citizens to obey them.[139]

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[136] Ibid., 317.

[137] Ibid., 319.

[138] Ibid., 325.

[139] Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in Harrison, *Juvenescence*, 108.

However, unlike for Emerson, conscience on Heidegger's view does not have a practical moral function, nor does it have positive content. In fact, there is a curious emptiness to conscience, whose call "asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events, has nothing to tell."[140] In a moment of paradoxical poeticizing, to which Heidegger is susceptible, we are told that conscience "calls without uttering anything. The call discourses in the uncanny mode of keeping silent."[141] There is an almost apophatic quality to conscience, and certainly an antinomian quality (the two are often connected; the legal is often at odds with the mystical). That is, in the call of conscience, "one can indeed point to nothing which the voice 'positively' recommends and imposes," and this absence of clear instruction can be disorienting precisely because "we expect to be told something currently useful about assured possibilities of 'taking action' which are available and calculable."[142] Conscience does not offer propositionally articulated guidance about which way to act or choose in a particular situation; it does not contain a discursive list of do's and don'ts; it does not speak to concrete omissions, reparations, requirements. "The call of conscience fails to give any such 'practical' injunctions" and has no "maxims which could be reckoned up unequivocally."[143] Conscience does not act as a policeman, a judge, a confessor. Far from offering actionable guidelines or weighing in in response to a specific situation or dilemma,

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140 Ibid., 318.

141 Ibid., 322.

142 Ibid., 340.

143 Ibid.

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"[t]he call of conscience passes over in its appeal all Daseins' 'worldly' prestige and potentialities."[144]

One might then ask what good or what use conscience is, if so irrelevant to the practical considerations of everyday life. Despite its discoursing silence, its absence of maxims and positive recommendations, conscience does have a message: "it summons Dasein to existence, to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being itself."[145] Once that ownmost, singularizing directive is heard and understood, the self authentically chooses its action.[146] The authentic person who has heard and understood their conscience does not remain suspended and aloof from circumstances but rather brings "oneself into a factical taking-action" suffused with an awareness of their own distinctive possibilities.[147]

To conclude, in *Being and Time*, conscience and anticipatory resoluteness are inextricable from one another as features which singularize each person. As Heidegger puts it, "[t]he unwavering precision with which Dasein is thus [in the call of conscience] essentially individualized down to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, discloses the anticipation of death as the possibility which is *non-relational*. Anticipatory resoluteness lets the potentiality-for-Being-guilty, as one's ownmost non-relational possibility, be struck wholly into the conscience."[148] Awareness of my mortality and my possibilities gives me

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[144] Ibid., 354.

[145] Ibid., 340.

[146] "In understanding the call, Dasein lets its ownmost Self take action in itself in terms of that potentiality-for-Being which it has chosen" (Ibid., 334).

[147] Ibid., 341.

[148] Ibid., 354.

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clarity that my situation is uniquely mine, and that it is within my powers and therefore in some sense my responsibility to choose and act within my situation. While nearly all of the discussion about these singularizing forces focuses on the unpleasant, uncomfortable affective experiences they produce, Heidegger's presentation of individual self-realization is not uniformly bleak. The recognition of my agency and capacities, while often terrifying or overwhelming, can elicit real elation. Heidegger points out that "[a]long with the sober anxiety which brings us face to face with our individualized potentiality-for-Being, there goes an unshakeable joy in this possibility."[149] Joy is the attitude or the feeling of someone coming into their powers, taking their first steps, discovering their talents, exercising their skills. Joy is what we feel when we become ourselves.

Conclusion

Nicholas's late medieval thinking—his emphasis on singularity at epistemological and cosmological levels, and his valorization of finite perspective and freedom—anticipates the revolutions of modernity that emerge only a few decades later. His writing is a fascinating example of the way in which mathematical thinking can coexist with an account of human individuality and creativity. Heidegger, from a late modern perspective, gives an account of personal identity and uniqueness that insists that no human person is interchangeable with another, despite how certain forms of publicity or social engineering may attempt to present the situation. Self-development and authentic action are within reach so long as we keep our ears open to the call of conscience. However, as the next chapter will explore in detail, neither Nicholas nor Heidegger posit a radically autonomous, self-reliant, solitary model of

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[149] Ibid., 358.

the individual. Both offer accounts of the social worlds and communities that we construct and by which we ourselves are shaped as individuals, and through which we come to make sense of our own identities

Chapter 3: Sociality in Cusanus and Heidegger

Introduction

Building on the work of Michel de Certeau and Jonathan Z. Smith, I explain in the first half of this chapter how the group exercise around an all-seeing portrait in the preface of *On the Vision of God* models the emergence of the kind of community whose social contracts are founded on discourse and belief—belief that is required when verification is limited. I argue that Cusanus's prescription of a secularized, mathematical liturgy that transcends the topoi and temporal structures of the Christian calendar enables him to offer more generalizable lessons about how to generate practices of reciprocity, commensurability, and social intelligibility that nonetheless retain individual differences and a remainder of mystery. Examining the Cusan exercise through Smith's interpretive lens casts into relief the fact that it goes beyond many of the typical features of ritual, making it "exportable" and closer to ordinary social practices. The presence of these secularized and secularizing elements corroborates de Certeau's reading of the text as protomodern in its outlook and invites us to recognize the difference between a community and an anonymous crowd, while resisting the impulse to sectarian versions of community. That is, the testimony, empathy, listening, and preservation of multiplicity in the communal contemplative practice of *On the Vision of God* offers an alternative to the highly conformist, anonymous model of sociality found in the crowd of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Adorno's modernity.

In the second half of this chapter, I lay out and intervene in the debate in the journal *Inquiry* between Hubert Dreyfus, Fredrick Olafson, and Hermann Philipse about how best to interpret the meaning of Heidegger's concepts of *das Man* (the "they") and *Mitsein* (Being-with) in *Being and Time*. The aim is to present a version of Heidegger's committedly

existentialist framework that maintains individual freedom alongside communal participation rather than requiring hermetic solitude—in short, I seek an interpretation that allows for the harmonization rather than the erasure of social differences. I show that the analysis of *Mitsein* and *das Man* in the Anglophone philosophical literature leaves out, to its own detriment, an engagement with *Fürsorge* (solicitude) and the social dimensions of *Gewissen* (conscience). I explain Olafson's mistaken attempt to entirely separate the notion of *Zuhandenheit*, practical skills and know-how, from *Mitsein*, and I show that Philipse fails to appreciate Heidegger's evocation of the middle voice, especially, I argue, as it is operative in Heidegger's idiosyncratic concepts of *fate* and *destiny*, concepts he imbues with a sense of action rather than mere resignation to the unfolding of circumstances. I emphasize the creative and thoughtful decisions that are required for heritages to be taken up, and the novelty that suffuses repetition.

Part 1: Nicholas of Cusa and Community

Mathematical Liturgy and the Sacrality of the Ordinary

> There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing"; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity" be.
> —Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Nicholas of Cusa's 1453 treatise on mystical contemplation, *On the Vision of God*, reflects two of his major aesthetic interests: the traditional use of icons in religious devotion and the experience of visual perspective innovated by Renaissance painting. In his characteristically ambitious inclination to synthesize many parts into a complex whole, however, Nicholas treats a wide range of themes beyond the aesthetic. *On the Vision of God* explores divine and

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creaturely vision as a thematic means to address many classic metaphysical dilemmas: how

to reconcile universal with particular, infinity with the finite, and providence with human

freedom. David Albertson explains why the exercise necessitates social interaction:

> Because of the visual medium of the painting, the Tegernsee brothers could only "read" Nicholas' gift if they integrated image and text; because of the optical trick, that integration could only be achieved socially, when they stood before the icon praying in harmony with each other, overcoming their oppositions, and uniting knowledge with love. The medium was, in part, the message.[1]

These many features already indicate the presence of a secularizing element. Nicholas's gift

brings the arts of the outside world, the *saeculum*, into the cloister, asserting that the

Benedictines can learn from them.

Michel de Certeau observes that in this formulation of the contemplative itinerary,

Nicholas requires that the painting be placed in the center of the scene, where the altar and

the Bible would have been, inviting participants instead into a "mathematical liturgy."[2]

Jonathan Z. Smith's definition of sacrality helps us to understand the significance of Falque's

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[1] Albertson, "Before the Icon," 263. Sloterdijk also connects media theory with late medieval mystical theology and its social potential: "If one wanted to design societies on the model of the icon of the Trinity, the result would be vigorously perichoretic social forms along the spectrum of communes, communitarisms, communisms—from the *communio sanctorum* to the idea of the homogeneous outsideless world state as the final communal structure—as recently dreamed up by the media theorist Marshall McLuhan in his pentecostal phantasms of the electronic global village" (*Bubbles: Microsphereology*, vol. 1, *Spheres*, trans. Wieland Hoban [Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011], 625. Michel de Certeau argues that the belief in and of religious institutions has been transposed to belief in and of the realms of media and commerce—that is, in advertising and consumption: There are "two mechanisms through which a body of dogma has always made itself believed: on the one hand, the claim to be speaking in the name of a reality which, assumed to be inaccessible, is the principle of both what is believed (a totalization) and the act of believing (something that is always unavailable, unverifiable, lacking); and on the other, the ability of a discourse authorized by a 'reality' to distribute itself in the form of elements that organize practices, that is, of 'articles of faith.' These two traditional resources are found again today in the system that combines the narrativity of the media—an establishment of the real—with the discourse of products to be consumed—a distribution of this reality in the form of "articles" that are to be believed and bought." (De Certeau, "Believing and Making People Believe" in *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Rendall [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988], 185).

[2] Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume 2: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Luce Giard, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 41.

interpretation of the 'profane' portrait, which I discussed in my previous chapter. For Smith, "A ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way. There is nothing that is inherently sacred or profane. These are not substantive categories, but rather situational ones. Sacrality is, above all, a category of emplacement."[3] By placing the painting where the altar traditionally would be, and by doing the recommended exercise, the monks make the painting sacred, holy; it does not arrive at Tegernsee as an alchemically potent icon, but rather is elevated and set off as exemplary through the activity done around it. As Smith puts it, "Ritual is not an expression of or a response to 'the sacred': rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual (the primary sense of *sacrificium*)."[4] To learn the lessons of the exercise, one need not behold an icon of Jesus; one can instead practice communal contemplation with any all-seeing face. Thus, the lesson of the exercise—that perspectival vision is multiple and harmonious, and that perspective is translatable even if *also* retaining a remainder of untranslatable mystery—is rendered universalizable and relevant to the creation of social space more generally.[5]

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[3] Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 104.

[4] Smith, *To Take Place*, 105.

[5] Nicholas of Cusa's decision to explore infinity through a painted face and a face-to-face communal exercise has a remarkably Levinasian quality. Derrida points out that seeing and being seen by a face, exchanging glances, is a close approximation of ultimately inexpressible infinity: "The infinity irreducible to the representation of infinity, the infinity exceeding the ideation in which it is thought, thought of as more than I can think, as that which cannot be an object or a simple 'objective reality' of the idea—such is the pole of metaphysical transcendence. . . . But what neither Plato and Descartes recognized . . . is that *the expression of this infinity is the face*.
    The face is not only a visage which may be the surface of things or animal facies, aspect, or species. It is not only, following the origin of the word, what is *seen*, seen because it is naked. It also that which sees. Not so much that which sees things—a theoretical relation—but that which exchanges its glance. The visage is a face only in the face-to-face" (Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 98).

However, Michel de Certeau is careful to acknowledge the dangerous side of standing before an all-seeing eye, especially if that omnivoyant perspective is held by advertising and marketing agencies, or by political administrations.[6] In that sense, panoptic observations are all too familiar to denizens of digital cultures. Unlike the loving gaze of Cusanus's all-seeing portrait, under the all-seeing surveillance of the corporations who offer and deliver our products, we're seen always and everywhere as data in order to control and automate our consumer behavior. Caught in the "surveillance network" of various businesses, workers can find themselves in a system that "tends to become a form of imprisonment in order to prevent any sort of escape."[7] The intention of the gaze—loving or menacing, benevolent or authoritarian—affects the way we read the practices organized around it.

In what additional ways might one conceive of the universalizability of Nicholas's mathematical liturgy? Smith's ritual theory, especially his analysis of the 'exportation methods' of early Christian pilgrimage rites, is fecund with possibilities. Smith shows how the ritual piety originally developed by Christians in Jerusalem at the church of the Holy Sepulcher was transposed from the spatial, which required pilgrimage to and procession through that specific set of sites, to the temporal, that is, to the liturgical calendar of the Christian year, whose rhythms and schedules could be practiced in any locale. As Smith puts it, "the hymns, prayers, scripture lessons, and gestures tied to particular places in the indigenous Jerusalem liturgy could be expropriated and exported. The sequence of time, the

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[6] "The powers in our developed societies have at their disposal rather subtle and closely-knit procedures for the control of all social networks: these are the administrative and "panoptic" systems of the police, the schools, health services, security, etc. But they are slowly losing all credibility. They have more power and less authority" (De Certeau, "Believing and Making People Believe," 179).

[7] Ibid.

story, the festal calendar, have allowed the supersession of place."[8] By exporting place to time, these systems of devotion and remembrance could be replicated elsewhere—anywhere, everywhere—and the loci of scripture could be engaged imaginatively. Rather than fighting over ownership of a site as contentious as Jerusalem, to which so many have laid claim, "It is through structures of temporality, as ritualized, that the divisiveness and particularity of space are overcome."[9]

If the move from the specific site of the Holy Sepulcher to the time of the liturgy is one of the early exportation methods of Christianity, Nicholas can be read as taking that exportation one step further. The exercise in *On the Vision of God* is a progression away from the time-bound liturgy of the Christian calendar that Smith describes. There is a highly plastic a-temporality to the portrait practice, with no references to scripture, bread, wine, water, blood. Instead, the liturgy is mathematized, with timeless principles of geometry and optics, and the ritual can be done in any room in which one hangs the all-seeing portrait. There is no temporal structure with discrete steps; the exercise can be done at any time of day, on any day of the week, during any week of the year, and the *simul* of the simultaneous means the portrait's gaze is directed at the same time to each person. Smith says, concerning temporality, that "[r]itual is a relationship of difference between 'nows'—the now of everyday life and the now of ritual place; the simultaneity, but not the coexistence, of 'here'

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[8] Smith, *To Take Place*, 94.

[9] Smith, *To Take Place*, 95. In his essay "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," Derrida notes the longstanding mystical tradition of displacing and metaphorically re-placing, internally, the Jerusalem of one's devotional affections: "Allow me to cite Meister Eckhart again. Like that of Dionysius, his work sometimes resembles an endless meditation on the sense and symbolism of the Holy City: a logic, a rhetoric, a topology, and a tropology of Jerusalem. Here is an example among many others: I said that Jerusalem is as near to my soul as the place where I am now. In truth, that which is a thousand miles beyond Jerusalem is as near to my soul as my own body; I am as sure of this as of being a man" (83–84).

and 'there.'"[10] There is the 'now' of walking along the semicircle, and the 'now' of divine

eternity, signaled by the ever-present gaze of the portrait.[11] This is not to say that the exercise

transcends time. Quite the contrary; it places participants within a ritualized, temporal

unfolding, within which the act of walking, along with the play of testimony and belief, takes

time. Because communication implies belief, and because belief implies a kind of credit, the

testimonial practice of the portrait exercise instates a time-bound relationship between

speakers and their expectations.[12]

Place too is reconceived, and made exportable; procession around the portrait, like

procession through a pilgrimage site, does happen, but without reference to the loci of, for

example, the stations of the cross and the events they depict from the gospel narratives. A

new set of topoi are instated, because participants must walk the path of the semi-circle to

experience the optical trick, but every point in the semicircular procession reiterates the same

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[10] Smith, *To Take Place*, 110.

[11] Nicholas indicates that viewing the image elicits the experience of parallel senses of time—both the now and the eternal. "*Now* [*nunc*] I contemplate *eternal* [*aeternam*] life in a mirror, in an icon, in an enigma, for that is nothing other than the blessed vision by which you never forsake regarding me most lovingly even to the innermost places of my soul" (*DVD*, 16; *VG*, 240).

[12] In his essay on expectational practices, Michel de Certeau explains that time is necessary for any transmission or sharing of beliefs: "The communication established by the goods put in circulation posits a distinction of sites (the detainers of the 'thing') by that of time. It temporalizes the relation of the one to the other. The object of the exchange is itself altered by this distance between moments, since the due – or expected - is not the same as the given, but an equivalent: the analogy between the offered and the received would be the work of time on their identity. The sequence of the gift and restitution thus temporarily articulates an economy of exchange. It will develop on the side of *credence*, or 'crediting', of the creditor or 'believer' and, more explicitly, towards credit." ("What We Do When We Believe" in *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985], 193).

"The difference that distinguishes [believing] from seeing or knowing is not at first notable for the truth value of which a proposition is susceptible—to which an entire epistemology has been devoted—but by this inscription of time in a subject-to-subject relationship. When this relationship can no longer be sustained and structured by temporalization, it will evolve into a relationship of (knowing) subject to (known) object. In social relationships, the question of belief is the question of time" (Ibid., 193).

idea over and over: that God sees all, and that I perceive God through my own gaze. The plasticity of the portrait exercise, its exportability, is further underscored by a fact from Nicholas's biography: in his role as bishop, Nicholas discouraged exploitatively expensive pilgrimages to spectacles such as the bleeding hosts of Wilsnack, advocating instead for participation in local masses.[13] Traveling to a distant, supposedly miraculous site—at which one would pay a handsome fee for entrance—was not necessary because of the sacrality already present in ordinary parish communities.

Each and All: Dynamism and Infinite Perspectives

In light of these features of Nicholas's preface, it comes as no surprise that equality, both spatially and socially (the two reinforce each other), is foundational for the portrait exercise. The brothers are instructed to stand "equally distant [*parum distanter*]" from the place where the portrait hangs, so that the topography of the situation is transcended, and a utopia, a place without a *topos*, can be generated. "Each [*quisque*]" will see that "from whatever place [*ex quocumque loco*] one observes [*inspexerit*] it," no matter the cardinal direction, "the face will seem to regard him alone [*solum*]."[14] The fullness of the gaze is received by each one, individually, rather than by a generic crowd. Prior to writing *On the Vision of God*, Nicholas had labored for many years in ecumenical work, brokering (or at least aiming to broker) compromise and peace among Greek, Russian, and Bohemian Christian sects, as well as between Christian and Muslim communities (especially those in

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[13] See Brian Pavlac, "Reform," in *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to the Renaissance Man*, ed. Christopher Bellitto, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson (New York: Paulist Press 2004), 59–112.

[14] Cusanus, *DVD*, 5; *VG*, 236.

Istanbul—a locale then recently ravaged by armed conflict). Thus, Nicholas's promise that

"[t]o a brother standing in the east, the face [of the portrait] will look eastward [*orientaliter*];

to the one in the south, it will look southward [*meridionaliter*]; to the one in the west,

westward [*occidentaliter*]," operates on multiple levels.[15] There is of course an east-facing

wall and west-facing wall of the room in which the portrait hangs, but there is also the

metonymic 'east' of Orthodox Christianity and of Turkish Islam, the 'west' of Roman

Catholicism, the political realities of internecine warfare, and the general human inclination

to regard outsiders with suspicion. Subtle details in his instructions indicate Nicholas's

inclusivist instincts. He suggests that the portrait be hung on a north wall—not facing

towards Rome, nor facing towards Mecca. Occident and Orient are, in Nicholas's utopian

imagination, held in the same loving gaze, "all and each one [*omnes et singulos*] of you at the

same time [*simul*]."[16] Importantly, the occupant of each position is not asked to dirempt or

efface himself, but is asked instead to journey to the other's position to see from that new

vantage point—an exercise in empathy so basic that English has an idiomatic expression for

it: walking a mile in someone else's shoes. "Let the brother who was in the east place himself

in the west, and he will experience the gaze as fastened on him there just as it was before in

the east."[17] The individual experiences the perspective of another by occupying that other's

position.

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[15] Cusanus, *DVD*, 5; *VG*, 236.

[16] Cusanus, *DVD*, 5; *VG*, 236.

[17] Cusanus, *DVD*, 5; *VG*, 236.

According to Smith, an essential component of placemaking is the creation of focal points, with implicit guidance about where and how to direct one's cognitive energies. Placemaking so often includes ritual because ritual is "a mode of paying attention. It is a process for marking interest . . . it is this characteristic that explains the role of place as a fundamental component of ritual: place directs attention."[18] We can see these elements in operation when Nicholas instructs the contemplatives to create a place by hanging the portrait on a north wall, in order that they may then direct their attention to the moving eyes of the face of the painted image, marking interest not simply in the artistic object but interest in the encompassing gaze that the other participants experience.

The experiment really takes off, and the power of its object-lesson is amplified, with layers of simultaneous, transverse movement: the gaze of the portrait "is moved in the same manner with someone coming forth to meet him from the opposite direction"; here, group participation, or social collaboration, becomes essential, because the only way to experience the 'omni' of the omnivoyant gaze is to "let him have *one of his brothers* pass across from east to west while looking at the icon, as he himself moves from west to east."[19] The exercise is an exemplary, almost paradigmatic case of Lévi-Strauss's definition of ritual, cited approvingly by Smith: "In all cases, ritual makes constant use of two procedures: parceling out [*morcellement*] and repetition."[20] A semi-circular space is parceled out into distinct

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[18] Smith, *To Take Place*, 103.

[19] Cusanus, *DVD*, 5; *VG*, 236.

[20] Smith, *To Take Place*, 111. De Certeau also emphasizes that the exercise requires repetition because of the layered coordination of doing and speaking, action and discourse: "The threshold of sociality appears with recourse to a partner. There is indeed repetition of the movements foreseen at the preceding stage, in one direction by the actor, in the opposite direction by his fellow religious, but the articulation between these two

components based on the vantage point of each viewer, and the transverse movement across the scene or stage of the portrait's gaze is repeated by each member of the group. Experiencing perspective dynamically cannot be achieved in solitude; a collective is required.

Mobility has a pedagogical function; it often assists in rendering our experiences intelligible. Perhaps this is one reason why the practice with the portrait requires a coordinated movement of bodies, from one point on the semicircle to the other. No less august a figure than Kant, who introduced the study of geography to the University of Königsberg curriculum, argues in his essay "On the First Ground of the Distinction of Regions in Space," in Smith's paraphrase, that "orientation is always in relation to our bodies. Maps, charts, or cardinal directions are useless unless they be oriented with respect to the individual's body, especially to the left and right sides and hands."[21] Though in some ways the 'map' that Nicholas hopes the monks will create is utopic, a coincidence of contradictories, it is in another sense linked directly to orientations of east and west, north and south. Only this embodied experience can transform unfamiliar, abstract space into a meaningful, familiar place. As Smith says, "Human beings are not placed, they bring place into being."[22] De Certeau notes that Nicholas "conceives as a mathematician the exercise that the monks have to carry out not with a compass but with their legs" making space into place through this embodied enactment of a topography, creating a map of the cardinal directions

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opposite circuits is made in a social mode, first in a coordination in acting, then in an agreement at the level of saying" (*Mystic Fable*, 46–47).

[21] Ibid., 27.

[22] Ibid., 28.

that serves as a microcosm of the world, and which "stages a space distributed in places by a system of differences between singularities constituted by their reciprocal positions."[23] The *reciprocity* of these positions is essential for building a *social* space through the exercise.[24]

De Certeau sees a continuity in Nicholas's corpus: mutuality and reciprocity are at play in his *Catholic Concordance* at the juridical level, whereas mutuality and reciprocity operate at the cosmological level in *On Learned Ignorance*.[25] Near the end of his life, these themes are staged in the portrait exercise in *On the Vision of God*. That is, "the principle of movement," which, governs the bodies of perambulating spectators, "cannot be identified with any one of the elements put into play, nor does it hold them at a distance by a process of abstraction; it assumes, in opposite singularities, an internal mainspring capable of actualizing them through mutual relations."[26] The dynamism that is required in order to experience the multiple angles and perspectives on the art object is what guarantees that in the portrait exercise, diversity does not collapse into an ultimate unity.

That is, multiplicity is maintained in *On the Vision of God* because the position of each portrait spectator is reciprocally determined by the position of other spectators. The reciprocity maintains the distinctions between each singular spectator, even though each

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[23] De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 41.

[24] De Certeau's reading of the portrait exercise as a founding moment for a collective echoes Derrida's reading of Levinasian seeing and speaking face-to-face: "Face to face with the other within a glance *and* a speech which both maintain distance and interrupt all totalities, this being-together as separation precedes or exceeds society, collectivity, community. Levinas calls it *religion*. It opens ethics. The ethical relation is a religious relation." "Violence and Metaphysics," 95-96.

[25] Cusanus, *De Concordantia Catholica*, vol. 14, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Gerhardus Kallen (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1939); *The Catholic Concordance*, ed. Paul E. Sigmund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *De Docta Ignorantia*, vol. 1, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Raymond Klibansky (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1932); *On Learned Ignorance*, in *Selected Spiritual Writings*, 19–31.

[26] De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 28.

member rests and moves in equal proximity to the goodness at the center of the scene. As de Certeau elegantly explains it, "each of these points of view, irreducible to the others and unfolding in a process relative to the infinity that gives it life, has, then, a relation to the others that is homologous with that of the first actor to his partner, or of the author to his addressee."[27] As this homology is multiplied by the (theoretically infinite) addition of participants or initiates to the exercise, the geometrical meaning—which is more than a metaphor, because it is an actual configuration of bodies—underscores and aligns with the social reality: "the dialogical figure remains polygonal. The growth in the number of units and the extension of the 'transfers' from one to another, however, by the multiplying of angles, bring the polygon progressively closer to the form of a circle, which would ultimately be the totalization of the contradictories generated by the center."[28] The circle contains an infinity of polygons, just as the social world contains an infinity of interpretations and perspectives. Peter Sloterdijk also sees in *On the Vision of God* an "a priori inter-'subjectivity'" according to which "physical space is sublated in relational space."[29] The multiplication afforded by these intertwinements "simultaneously guarantees the absolute intimacy and reciprocal immanence."[30]

Fascinatingly, de Certeau's analysis of this infinitely multiplying polygonal reciprocity aligns with Smith's definition of ritual as a system of differences. For Smith,

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[27] Ibid., 62.

[28] De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 63.

[29] Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 594.

[30] Ibid., 599: "Trinitarian theology is exploded into an unbounded multiplicity: 'three times infinity is infinity; now the dogma makes mathematical sense. The infinite is imagined in the figure of the all-encompassing orb, in which externality simply cannot appear.'"

ritual "is, necessarily, an affair of the relative. . . . In ritual, the differences can be extreme, or they can be reduced to microdistinctions—but they can never be overthrown. The system can never come to rest."[31] In Nicholas's system, microdistinctions are maintained not only between each of the human spectators and their unique perspectives, but also between the human spectator and the infinite gaze of the ritual object, between Creator and creature. Ever-expanding desire for an infinite goodness, where the reaching out never comes to rest, is the conclusion of *de Visione Dei*.

The Limits of Discourse: Exchange, Translation, and Reconciliation

Coordinated group movement does not yet reveal the fullness of the lesson. Just as one must transition from solitude to sociality, the group must transition from silence to speech. The coincidence of the medium and the message is unfolded in the transition from the static elements of the practice to the dynamic ones, and the final stages of the practice need communication, which entails speaking, hearing, trusting, and believing. When one transverse sojourner meets the other, says Nicholas, "let him ask [*interrogaverit*] the other whether the icon's gaze continuously turns with him, and he will hear [*audierit*] that it moves just the same in the opposite direction. He will believe [*credet*] him, but unless he believed him, he would not imagine this to be possible."[32] The "unless" is significant; the revelation of the facts of experience are necessarily relational, relayed from one witness to another. As de Certeau aptly frames the narrative unfolding and the scene-building of Nicholas's preface, "at the beginning, it is the painting—a necessary condition—that first generates a space (the

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[31] Smith, *To Take Place*, 110.

[32] Cusanus, *DVD*, 6; *VG*, 236.

semicircle of observers). At the end, it is an oral testimony (the *revelatio relatoris*) that alone allows one to 'believe' what eludes vision, so that the ears give us to understand what the eyes cannot see. Hence the image 'requires' discourse."[33]

Discourse substitutes for cold, hard facts; it compensates for an absence of equivalent experiences; it allows for circulation or transmission of ideas when verification is limited; it renders commensurable that which is seemingly unique and untranslatable. For de Certeau, *belief* in oral testimony is the means used—both in the portrait exercise and in social contracts more generally—to incorporate what would otherwise remain outside the boundaries of social norms, that which is set aside as crazed, delusional, fantastical. "Belief is the moment, to be repeated indefinitely, by which the madness of the look is transformed into discourse and history."[34] Belief transforms madness into discourse by turning the inscrutable into the sayable, the communicable, the intelligible, the legible, all of which requires trusting the testimony or the witness of another. In the context of the portrait exercise and the singular yet shared encounter with a mysterious infinity, "the adherence to the 'saying' of partners multiplies the relation each one has alone with the look [of the portrait]" and so through these "reciprocal enunciative experiences," "belief socializes the insane," that is, belief allows a community to form on the basis of trust that individuals speak

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[33] De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 39.

[34] Ibid., 50. Derrida, along with de Certeau, links discourse, speaking and hearing, with faciality: "the face-to-face eludes every category. For within it the face is given simultaneously as expression and as speech. Not only as glance, but as the original unity of glance and speech, eyes and mouth, that speaks, but also pronounces its hunger. Thus it is also that which *hears* the invisible, for 'thought is language'. . . . Moreover, the face does not *signify*. . . . Thought is speech, and is therefore immediately face. In this, the thematic of the face belongs to the most modern philosophy of language and of the body itself" (Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 100).

truthfully about their otherwise inaccessible inner experience.[35] The panoptic gaze of the

portrait, when distributed among many audience members, generates "exchanges that set the

initial stupor in movement and metamorphose the solitary *admiratio* into the productive work

of the group."[36] The pious admiration is no longer purely private or idiosyncratic; it is

translatable into language intelligible to others. Additionally, discourse is world-expanding: it

allows individuals to intuit a reality that would be inaccessible to them in their solitude.

 The pursuit of commensurability and cultural translation are foundational to the

scholarly study of religion according to Smith, who sees any insistence on uniqueness as an

impediment to such study. Smith notes that the unique and the individual are *not* equivalent

notions; location in space-time is often incorrectly described as having unique attributes and

properties rather than as having an individual position. The academic study of religion can

function only if it is premised on the conviction that "Nothing human is foreign to me," and

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[35] Ibid. The participants come to know about the omnivoyance of the gaze through "a transposition of the not-knowing/knowing relation to a relation between an initial astonishment ('I don't believe my eyes about it') and a final assent ('I believe what the other says about it')." That is, the third moment of the exercise "consists, for the partners, in each one *doing the opposite* of the other (inverse trajectories) and in *saying* to the other afterward the *same thing* ("you too?" "yes"). The 'doing' falls under a contradictory plurality; the 'saying' under a unifying coincidence" (De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 48). Stanley Cavell makes a similar point about the way that sharing is the foundation not only of socialization but of the boundaries between sanity and insanity: "We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation – all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'. Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying" (*Must We Mean What We Say*? [New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1969], 52).

[36] De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 50.

nothing is "beyond the pale of understanding."[37] It should come as no surprise, given this common sense, Enlightenment-inspired approach to religion as a branch of civil discourse, that Smith believes that "uniqueness denies the possibility of comparison and taxonomy; the individual requires comparative and classificatory endeavors. Uniqueness prevents science and cognition; the individual invites the same. Absolute difference is not a category for thought but one that denies the possibility of thought."[38]

De Certeau, by contrast, insists on the uniqueness and irreducibility of what the look (of the face of the portrait) means to each person "since every walk bears within itself the solitary secret of its relation to the infinite. No exchangeable element can pass from one to the other. No transformation code can, as with a monetary system, contain their particular exchange with a general system of equivalency."[39] The demonstration, or the translation of inner experience to the outer realm of discourse, requires a trust, a belief, because the demonstration is always slightly inadequate. De Certeau claims that "what each can say, qua subject haunted by the look, cannot be seen by the other, but only believed."[40]

And yet the Cusan exercise allows a certain kind of commensurability, because what is said by one spectator *can* be seen by another, by walking to the first's spot and occupying his vantage point. Even if access to the mental contents or inner experience of the other remains unavailable, the empirical, sensory verification of the movement of the painting's

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[37] Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 104.

[38] Smith, *To Take Place*, 34.

[39] De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 49.

[40] Ibid.

gaze gives the community a common set of references on which to build a discourse that can name a common, yet also private and numinous, experience. Nicholas himself acknowledges that science (broadly construed) as well as discourse requires commensurability. He describes how God's face appears to each creature according to the parameters of the viewer: "Every face which can behold your face sees nothing that is other or different from itself, because it sees there its own truth."[41] Strikingly, as noted earlier, Nicholas extends this explanation of "facial seeing" to other members of the animal kingdom, noting: "if a lion were to attribute a face to you [God], it would judge it only as a lion's face; if an ox, an ox's; if an eagle, as an eagle's."[42] God's face appears within the horizon that is comprehensible to each creature, according to its standards of judgment, its capacities of vision, its range of possibilities. To be visible to the creature, God's face must be familiar and recognizable, rather than totally alien to or incommensurate with creaturely expectations and measurements. In the same way, the participant of the portrait exercise must find a way to overcome the seeming untranslatability of their experience so that it becomes transmissible, communicable through a shared language.

Despite the impossibility of perfect translation or of the perfect representation of experience in language, de Certeau asserts that discourse is possible, and that it founds the social contract. The absence and impossibility of equivalence does not prevent a verbal and

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[41] Cusanus, *DVD*, 20–21; *VG*, 243. Some might be tempted to read this as an adumbration of Feuerbachian projection theory, according to which the human makes God in human image, assigning to God the qualities and features that are really true of people. That interpretation is difficult to sustain, given the distinction Nicholas draws in this paragraph between contracted creatures versus God's true, absolute face, which "precedes every formable face" and "has neither quality nor quantity, nor is it of time or place, for it is the absolute form, which is the face of faces" (*DVD*, 20; *VG*, 243).

[42] Cusanus, *DVD*, 21; *VG*, 244.

auditory "circulation" which "in becoming more general, keeps the initial dialogical form, the form of the type: 'You too'? 'Yes.'"[43] Because each point of view is "revealed to itself" in "recognizing that other ways are built on the same secret," de Certeau argues that "this theology is not 'negative' nor is it 'apophantic.'"[44] The madness becomes intelligible, the negative and silent becomes positive and spoken. Thus, de Certeau, insistent as he is on the non-equivalence and irreducibility of each participant's perspective or position, presents a version of the Cusan exercise in which the mysterious can still produce science and cognition, or at least it can produce belief and discourse.

An economic sense of social production can be subtly detected in de Certeau's analysis, with the etymological connection between credo, I believe, and credit, the foundation of exchange.[45] Donald Lopez Jr., in his analysis of belief as it shapes both heretical controversies of the Dominican inquisition and the invention of a nineteenth-century Buddhist catechism, links belief, as it is defined by de Certeau, explicitly with

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[43] De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 63.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Sloterdijk also sees an economic implication in Nicholas's construal of the all-seeing God as lender, even though Nicholas himself does not use this word or concept in *De Visione Dei*. "God acts as a lender of eyesight to humans—or more generally as a lender of subjectivity. Here the word 'lend' can be understood both in its feudal and its bank-capitalist sense, for both fief and credit are authentic modes of giving being or awarding strength—self-contraction, in Cusan terms—which reminds us of the precondition that none are eligible to be the feudal lord or lender save the actual infinite itself. These circumstances provide the last reason for the basic figure of modernity, which is the replacement of the all-effectuating God by all-sweeping capital. Cusanus's reflections show how the most stimulated minds of the early Modern Age were opening up to the adventurous and serious idea that the subject, by becoming involved through knowledge and action, works with the credit of the absolute. This is where the change from meaning from guilt to debt begins. We are here touching on the formative process of the recent history of European mentality: the birth of entrepreneurial subjectivity from the spirit of the mystical duty to repay" (*Bubbles*, 576–77). Cusanus *does* use an extended minting and coining metaphor in *De Ludo Globi* (vol. 9, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Hans G. Senger [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1998]; "The Bowling-Game," trans. Jasper Hopkins, in *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations Volume 2* [Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning, 2000), 1182–1248]. See also Donald F. Duclow, "'Our Substance is God's Coin': Nicholas of Cusa on Minting, Defiling, and Restoring the *Imago Dei*," in *Nicholas of Cusa and Times of Transition*, 301–19.

material interests, noting that temporal deferral is at the heart of the concept of belief: "The

believer, in a position of inferiority in relation to the object of belief (we speak of belief

being owed and credence being given), gives something away in the hope of getting

something back, not now, but sometime in the future."[46] Belief remains necessary so long as

one still awaits the return on the investment, the repayment of the loan. The "expectational

practice" of belief and the time it requires is what "differentiates believing from the

simultaneity of subject and object characteristic of knowing or seeing."[47] Communication

itself, the discourse which we ordinarily employ, requires belief, and therefore a kind of

credit, such that one must await the return on the metaphorical investment, rather than

enjoying the immediacy offered by seeing. As de Certeau puts it, "[b]elieving is the link,

distended, that connects by speech two distant gestures."[48]

Perplexingly, in the Cusan portrait exercise, seeing and believing are intimately

connected, rather than set at odds; seeing is the thematic centerpiece of the treatise, and yet

belief in the oral witness of other participants is nonetheless required because a finite viewer

cannot see infinite sight on his own. Lopez observes that "the statement, 'I believe in . . . ' is

sensible only when there are others who 'do not'; it is an agonistic affirmation of something

that cannot be submitted to ordinary rules of verification."[49] Verification of my partner's

experience of the portrait's look is beyond my grasp insofar as I cannot open their brain to

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[46] Lopez, "Belief," in *Critical Terms in Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor [Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1998], 28.

[47] Ibid., 28.

[48] De Certeau, "What We Do When We Believe," 195.

[49] Lopez, "Belief," 33.

see and so confirm the presence of their belief, but Nicholas's exercise is so interesting

precisely because it allows more verification than do other reported mystical phenomena

from the medieval period. Unlike, for example, the anchorite Julian of Norwich's

extraordinary vision of suckling at the breast of a lactating Christ, in the portrait exercise I

can walk the path that my partner has walked and so see the gaze following me. Something

akin to laboratory procedure is possible here in a way that it is not for other *sui generis*

mystical raptures. Lopez Jr. connects belief with the exclusive or the extraordinary, pointing

out that "the very impossibility of verification has historically functioned as a means of

establishing a community against 'the world,' hinting at a counterfactual reality to which

only the believers have access."[50] Such a sectarian attitude is foreign to the humanist

hospitality that characterizes much of the Cusan corpus, especially the lessons of *On the

Vision of God.* Here it is relevant to note the affective dimensions of the concept of belief.

Lopez Jr. lays out the etymological connection between belief and love as follows:

> The English word 'belief' can be traced back to the Old High German *gilouben*,
> meaning to hold dear, cherish, trust in. The Germanic *laub* is related to the Indo-
> European *leubh*-, meaning love or desire: hence, the English 'libidinous,' 'love,'
> 'believe'; the Latin *lubet* (he is pleased by); the Italian *libito* (will, desire); the
> German *lieb* (dear), *lieben* (to love), *loben* (to praise), *glauben* (to believe).[51]

In the Cusan exercise, the play of testimony and belief is also a play of love within the

community, an affectionate listening and responding that facilitates corroboration of the truth

and collaboration in the projects of world-building.

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 22. Lopez continues: "The multivalence of the root is perhaps exceeded only by the multivalence of the term derived from it, belief. It seems possible, for example, to believe what one knows to be untrue ('I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows.') and not to believe what one knows to be true ('I can't believe I ate the whole thing.')."

What might Nicholas's exercise in reciprocity, testimony, and contract-building offer us in terms of possibilities of reconciliation? His group practice, to an extent, ritualizes a harmony of differences that he had not yet seen achieved in the 'real' world. His career in diplomacy and papal legation made very clear to Nicholas at the time of writing *On the Vision of God* that religious communities in 'the west' did not share views with 'the east' on the 'right way' to do baptism, or how and to whom to administer the eucharistic elements; they did not agree upon the doctrine of the trinity, nor the divinity of Jesus.[52] He knew that Constantinople became Istanbul through bloody conflict, his peace talks having failed, and he knew that the papacy was continually at odds with ecclesial councils of local clergy. The portrait ritual can thus be read as aspirational, an attempt to imagine cooperative coexistence precisely because division, conflict, and chaos persisted throughout the fracturing empire, outside the doors of the monastery and even within its halls, with debates still roiling over whether affect or intellect takes priority in divine contemplation. Rites of reconciliation exist because religious traditions recognize that humans will fall short of the law, will hurt each other, and that the 'is' rarely matches up to the 'ought.' According to Smith, ritual creates, rather than responds to, the sacred, and ritual also has a normative dimension, an aspirational, ameliorating function, where the community's or the practitioner's ideals are set forth in contrast to regular life which so often falls short of them. Through the "creation of a controlled environment where the variables (the accidents) of ordinary life may be displaced," ritual is "a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension

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[52] See *Nicholas of Cusa on Interreligious Harmony: Text, Concordance, and Translation of* De Pace Fidei, ed. James E. Biechler and H. Lawrence Bond (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), ix–xlviii.

with the way things are," which means that "it also relies for its power on the perceived fact that, in actuality, such possibilities cannot be realized."[53]

This is the point at which Smith's ritual theory may not capture all that is so fascinating, boundary-pushing, and paradigm-shifting in Nicholas's liturgical design. There is not a clear indication in the text of *On the Vision of God* that Cusanus means for the exercise to be an antidote to an ailment, medicine for an affliction, healing for a wound, or reparation for a misdeed. Instead, the exercise is meant to teach practitioners about mystical theology through an image, a lived-in display of a glorious fact that is already the case (that a providential gaze of love holds all within itself) but which gets pushed aside in the hustle and bustle of daily life, unless we bring it back into focus. This is Nicholas's optimism: he does not subscribe to original sin and the fallenness of the world, but rather insists upon the shimmering orderliness of creation, and the vibrant potency, not the decrepitude and evil, of the human mind. Amid the immense human-made suffering and conflict of our world, one wonders if this view is too naïve to be tenable. And yet, we hold out hope for the kind of discourse that invites cooperation, for the endurance of social contracts, and for community hospitable to freedom.

Part 2: Heidegger and Community

Being-With: The Fundamentally Social Human Being

The aporia in Cusanus's portrait exercise about how to reconcile uniqueness with communal commensurability articulates, in a different idiom, a central question for interpreters of Heidegger's *Being and Time*: can individual authenticity be social, and if so,

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[53] Smith, *To Take Place*, 109.

how so? That both Nicholas and Heidegger address versions of this same question testifies to the perennial, challenging nature of the conceptual problem. Can a person reject the kind of *conformism* that absorbs identity, and instead authentically accept conventions and communal standards, articulated by *das Man* and *Mitsein*? Far from being tedious rehearsals of minutiae better left in the proverbial dustbin of history, or the archives, interpretive debates about social networks and self-identity in Heidegger's thinking raise questions that urgently demand consideration. We in modern multi-cultural societies ought to be able to justify the practices and general norms to which we expect conformity, giving an account of fulfilling and enriching civic life, while also maintaining individual freedoms, choices, and self-directedness. In short, the modern situation requires a means to and a framework through which to harmonize individual flourishing with communal flourishing.

In Division 1 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger explores who we are as self-reflective, environmentally situated, care-directed, conscious beings. Though some readers have emphasized the death-obsessed, solitary elements of his thinking, it would be a profound mistake to overlook the fact that in Heidegger's philosophical anthropology, we are fundamentally, undeniably social. To understand Heidegger's complicated account of how it is that we are social and how that sociality functions, one must understand the network of terms he uses to describe life together. Since he deploys neologisms unfamiliar to daily, ordinary language users—he famously does not write idiomatically—and since each term in this new lexicon relates ambiguously to the other terms, interpreting Heidegger's stance on sociality and collective forms of life requires care, patience, and precision. The concepts of *Mitsein*, *das Man*, *Fürsorge,* and *Wiederholung* are especially important for understanding

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what Heidegger's thought has to offer to theories of difference-preserving sociality and possibilities for authentic community.

Though he uses highly technical, obscure terminology, Heidegger's aim is to illuminate the social quality of *everyday* life—the way we are with one another ordinarily, usually, for the most part, rather than in exceptional circumstances. *Mitsein*, Being-with, is the foundational concept of Heidegger's account of sociality. "*Being-with* and *Dasein-with* [*Mitsein* und *Mitdasein*]," are basic to human being, and are structures which ground "the mode of everyday Being-one's-Self [*Selbstsein*]."[54] There is no such thing as a private world, no possibility of solipsism, no such thing as a subject without relations to others.[55] If I am in an environment, I am *de facto* and *de jure* in relation to other humans. Sloterdijk calls the interpersonal matrix of everyday existence an "ecstatic intimacy," noting that "Whoever is in the world inhabits a place in which, by virtue of the In's structure, the strong relationship has always already asserted its claim."[56] Heidegger's parlance for this relationality makes repeated use of the prefix "*mit,*" with. "The world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with* Others. Their Being-

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[54] Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, vol. 2, *Gesamtausgabe* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1976), 154; *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: HarperPerennial, 2008), 149. References to the works of Martin Heidegger will be presented in the following order: (1) citation to the text in the *Gesamtausgabe* and (2) citation for the relevant English translation.

[55] As Hubert Dreyfus puts it in his commentary on *Being and Time*: "There is no such thing as my world, if this is taken as some private sphere of experience and meaning, which is self-sufficient and intelligible in itself, and so more fundamental than the shared public world and its local modes. Both Husserl and Sartre follow Descartes in beginning with my world and then trying to account for how an isolated subject can give meaning to other minds and to the shared intersubjective world. Heidegger, on the contrary, thinks that it belongs to the very idea of a world that it be shared, so *the* world is always prior to *my* world" (*Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's* Being and Time*, Division I* [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991], 90).

[56] Sloterdijk, *Bubbles,* 628.

in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with* [*Mitdasein*]."[57] Human life is in some

inescapable sense *interactive* and shared. Every circumstance is the product of ongoing

collaboration (and conflict) between people, and refers to the humanly constructed system of

significance through which we understand ourselves, our neighbors, our enemies, and our

tools for accomplishing goals. Sloterdijk, who reads Heidegger as a social theorist with

relevance to contemporary media theory, contends that "Being-in," a concept that expresses

the interconnectedness of *Being and Time*, "should be conceived as the togetherness of

something with something in something. . . . What are media theories but suggestions of

ways to explain the how and the whereby of the connection between different existents in a

shared ether?"[58] The 'shared ether' of the world and the connection—linguistic, instrumental,

and emotional—between the inhabitants of that world are captured by the concept of *Mitsein*.

As Heidegger argues in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, *Mitsein* also includes

attunement [*Befindlichkeit*], that is, the contagion of mood; we respond to and also influence

the emotional ambiance of gatherings in a pre-reflective, instinctual way. The person who "is

in good humor brings a lively atmosphere with them. . . . We do indeed say that attunement

or mood is infectious."[59] Just as the jovial person livens a room, the morose person, on the

other end of the emotional spectrum, "through their manner of being makes everything

[57] Heidegger, *SZ*, 159; *BT*, 155.

[58] Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 542.

[59] Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit*, vol. 29/30, *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), 100; *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeil and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 66.

depressing and puts a damper on everything; nobody steps out of their shell."[60] These attunements of joyfulness and melancholy "are not something merely at hand. They themselves are precisely a fundamental manner and fundamental way of being, indeed of being-there [*Da-sein*], and this always directly includes being with one another."[61] Attunements shape our shared ether.

So committed is Heidegger to the social nature of the human that he insists even solitude is premised upon shared existence: "Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factically no Other is present-at-hand or perceived."[62] Togetherness and shared life are not constituted simply by physical proximity to other humans, as if counting the number of bodies in a room were the way to tell the difference between the social and the solitary: "Being-with and the facticity of Being with one another are not based on the occurrence together of several 'subjects.' Yet Being-alone 'among' many does not mean that with regard to their Being they are merely present-at-hand there alongside us."[63] Rather, we are always experiencing and interpreting these others as part of a mutually recognized environment, even when that acknowledgement is implicit or subconscious. We also implicitly interpret ourselves as members of a group whose midst we are in: "By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me—those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself—those among

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[60] Heidegger, *GM*, 100; *FCM*, 66.

[61] Heidegger, *GM*, 100; *FCM*, 67. See *SZ*, 181; *BT*, 175, for a discussion of how moods are prior to volition and cognition

[62] Heidegger, *SZ*, 160; *BT*, 156.

[63] Heidegger, *SZ*, 161–62; *BT*, 157.

whom one is too."[64] Heidegger often includes examples of social alienation and discomfort rather than social connection and pleasure in his explanation of the fundamentally intermingled, other-directed, socially referential quality of each person's unique existence: "Being missing and 'Being away' are modes of Dasein-with, and are possible only because Dasein as Being-with is in every case a characteristic of one's own Dasein."[65] It is striking that Heidegger so often points to lack, absence, disregard, and distance as instances that point up *Mitsein*. He rarely explores cases of robust, rich, intimate relationships between people. In this section of Division 1, there is no explicit talk of friendship, nor of family relations, nor talk of communal roles and relations such as those of neighbors or citizens. Though we are told that "as Being-with, Dasein 'is' essentially for the sake of Others," which at first blush sounds like the assumption of an altruistic, collaborative, interdependent philosophical anthropology, we learn that in fact "Even if the particular factical Dasein does *not* turn to Others, and supposes that it has no need of them or manages to get along without them, it *is* in the way of Being-with."[66] Even selfishness, curmudgeonliness, and anti-social self-sufficiency are "ways of being with" other people, which pushes against commonly understood definitions of 'sharing' and togetherness. This outlook could simply indicate Heidegger's commitment to description and his desire to avoid prescription (or worse, naïve optimism). Life in a collective is often characterized by apathy, thoughtlessness, or even conflict, rather than harmony or intimacy, and Heidegger's account is realistic about this fact.

Conformism and Publicity: The Risks of Social Existence

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[64] Heidegger, *SZ*, 157–58; *BT*, 154.

[65] Heidegger, *SZ*, 158; *BT*, 154.

[66] Heidegger, *SZ*, 164; *BT*, 160.

For those who want to highlight the social ontology of Heidegger's thought, and who want to find in it resources for theorizing a version of human community that shares a set of norms and practices while also preserving individual freedom, authenticity is best understood as a modification of *das Man* rather than a rejection of it. This interpretation offers the promise that individual agency and self-expressive freedom need not rest upon radical isolation, solitude, or anti-social withdrawal. If *das Man* is constitutive and ineluctably structural even for my authentic being, this means that authenticity can be worldly, even cooperative; it need not necessitate a denunciation of the commonly held and ordinarily experienced cultural context. The achievement of authenticity need not oblige the construction of a separate sphere for each person in which to exercise their authentic selfhood. The authentic individual would not have to be a pariah, a recluse, or a hermit, but could instead be a neighbor, a citizen, a friend, a lover, a member, a participant, taking up multiple social roles without considering such inhabitations to be an impingement upon or a stifling, suppression, or restriction of their genuine selfhood and self-expression.[67]

While not everything about Frederick Olafson's analysis of sociality in *Being and Time* stands up to scrutiny, he is certainly right that Heidegger "can hardly be said to have done a good job of distinguishing between the innocuous and the objectionable forms of social anonymity."[68] Heidegger indeed oscillates unpredictably between, on the one hand,

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[67] The attempt to harmonize the two opposing strains of European philosophy in *Being and Time*—the Diltheyian, Wittgensteinian, communitarian side on the one hand, and the Kierkegaardian existentialism on the other—is not a denial of the fact that tensions are present in Heidegger's text, some of which may, on a strictly exegetical level, be irresolvable. This tension between individual freedom and norm-governed, heteronomous society is a perennial philosophical problem on which Heidegger sheds light, even if he himself did not programmatically and conclusively solve the puzzle.

neutral descriptions of the socially constituted nature of personal identity and its sources and shared practices (the set of ideas resonant with those of the late Wittgenstein) and, on the other, veiled denunciations of modern mass culture—textual evidence of which will be provided below—and all of the perversions into which it tempts us and the constraints in which it entangles us (in which one hears the familiar cries of Kierkegaard).[69] That Heidegger's text itself is inconsistent, or at least not straightforward, about the meaning of the term *das Man* only increases the difficulty of adjudicating between these seemingly conflicting positions on the nature of the social. Heidegger contradicts himself about whether *das Man* is ontic or ontological, how authenticity relates to inauthenticity, and whether or not *das Man* is an inauthentic mode of being. Heidegger states both that "authentic self-being is an existentiell modification of *das Man* . . . as an essential existentiale"[70] and that "the they-self is an existentiell modification of the authentic self."[71] Some readers have suggested that these two statements are not at odds, but are rather making the same point from different directions. Given the ambiguities and tensions of the text, it is a worthwhile task to inquire

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[68] Frederick A. Olafson, "Heidegger *à la* Wittgenstein or 'coping' with Professor Dreyfus," *Inquiry* 37, no. 1 (1994): 57.

[69] Sloterdijk captures this two-sided, slippery quality of *das Man*, a composite of despair and hope, conformism and communion, which asserts that we are always already social: "Heidegger's 'they' reveals the other true icon of intimate interweaving; it brings into view the imprecise interwoven life of the many and the general commitment to averageness. And yet, even in this derelict, confused, talked-to-death Dasein, there is still an inextinguishable sacred remainder. For even in the most banal existence, there is a togetherness with others that is antecedent and immemorial . . . someone is somehow close to someone else at some time. One can always reckon with some others from the start, even if their number, status, and mindset remain unclear" (*Bubbles,* 627).

[70] Heidegger, *SZ*, 173; *BT*, 168.

[71] Heidegger, *SZ*, 420–21; *BT*, 365.

into what this section of *Being and Time* entails for questions of personhood, sociality, and community—questions of autonomy, heteronomy, conventionalism and conformism.

When he is writing in the mode of Kierkegaardian derision and despair over the nihilism of modern culture, as he seems be in his discussion of publicity and levelling, Heidegger does regard *das Man* as a lamentable form of social anonymity, a set of interpretations and practices that we unreflectively fall into or fall back upon and in so doing cover up and temporarily forget how to be responsible decision makers, resolute agents, and lovers of other people.[72] There is textual evidence in *Being and Time* of what Olafson means by "objectionable" forms of social anonymity[73]—anonymous social forms that sound strikingly similar to the leveling culture industry that, as my first chapter laid out, Adorno and Horkheimer excoriate. Heidegger asserts that in the everyday way of being with people, there is an element of domination, and of disposability: an individual "stands in *subjection* [*Botmässigkeit*] to Others. [The individual] itself *is* not; its Being has been taken away by the Others. [An individual]'s everyday possibilities of Being are for the Others to dispose of as they please."[74] The experience of daily life, according to this sentence, is one of powerlessness in the face of subtle but pervasive social pressure, which dictates how I can act and spend my time, and which instrumentalizes me as an object for others to employ for their purposes: they can use me to farm their fields, to serve their coffee, to drive the bus they take

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[72] For example, Heidegger speaks of *das Man* as that in which we *lose* ourselves, and he says that "'resoluteness' signifies letting oneself be summoned out of one's lostness in the 'they'" SZ 299; BT 345. Thomas Carlson notes that "only in being in being so summoned does one care, as oneself, for the other as herself." *With the World at Heart*, 136. That is, Carlson points out the way in which resoluteness, as opposed to lostness in *das Man*, allows us to have authentic loving relationships with one another.

[73] Olafson, "Coping," 47.

[74] Heidegger, *SZ*, 168; *BT,* 164.

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to work, and so on. This labor itself is not the problem; rather, it is the risk of the erasure of personhood with which Heidegger seems concerned. Importantly, the subject or the collective force doing this dominating is nebulous, unidentifiable, anonymous, even interchangeable: "These Others, moreover, are not *definite* Others. On the contrary, any Other can represent them. . . . The 'who' is not this one, not that one, not oneself [*manselbst*], not some people [*einige*], and not the sum of them all. The 'who' is the neuter, *the 'they'* [*das Man*]."[75] Not only is *das Man* unidentifiable as an agent of domination, too diffused and inconspicuous to be something I can point to as my oppressor; it is also something that (sometimes conveniently) takes away my agency, accountability, and responsibility. "The 'they' is there alongside everywhere [*ist überall dabei*], but in such a manner that it has always stolen away whenever Dasein presses for a decision. Yet because the 'they' presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability."[76] My actions and opinions cease to be recognizable as my own; but so insidious is this agency-stripping social pressure that I do not even realize the grip it has on both my active and contemplative life, on both my inner experience (say, my judgments about the quality of a film) and my outward behavior (say, the career path I pursue). The anonymous collective conceals who causes what, and makes individual human beings appear to be completely passive: "In Dasein's everydayness the agency through which most things come about is one of which we must say that 'it was no one.'"[77] Though he writes laudatorily

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[75] Heidegger, *SZ*, 168; *BT,* 164.

[76] Heidegger, *SZ*, 169; *BT*, 165.

[77] Heidegger, *SZ*, 169; *BT*, 165. Sloterdijk also compares the diffused, nebulous agency of *das Man* to the mysterious way in which medieval Christian authors conceptualize the human as the medium or channel through which divine agency is exercised: "While the mystic has relinquished his will so that God wills in him,

in Division II about ways in which we are all benefactors and heirs of traditions, languages, and cultural practices—absent which we simply could not be the beings we are—in this passage, Heidegger describes us not as actors but as patients of situations outside our individual doing, sufferers of circumstances beyond our control, coping with arrangements that no one can do anything about because no particular person is responsible for having created them or for maintaining them. We are uniform and interchangeable: "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself" and the "who" of my everyday self "is the '*nobody*' to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being-among-one-another [*Untereinandersein*]."[78] Sloterdijk, along with Heidegger's Anglophone readers, senses a negative charge to this discussion of *das Man*, which Sloterdijk, applying a trinitarian theological term usually reserved for the interrelations of the three persons of the Godhead, calls "derelict forms of existential perichoresis." This dance transpires in "the communal intimate swamps where daily coexistence takes place as an unassuming being-outside-oneself. If everyone is the other and no one themselves, a gray perichoresis comes into view that makes communional optimism . . . come to nothing."[79]

While this sleepy dispersal into the nothing of the no one may sound unappealing, Heidegger argues that anyone "who has any tendency to take things easily and make them easy" experiences this "disburdening" by *das Man* as an "accommodation," not as a restriction on self-expression and freedom.[80] Sometimes deferral to and conformity with *das*

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for him, and through him, the 'they' always finds a way to have been the one who did it; where someone did something, no one did it" (*Bubbles*, 628).

[78] Heidegger, *SZ*, 169; *BT*, 165.

[79] Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 626

Man is a function of our fatigue because it takes persistent energy and effort to swim upstream, to buck tradition, to forge a path in an untrammeled thicket. Ease, comfort, survival: these often motivate social conformity. Because of the seductive convenience and relief offered by passive anonymity, "the 'they' retains and enhances its stubborn dominion."[81] Given the Kierkegaardian and Adornian resonances of descriptions like these, readers might understand why Olafson would argue, albeit hastily and overemphatically, that *das Man* is a "deformation of *Mitsein.*"[82]

Das man encompasses several ways of being, including (but not limited to) distantiality, averageness, and leveling. "Distantiality, averageness, and levelling down, as ways of Being for the 'they', constitute what we know as 'publicness' ['die Offentlichkeit']."[83] What is meant by publicness? The public official occupies an office, taking on a role that has been held by predecessors and will be held by successors; the office—such as that of a district attorney, a judge, a pediatrician, a bishop, or a university president—is assumed to be something that generations of people will be able to take turns filling, and who are expected to act, if not *in loco parentis*, then at least in the place of and on behalf of the interests and needs of those they represent, according to the functions the office is designed to carry out. The public official, when acting as such, fulfills different obligations and duties than when that same person acts as a friend or as a parent, which are usually private roles. The public nature of the bureaucratic position necessitates conformity to public

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[80] Heidegger, *SZ*, 169; *BT*, 165.

[81] Heidegger, *SZ* 169; *BT*, 165.

[82] Olafson, "Coping,"59.

[83] Heidegger, *BT*, 164.

standards, even if some officials fulfill the office with more diligence, integrity, and positive impact than others (there are good teachers and bad teachers, good judges and bad judges, good presidents and very, very bad ones).

Many of Heidegger's descriptions of leveling [*Einebnung*] and publicness [*Öffentlichkeit*] sound particular to modern mass culture in industrialized Europe.[84] The fact that Heidegger takes "utilizing public means of transport" and "making use of information services such as the newspaper" as examples of the public environment indicate that he has in mind urban, literate, densely populated ways of life that are premised on the use of printing presses, gasoline, and paved roads. The problem is that in such environments, "every Other is like the next" and my own individuality "dissolves completely" even as explicit and distinct others "vanish more and more."[85] The mass overtakes the singular not just in crowded bus terminals or stadiums but in a whole range of leisure activities, aesthetic preferences, and acceptable reactions which inconspicuously unfold "the real *dictatorship* of the 'they.'"[86] We do not express an unpopular opinion about a recent film because we want present company to like us and to believe us to have sophisticated taste according to the prevailing standards of the literati. "We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [*man*] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find

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[84] Olafson takes Heidegger, in the section on *das Man*, to be speaking not about perennial human problems but rather about "the circumstances of modern life in mass societies; and under the influence of Kierkegaard he sees the anonymity that is unavoidable in the circumstances of modern life and mass society as taking on a momentum of its own and, so far from being confined to certain situations, as dominating the relations among human beings and even that of each human being to himself" ("Coping," 58).

[85] Heidegger, *SZ*, 168; *BT*, 164.

[86] Heidegger, *SZ*, 168; *BT*, 164.

shocking."[87] So irresistible is this conformism that even when we think we are rebelling from it, we do so in a predictable and uniform way. Contrarianism is itself a movement, a trend, as susceptible to clichés as any other form of life. Even 'alternative' subcultures, their musical genres and clothes, become lifestyle brands available for purchase by those who fear being unfashionable.

Heidegger also describes publicness as a hermeneutical lens—as an all-encompassing interpretation of the world, rather than as practices such as news-reading or bus-riding. "Publicness proximally controls every way in which the world and Dasein gets interpreted, and it is always right . . . because it is insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness and thus never gets to 'the heart of the matter.'"[88] Because it homogenizes and trivializes, this public interpretation is erroneous, artificial, illusory, inaccurate. Here, Heidegger construes the normality reinforced by *das Man* as that which occludes our vision, muddies the waters, and misdirects the focal beam of our scrutiny, curiosity, or skepticism: "By publicness everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone."[89] Far from making our practices, goals and values clear, far from being revelatory, publicity provides a false sense of accessibility that distances us from the pursuits and ideas that might enrich us most. Publicity in this passage opposes authenticity insofar as the former occludes and veils what the latter must then uncover and reveal.

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[87] Heidegger, *SZ*, 168; *BT*, 164.

[88] Heidegger, *SZ* 169; *BT*, 165.

[89] Heidegger, *SZ* 169; *BT*, 165.

Heidegger's worry about a certain kind of publicity stems from the chattering it produces, a prattling that makes the distinctions between the profound and the trivial, the significant and the trifling, nearly impossible for hearers, speakers, and writers to discern. As averageness and leveling down unfold in a society, "[o]vernight, everything that is primordial gets glossed over as something that has long been well known. Everything gained by a struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every secret loses its force."[90] Rumors circulate, and the default mode of communication becomes an empty narrativizing that never references a reality outside its own circle of jabbering. In this Heideggerian spirit, Michel de Certeau questions whether it is wise or prudent to base policy decisions on opinion surveys, given that the citational practices involved in such information gathering may cover up demographic facts rather than pointing to and clarifying them.[91]

And yet, not every social context is one in which the prevailing ethos vociferously denies the exceptional to the point of maintaining absolute homogeneity. Sloterdijk points

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[90] Ibid. Michel de Certeau sees this Heideggerian idle talk operative in contemporary news media landscapes: "The media transform the great silence of things into its opposite. Formerly constituting a secret, the real now talks constantly. News reports, information, statistics, and surveys are everywhere. No story has ever spoken so much or shown so much. Not even the ministers of the gods ever made them talk in such a continuous, detailed, and imperative way as the producers of revelations and rules do these days in the name of current reality. Narrations about what's-going-on constitute our orthodoxy." ("Believing and Making People Believe"), 185.

[91] "Every citizen assumes about all the others what, without believing it himself, he learns about the belief of others. Replacing doctrines that have become unbelievable, citation allows the technocratic mechanisms to make themselves credible for each individual *in the name of the others.* To cite is thus to give reality to the simulacrum produced by a power, by making people believe that others believe in it, but without providing any believable object" (De Certeau, "Believing and Making People Believe," 189). In a passage that predates the fake news crisis by decades, de Certeau offers a prescient account of the ways that supposed facts about public opinion can be used to deceive and manipulate the community whose opinions are surveyed: "To the extent that this instrument [of opinion surveys and their citation] that 'creates opinion' is manipulable by those that have it at their disposition, it is legitimate to inquire into the opportunities it offers for changing 'belief' into 'mistrust,' into 'suspicion,' and indeed into denunciation, as well as into the opportunity for citizens to manipulate politically what serves as a circular and objectless credibility for political life itself" (Ibid., 189).

out the luminary potential of Heidegger's concepts for social existence; we are each a place that is "disclosed through the mutual inhabitation of those confusedly existing in a state of being-there-with. This place has always opened up, even if the horizon is only illuminated by the average, the medial or the vulgar."[92] On this reading, the banality of *das Man* can be at any moment the means through which we come to our fullest selves.

Conscience and Authentic Consensus

The strange tension in *Being and Time* between the tonal bleakness on the one hand and the positive concept of sharing on the other relates to a point around which much of the Anglophone scholarly debate has centered. Intervening in the vigorous debate between Hubert Dreyfus and Frederick Olafson about how to interpret the meaning of *das Man*, Herman Philipse argues that "Heidegger uses the expression '*das Man*' as a collective noun for all human behaviour that is standardized by roles and rules," but while Dreyfus takes norms of equipmental use as the paradigm case, Philipse highlights that the term also covers "conformity to the moral norms of society."[93] Philipse argues that while both Dreyfus's and Olafsons's readings have their own problems—problems he attributes to American ideologies of optimism, according to which things in daily life are mostly alright—Philipse maintains that elements of both readings are correct. Philipse argues that the most accurate treatment of the text of *Being and Time* "should explain why Heidegger stresses both the fundamental and the negative nature of das Man."[94] Dreyfus satisfies this requirement

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[92] Sloterdijk, *Bubbles,* 628.

[93] Philipse, "Heidegger and Ethics," 453.

[94] Ibid., 452.

partially; he accounts adequately for the "fundamental" nature of *das Man* by describing it as constitutive of daily life in a shared cultural context, and as the source of the norms that govern and guide equipmental use. Olafson accounts for the other half of the equation, explaining the "negative" nature of *das Man*, because he reads *das Man* as a deformation of *Mitsein*. While Philipse points out that Olafson wrongly characterizes *das Man* as an ontical rather than an ontological feature of the human, Olafson rightly picks up on the gloominess of many of Heidegger's descriptions of inauthentic public life. The problem is that "both Olafson and Dreyfus tacitly assume that according to Heidegger, *das Man* cannot be both a fundamental structure of our daily life in the world and a structure that has to be evaluated negatively from an ontological point of view."[95] Philipse maintains that "someone like Heidegger, who was imbued with a traditional and mystical Catholic mentality of world-abnegation and was writing *Sein und Zeit* during the cheerless German interbellum period" would not make such an assumption; rather, appraising ordinary social existence as both constitutive *and* negative is precisely what Heidegger would do.[96] As opposed to the naively optimistic "Californian multiculturalism"[97] attributed to Dreyfus's reading, Philipse implies that Heidegger would have had no expectation that day to day living would be something other than drudgery, believing instead that suffering is basically inescapable, that people go about their business for the most part thoughtlessly and wearily, that a permanent cure for

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[95] Ibid., 452.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 456.

what ails us does not exist, and that participation in the life of society is inexorably oppressive, or at least restrictive.

Philipse reads Heidegger's ethical position in *Being and Time* to be one of radical decisionism, because of the autonomy required by authenticity and by the reflective freedom of conscience. Philipse glosses Heidegger's account of the individual's relation to ethical injunctions as follows: "If authentic Dasein considers itself to be bound by moral rules, this is because it has chosen to be so bound. According to Heidegger, the normative force of moral rules does not restrict the possible contents of an authentic choice. Rather, if moral rules have normative force at all for a given individual, this force is produced by authentic choices of that individual."[98] Heidegger does not use the phrase "moral rules," nor does he reference the contents of any such rules in an explicit way in *Being and Time*. Still, his discussion of conscience—which is a morally charged concept—understandably raises some questions about the possibility of instituting authoritative and enforceable communal guidelines.

While Heidegger's antinomian construal of conscience, which is outlined in section two of Division II, and which my previous chapter discussed, follows Kant by rejecting heteronomy in favor of only those rules that can be subjectively or personally authenticated, it also rejects the restrictions imposed by Kant's categorical imperative, which sets limits to the contents of moral choices. For Kant, only those choices that can be universalized are acceptable. This is why Philipse understands Heidegger's moral decisionism to be of a skeptical variety, and one that ultimately claims that "there is no ground of ethics at all, or, to

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[98] Ibid., 455.

use Heidegger's later jargon, that the ground (*Grund*) of ethics is an abyss (*Abgrund*)."[99] However, pointing out the groundlessness of ethics already seems to undermine Philipse's claim that Heidegger endorses submission to the *Volk* as the solution to an otherwise ungraspable consensus. If ethics is abyssal, then submitting to the general will and destiny of the *Volk* is just one possible choice among many, rather than an irrefutable, irresistible command which demands obedience.

The problem with deferring to a plurality of individual consciences, of course, is that living in a peaceful community requires some baseline agreement about what is and is not acceptable to do and say. As Philipse puts it, "no state can be effective unless there is a robust global consensus on many norms and values."[100] He is doubtful that any such consensus could arise "if the authentic acceptance of moral and political norms is produced by free decisions of each and every individual citizen," as would be required by certain formulations of democracy.[101] Consensus usually requires individuals to submit to some heteronomous guidelines—or, at a minimum, we arrive at peaceable, sustainable consensus only when we each autonomously or willingly choose to give up some of our freedoms. Philipse claims that "Heidegger endorses the *mythical solution* to the problem of *Gleichschaltung* [how autonomous individuals can arrive at consensus on norms and values]

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[99] Ibid., 458. Adorno made similar criticisms of Heidegger, which Espen Hammer deems incorrect: "Fundamental ontology advocates "submission to historical situations as though it were commanded by Being itself" (Adorno, 1973b: 130). Consequently, "Of the eternal idea in which entity was to share, or by which it was to be conditioned, nothing remains but the naked affirmation of what is anyway — the affirmation of power" (Adorno, 1973b: 131)" (Hammer, *Adorno*, 109)

[100] Philipse, "Heidegger and Ethics," 460.

[101] Ibid.

in section 74."[102] That is, Philipse understands Heidegger to be saying that our free authentic

decisions are "guided in advance" toward harmony "by the 'mythical entity' of the 'people'

(*Volk*) and its historical destiny, a view derived from theories of the general will (Hobbes,

Rousseau) and from the German romantics."[103] Thus, Philipse believes that Heidegger's form

of individual decisionism leads to totalitarian political rule, because the resolute individual,

upon deciding to make a choice, "will discover that this choice has already been determined

in advance by the authentic Destiny of its Volk, to which it has to surrender (*überliefern*)

itself."[104] To what extent is such an interpretation tenable? The careful reader can see that

this totalitarianism-endorsing construal of the text ignores many facts about this passage of

Being and Time, the details of which will be discussed at length below. A straightforward

reading of Heidegger's own words complicates, if not contravenes, Philipse's claim that

deference to the external authority of the *Volk* is commended, particularly Heidegger's

section on conscience, and his criticisms of the leveling forces of publicity. Philipse's

reading is that Heidegger "relegates common morality to the sphere of inauthenticity and *das

Man*" and so cannot help us think through how to achieve consensus that preserves freedom.

However, it is far from clear that Heidegger slots all norms of use, action, and speech under

the heading of *das Man*.

Most importantly, this reading fails to see that Heidegger talks about Destiny *not* as a

predetermined outcome but as the result of resolute human action. Heidegger does indeed

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[102] Ibid. As I noted earlier in this dissertation, Heidegger's anti-Semitic remarks and his Nazi political
association are well-documented and inexcusable. Careful reading of *Being and Time*, published in 1926,
requires that we do not superimpose later biographical facts onto it.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid., 461.

state in section 74 that "'Destiny [*Das Geschick*]' is not something that puts itself together out of individual fates [*Schicksale*], any more than Being-with-one-another can be conceived as the occurring together of several subjects."[105] This is another way of saying that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, because it is impossible to tease apart the discrete cause and effect relations that bring about the founding and the development of communities. As Philipse puts it, "we would expect that within a given cultural matrix the historical vicissitudes that befall a community are produced, at least in part, by the individual decisions of its members" but that tracing or predicting the outcomes of each choice is impossible because "different individual decisions combined will always produce unintended results and may cancel each other out."[106] However, it is this "pluralistic conception of the 'destiny' of a people" that Philipse claims Heidegger rejects.[107] As I will show in more detail in the section on inheritance below, this reading misses the subversive, even dialectical way that Heidegger defines fate as a 'rejoinder,' which requires conscience and freedom, rather than a mere affirmation of status quo.[108] In light of this fact, it is not accurate to read these passages as endorsing a total surrender to a choice already made in advance by the *Volk*. Instead, the discussion is an attempt to present an account of authentic community: a group that preserves the uniqueness of the individuals who compose it, as opposed to a crowd that erases individual identities.

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[105] Heidegger, *BT*, 436.

[106] Philipse, "Heidegger and Ethics," 459–60.

[107] Ibid.

[108] "Only if death, guilt, conscience, freedom, and finitude reside together equiprimordially in the Being of an entity as they do in care, can that entity exist in the mode of fate; that is to say, only then can it be historical in the very depths of its existence" (Heidegger, *BT*, 437).

Solicitude as an Alternative to Conformism

The analysis of *Mitsein* and *das Man* benefits from an engagement with Heidegger's concept of solicitude [*Fürsorge*] because it rounds out the scholarly discussion of sociality in *Being and Time*, which has focused on the relation between the individual and society but has neglected Heidegger's brief treatments of interpersonal relationships—those that occur at a one-on-one level rather than on a cultural or societal scale. The concept of "leaping ahead" specifically offers an account of human sociality at the interpersonal level that could be fruitful if further explored by scholars doing constructive work in modern social theory.

Solicitude is the care we have toward other people, and it "is guided by *considerateness* and *forbearance*."[109] Our usual way of relating or being together in solicitude lies "between the two extremes of positive solicitude—that which leaps in and dominates, and that which leaps forth and liberates [vorspringend-befreienden]."[110] That is, *Fürsorge*, a subspecies of care specifically for other people (as opposed to concern, which is care for equipment ready-to-hand) includes positive, that is, active or attentive modes— leaping in and leaping ahead. Leaping in for another person "can, as it were, 'take away 'care' from the Other and put itself in his position of concern," usually in practical matters that involve the ready-to-hand.[111] For example, a lawyer could *leap in* for me and deal with a legal issue resolvable through a procedural solution, disburden me of it, and, employing their refined expertise and knowledge of the law, hand it back taken care of, having taken over a

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[109] Heidegger, *SZ*, 163; *BT*, 159.

[110] Heidegger, *SZ*, 163; *BT*, 159.

[111] Heidegger, *SZ*, 162; *BT*, 158: "The Other is thus thrown out of his own position; he steps back so that afterwards, when the matter has been attended to, he can either take it over as something finished and at his disposal, or disburden himself of it completely."

concern which is in fact mine and acting on my behalf. A plumber could take over my leaking kitchen sink and, having replaced a valve I did not know had eroded, leave me with well-functioning plumbing. Similarly, a kind mother-in-law could, sensing heightened stress levels and a busy schedule, leap in by dropping off a set of home-cooked meals during an intense week, disburdening me altogether of my usual concern to complete the pleasurable if time-consuming task of selecting recipes, shopping for, and preparing nutritious and flavorful food. I would count each of these temporary replacements of me and my position a relief, not as an infringement of my liberties. Much of ordinary life together requires such leaping in for one another, being at some level interchangeable with one another, and understanding one another's worries and desires adequately enough to be able to assist in attending to the projects and needs of neighbors, coworkers, family, and friends.[112] These innocuous and even beneficial forms of leaping in could be meaningful alternatives to the leveling and publicity that absorb personhood altogether. It is thus surprising that neither Hubert Dreyfus's account of intelligibility nor Olafson's constructive meta-ethics devote attention to the possible implications of this mode of *Fürsorge.*

Leaping ahead for the other "in his existentiell potentiality-for-Being" can "give back to him care authentically as such for the first time" and "helps the Other become transparent to himself in his care and to become free for it."[113] Thomas Carlson distinguishes this kind of authentic care from the instrumentalizing, selfish way in which we sometimes treat others,

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[112] As Steven Mulhall puts it, "A social role can be a vital element in an individual's self-understanding (as a vocation, for example); it can, therefore, be appropriated authentically, even if its essential nature does not ensure or even encourage such appropriations" (*Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005]*, 247).

[113] Heidegger, *SZ*, 163; *BT*, 159.

even others we supposedly cherish: authentic care is "a love that wills the other's authentic being (by contrast to a kind of nonbeing wherein the other simply serves the lover's calculating aims)."[114] To leap ahead is to liberate another person for his or her own authentic being. In a mentoring relationship, for example, the mentor awakens the conscience and consciousness of another. A good teacher shows the student the many branches of the many paths open to them, and reminds them of their agency to choose the route. When I leap ahead of someone, I empower them to take up their individual responsibility, and to find a stable footing as they step into the dizziness of freedom. When I the teacher leap ahead, I do not have foreknowledge of the linear lock step process the student will take, as if I am just a few steps ahead on the path that the student will follow. Instead, when a teacher leaps ahead, she helps the student clarify the student's own values, helps the student to make explicit what were previously only her implicit cares, and helps her take action to realize that care. Giving someone back to themselves is no easy task. But such liberation is required because at the level of someone's own mortally-delimited existence, no one can step in for them and take that over—it is not transferable or amenable to the logic of representation.[115] Dreyfus and

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[114] Carlson, *With the World at Heart*, 127. This idea is much like the Kantian dictum that a person always ought to be treated as an end in herself, rather than as means to an end. Carlson eloquently describes the way in which freedom and a degree of distance are required for genuine love: "By contrast to forms of love that consume the other and aim to secure the self on its own terms, thus eclipsing the ex-istence or standing out from herself that gives the other back to herself, genuine love here gives me to myself (as lover) only in giving me over to the existence of the other—who comes to herself, in turn, only in being likewise ex-posed, standing out from herself" (Ibid., 128).

[115] In the essay "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida explains this Heideggerian ethical relationship to another as a type of 'letting-be,' correcting what he sees as a misrepresentation or misunderstanding in Levinas's portrayal of Heidegger's notion of the Other: Thought "conditions the *respect* for the other *as what it is*: other. Without this acknowledgement, which is not a knowledge, or let us say without this 'letting-be' of an existent (Other) as something existing outside me in the essence of what it is (first in its alterity), no ethics would be possible. . . . The 'letting-be' concerns all possible forms of the existent, and even those which, *by essence*, cannot be transformed into 'objects of comprehension.' If it belongs to the essence of the Other first and foremost to be an 'interlocutor' and to be 'interpellated,' then the 'letting-be' will let the Other be what it is,

Olafson would have done well to investigate this conceptual territory more fully in order to understand the social (and ethical) dimensions of this part of *Being and Time*.

Social Norms and the Skilled Use of Equipment

A question implicitly raised in the Anglophone debate about sociality and conformism is whether equipment is premised upon and nestled within *Mitsein*, or whether the skills and know-how of equipment are structured by *das Man*, a particular subspecies or type of *Mitsein*. Phrased another way, the question is, to what extent does *das Man* structure our interpretation and use of equipment?

Frederick Olafson thinks Dreyfus needs to distinguish between skills on the one hand and norms on the other. That is, Olafson objects to categorizing instrumental and equipmental use as something structured by *das Man*. He argues that *das Man* names something distinct from the *zuhanden* quality of objects and that Dreyfus tries to slot too much of culture into *das Man*. On Olafson's view, Dreyfus erroneously presents *das Man* as "the repository of the whole stock of accumulated know-how of a given society—the whole corpus of competencies from how to tie a shoelace to how to build an atomic bomb together with a full roster of rules about the conduct of life and the terms on which we are to live together."[116] However, as both Dreyfus and Heidegger himself say, our social relations, some of which are named by *das Man*, *do* structure our use of tools and equipment and our selection of projects. Olafson's protestations are based on a misunderstanding of this fact. He

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will respect it as interpellated-interlocutor. . . . To let the other be in its existence and essence as other means that what gains access to thought, or (*and*) what thought gains access to, is that which is essence and that which is existence; and that which is the Being which they both 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" (137–38).

[116] Olafson, "Coping," 59.

is correct that in the organization of Division I, "until *Mitsein* is brought into the discussion of what we uncover in the world, *das Man* is not even mentioned."[117] But he is wrong that *zuhanden* entities and other Dasein can be so easily separated and so rigidly compartmentalized.

Sometimes, examining a very bad reading of a text is what best illuminates and allows one to draw out better and more tenable readings of that text. Errors can be as instructive as correct interpretations since their refutation requires explanation.[118] This is one such case. Olafson claims: "Since the skill we need to ride a bicycle involves the uncovering of *zuhanden* entities and not of other Daseins, it cannot very well be itself a form of *Mitsein* and, *a fortiori*, not a distorted form of *Mitsein* [this distorted form, according to Olafson, is *das Man*]."[119] Such a claim ignores the fact that a whole set of social practices and forms of know-how could properly fall under *Mitsein*. *Mitsein* structures how we interpret objects such as bikes, not only how we interpret social relations such as friendship or sisterhood. And exactly how solitary is bike riding? It seems ineliminably social from beginning to end. Riding a bike first requires someone to have manufactured metal and rubber for the wheels and the frame, and then requires someone to build the parts into something sturdy and smooth-riding. Once built, a store or a some such purveyor of goods is required to keep in stock, display and, sell the bike to consumers. A competent adult person is required to help the novice learn to ride a bike—holding the back of the seat until she learns to balance

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[117] Ibid., 60.

[118] Mark Taylor celebrates the possibilities opened by errors and by the willingness to be a nomad of thought: "Writing that attempts to trace the border and retrace the margin can, therefore, be described as *erring*" (*Erring*, 11).

[119] Olafson, "Coping," 60.

upright on her own. Once she knows how to ride it, it is possible to do with a greater degree

of solitude and without constant cooperation. She could drive in a car to a remote place in

order to bike alone along a forest-shrouded path—but it is a path that some previous person

cleared, on which other people have ridden, and to get to the remote place by car would

require her to follow all of the communally acknowledged traffic laws of the region.

Matthew Crawford shows exactly how social road sharing and driving are because of how we

must cooperate and read each other's signals.[120] Learning to ride a bike in the bike lane, and

not on the sidewalk, how to signal to cars with my arm when turning left, stopping at traffic

lights, yielding to pedestrians—all of these actions and communications require being with

others in a world of mutually recognized signals, indications, machinery, spatial

arrangements, rules of conduct, politeness, considerateness, and patience. The turn signal on

a motor vehicle is an example Heidegger himself gives of the socially assigned references

that make safe driving possible: "This sign is ready-to-hand within-the-world in the whole

equipment-context of vehicles and traffic regulations. It is equipment for indicating, and as

equipment, it is constituted by reference."[121]

Who determines this reference? In a line that most directly supports Dreyfus's

reading, Heidegger says "the 'they' [*das Man*] itself articulates the referential context of

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[120] See the chapters "Managing Traffic: Three Rival Versions of Rationality" and "Road Rage, Other Minds and the Traffic Community" in Matthew B. Crawford, *Why We Drive: Toward a Philosophy of the Open Road* (San Francisco: William Morrow, 2020). In "Automation as Moral Re-education" Crawford says: "Our ability to share the road together smoothly and safely is based on our capacity for mutual prediction. This is a form of intelligence that is socially realized, and depends on the existence of robust social norms that can anchor sound expectations of others' behavior. Automation may become attractive, then, as a response to declining social cohesion: it is an attempt to replace trust and cooperation with machine-generated certainty" (5).

[121] Heidegger, *BT*, 109.

significance."[122] How do implicit norms articulate the referential context of significance for bike-riding? They do so in myriad ways. It would be impractical to try to ride a bike by breaking from conventions and putting my head on the seat face down, because I would then not be able to use the bike to pedal myself from one place to another nor would I be able to see where I am going. Trying to use a bike as a hammer would not build a very good house. Trying to use a bike as a table would not make for a peaceful dining experience. Riding a bike through a hospital, or through the middle of a lecture hall, would create chaos and likely bodily injury for all parties involved. Olafson claims that "in his discussion of the *zuhanden* and the understanding that is cognate with it, Heidegger is talking about know-how and skills and not about social conventions or norms." But the know-how is embedded within and at every point shaped by social norms about where to bike (not through courtrooms, and not in the center of the freeway), when to bike (not at 3am when it is so hard to see and be seen by other road users), how to bike (I pedal with my feet, not my nose; I use the bike as a mode of transport, not as a pillow or a teacup). Agents and societies need norms and conventions in order to direct, order, and regulate the skills that are put to use in a certain way for a certain end, goal, or project, as the activity of bike-riding makes amply clear. Riding a bike as 'one' does, along a designated path (or down a rugged mountainside, if one is an especially outdoorsy thrill seeker), does not seem like conforming to oppressive strictures so much as using a piece of equipment in a way that allows me to achieve my goal within a context. Biking, in some respects is less cooperative and interactive than, for example, playing

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[122] Ibid., 167.

baseball, for which a pitcher, a catcher, basemen, and an opposing team are needed. But as

this lengthy description has just shown, biking is still *social* from beginning to end.

Without explicitly bringing in the 'who' associated with equipment, Dreyfus explains

that in the paradigm presented in *Being and Time*, our tools, our environment, and our

activities are interconnected:

> Equipment makes sense only in the context of other equipment; our use of equipment makes sense because our activity has a point. Thus, besides the "in-order-to" that assigns equipment to an equipmental whole, the use of equipment exhibits a "where-in" (or practical context), a "with-which" (or item of equipment), a "towards-which" (or goal), and a "for-the-sake-of-which" (or final point).[123]

The for-the-sake-of-which is shaped and influenced by the for-the-sake-of-*whom*, an

important point that connects the instrumental with the social. This is why Olafson's attempt

to separate equipment from social norms is a peculiar against-the-grain reading of Heidegger,

who devotes the first half of *Being and Time* to explaining that we do not encounter subjects

other than ourselves in a vacuum, without a world; rather, subjects always show up to and for

us within a context shaped by tools, goals, norms, and projects: "significance, as worldhood,

is tied up with the existential 'for-the-sake-of-which.' . . . The structure of the world's

worldhood is such that Others are not proximally present-at-hand as free-floating subjects

along with other Things, but show themselves in the world in their special environmental

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[123] Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 92. Heidegger offers an example of a project whose material tools, whose procedure, and whose aims are in response to the natural environment (inclement weather) and which are *for* a human person (who needs shelter to survive). The hammer, the house, the rain, and the people are interconnected. "With the 'towards which' of serviceability there can again be an involvement: *with* this thing, for instance, which is ready-to-hand, and which we accordingly call a 'hammer,' there is an involvement in hammering; with hammering, there is an involvement in making something fast; with making something fast, there is an involvement in protection against bad weather; and this protection 'is' for the sake of [um-willen] providing shelter for Dasein" (Heidegger, *BT*, 116).

Being."[124] The being of a human person is the ultimate end of every set of means; that is the

telos toward which every project is directed, which is why, again, it is not possible to

disentangle the equipmental from social norms. As Heidegger says, "the 'for-the-sake-of'

always pertains to the Being of *Dasein*, for which, in its Being, that very Being is essentially

an issue. We have thus indicated the interconnection by which the structure of an

involvement leads to Dasein's very Being as the sole authentic 'for-the-sake-of-which.'"[125]

While bike-riding is not an activity Heidegger explicitly mentions in *Being and Time*,

it is similar in relevant ways to the other practices Heidegger does mention, such as sewing

and tailoring, farming a field, selling and buying books, sailing a boat. To demonstrate the

intimate connection between *Mitsein*, people, and equipment, and the impossibility of

disentangling their referential networks, it is worth quoting Heidegger at length. We find that

in the work-world of the craftsperson

> along with the equipment to be found when one is at work [*in Arbeit*], those Others
> for whom the 'work' ["Werk"] is destined are 'encountered too.' If this is ready-to-
> hand, then there lies in the kind of Being which belongs to it (that is, its involvement)
> an essential assignment or reference to possible wearers, for instance, for whom it
> should be 'cut to the figure.' Similarly, when material is put to use, we encounter its
> producer or 'supplier' as one who 'serves' well or badly. When, for example, we
> walk along the edge of a field but 'outside it', the field shows itself as belonging to
> such-and-such persons, and decently kept up by him; the book we have used was
> bought at So-and-so's shop and given by such-and such a person, and so forth. The
> boat anchored at the shore is assigned in its Being-in-itself to an acquaintance who

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[124] Heidegger, *BT*, 160. Heidegger again explains in division II that the environmental being of the people with whom we share ways of life shows up to us in the midst of equipment, work, incidents, trade, activity: "When we are with one another in public, our everyday concern does not encounter just equipment and work; it likewise encounters what is 'given' along with these: 'affairs', undertakings, incidents, mishaps. The 'world' belongs to everyday trade and traffic as the soil from which they grow and the arena where they are displayed. When we are with one another in public, the Others are encountered in activity of such a kind that one is 'in the swim' with it 'oneself'" (440).

[125] Heidegger, *BT*, 116–17.

undertakes voyages with it; but even if it is a 'boat which is strange to us', it still is indicative of Others.[126]

The skills and the materials needed to tailor clothing, supply products to consumers, till a field, run a bookstore, or take nautical voyages are intelligible only within their social contexts and as references to human beings who are the makers and users of these things. *Mitsein* and *das Man* structure(s) how we interpret objects such as boats, fabric, scissors, plows, and paper, not just how we interpret social relations and social roles such as lovers, schoolmates, customer service providers, clergy and congregants. For example, in the case of the project of clothes-making, where fashion and function hopefully coincide, cotton is harvested and then woven and dyed *in order to* make a certain fabric which is tailored for a certain body type for a certain kind of person. The textile choice, print, color, pattern, and tailoring are often structured by the gender, age, occupation, or social class of the clothes wearer, for whom the garment is 'cut to the figure.' If we relate the social networks involved in clothing to the bike-riding example chosen by Olafson, we might readily concede that not everything about biking is free from objectionable types of conformism. Biking culture is fashionable, and there are certain clothing brands and models of bikes that one might choose in order to seem like the "right" kind of person—hip, fit, environmentally conscious, and therefore acceptable and lovable, worthy of group membership and inclusion. Deferring to a certain aspect of *das Man*, we perhaps 'forget ourselves' and buy athletic shorts because the brand is popular even though the shorts are unflattering to us in cut and color, or even though they were made by exploited children in sweatshops whose labor practices we denounce in theory but support in (purchasing) practice because the price of the garment is so attractively

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[126] Ibid., 153–54.

low. Still, the fact that there are more and less authentic ways of participating in biking

culture supports Dreyfus's reading of *das Man* as an articulation of the referential context of

significance, rather than Olafson's reading of *das Man* as a deformation of *Mitsein*.[127]

Inheritance, Freedom, and Futurity in Community

> The greatest blessing a society can confer on its young is to turn them into the heirs,
> rather than the orphans, of history. It is also the greatest blessing a society can confer
> on itself, for heirs rejuvenate the heritage by creatively renewing its legacies.
> —Robert Harrison, *Juvenescence*

> An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed
> unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction* to *reaffirm by choosing*."
> —Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

> Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be
> with one another.
> —Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*

In section 74, Heidegger subtly contrasts public interpretation and *das Man* with the

concept of heritage. We for the most part understand ourselves "in terms of those

possibilities of existence which 'circulate' in the 'average' public way of interpreting Dasein

today," such that we are "lost"; the proximity of these publicly interpreted possibilities makes

them "unrecognizable" even though, or precisely because, "they are well known to us."[128]

Familiarity renders some aspects of the world invisible, producing a kind of nearsighted

blindness. However, the authentic understanding and subsequent choosing of my possibilities

is not achieved in a vacuum, in an otherworldly plane separate from the socially and

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[127] "In understanding a context of relations such as we have mentioned, Dasein has assigned itself to an 'in-order-to' [Um-zu], and it has done so in terms of a potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which it itself is—one which it may have seized upon either explicitly or tacitly, and which may be either authentic or inauthentic" (Heidegger, *BT*, 119).

[128] Heidegger, *SZ*, 507; *BT*, 435.

historically constituted matrix of meaning through which I ordinarily move. The way of interpreting "which has come down to us," down from previous people, in implicit and explicit forms of tradition, is the backdrop against which "and yet again for it, that any possibility one has chosen is seized upon in one's resolution."[129] Authentic, resolute action is inextricable from the historical context from which that action emerges.

While Heidegger associates averageness and *das Man* with a sometimes negatively charged sense of lostness, his use of *heritage* is for the most part not attached to those connotations. In contrast to the dispersal and distraction that characterize lostness in *das Man*, when I return to myself, gathered and purposeful, my resoluteness "discloses current factical possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness, as thrown, *takes over*."[130] The confusing personification of resoluteness as the subject of the sentence (the subject who does actions like disclosing and taking over) notwithstanding, Heidegger clearly connects self-given heritage with authenticity. In spite of his earlier protestations and hedging about the merely descriptive, value-neutral status of inauthenticity, he states in this section that "the character of 'goodness' lies in making authentic existence possible" and that the resolute handing down of a heritage *to oneself* is a way to make such an authentic existence possible.[131]

Maddening as it can be for the political philosophers and ethicists who seek definitive answers to moral questions, in this section of *Being and Time*, Heidegger consistently avoids

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[129] Heidegger, *SZ*, 507; *BT*, 435.

[130] Heidegger, *SZ*, 507; *BT*, 435.

[131] Heidegger, *SZ*, 507; *BT*, 435.

a straightforward distinction between activity and passivity, between power and powerlessness. Heidegger's way of writing about resoluteness and fate prevents the possibility of neatly separating the agency of the individual from the circumstances that shape and supersede their agency. The two are always entangled such that we are constrained by structures and yet also free to choose within a range of options. Hermann Philipse's reading misses this dialectical feature of Heidegger's concepts. He claims: "the German words *Schicksal* and *Geschick* seem to cancel the notion of human freedom altogether. For to speak of an individual fate (*Schicksal*) and of the destiny (*Geschick*) of a people is to suggest that individual decisions do not make any difference whatsoever to what happens to us."[132] This misattributes a fatalism to the text. Heidegger does not demand that everyone accept their fate or their destiny, as if the destiny were predetermined and to be arrived at regardless of human action. There is no undergirding teleology to fall back upon in the existentialist, historicistic metaphysics of *Being and Time*. As he so often does with his terms of art, Heidegger turns the colloquial meaning of fate on its head, infusing it not with a sense of resignation and passivity, nor with the sense of a force or an outcome beyond control, but rather with a sense of action. Heidegger enjoins *amor fati* in a Nietzschean spirit of active nihilism, an opportunity for self-directed decisions. Grasping the finitude of my existence sets me in the "simplicity" of my fate, which is precisely *not* "comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly."[133] Rather, fate is the authentic historizing of the resolute individual, who "*hands* itself *down* to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited

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[132] Herman Philipse, "Heidegger and Ethics," *Inquiry* 42, nos. 3–4 (1999): 459.

[133] Heidegger, *SZ*, 507; *BT*, 435.

[*ererbten*] and yet has chosen."[134] *Received*, and yet also freely selected; that is the dual way in which to understand his idiosyncratic construal of destiny.

Once again reversing the expected implications of the term of art, he calls "the *powerlessness* of abandonment" the thing that we "take over" in freedom, exercising agency (in taking something over) precisely when it would seem we had no capacity to do so (in powerless abandonment).[135] Counterintuitively, it is not infinite, limitless liberty, nor a hope in everlasting, unmitigated strength and might that empowers, but rather it is our "finite freedom" that is our "superior power," according to which we can clearly envision "the accidents of the Situation that has been disclosed."[136] We can learn to distinguish between that which is accidental and that which is the result of our labors and efforts, and act resolutely within those constraints. Contra Philipse, this does not point to a defeatist acceptance of predetermined communal destiny.

We as individuals are shaped by our cultural contexts, "our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities."[137] At the heart of this co-historicizing is *struggle*, which is an activity, not automatic default or resignation. Heidegger argues that "only in communicating the struggle does the power of destiny become free."[138] Even here, destiny is not something that happens to us: it is something we shape. *We* liberate

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134 Heidegger, *SZ*, 507; *BT*, 435.

135 Heidegger, *SZ*, 509; *BT*, 436.

136 Heidegger, *SZ*, 509; *BT*, 436.

137 Heidegger, *SZ*, 509; *BT*, 436.

138 Heidegger, *SZ*, 509; *BT*, 436.

it. Fate—the abstract noun that Heidegger again personifies—does not wait idly by, nor does it slumber in an acquiescent haze, but rather "puts itself in readiness for adversities."[139]

Over and over in this section of *Being and Time*, Heidegger resists the idea of necessity, referring to historic practices as "possibilities," not as inevitabilities. Emulation and imitation of past ways of being are still shot through with novelty when I carry them forward to the present.[140] Even loyally "following in the footsteps of that which can be repeated" is a *struggle*; it is not done effortlessly and automatically, and it is one for which I must be "free," even if my aim is to be loyal and therefore committed to a definite and limited model, path, or way of life.[141]

Repetition is another concept shot through with the paradoxical coincidence of receiving and yet enacting, reiterating yet also innovating. There is no repetition of a practice without intention and choice—a handing down to oneself the thing to be repeated. A previously instituted practice or a law must be self-given, rather than heteronomous-ly imposed or coercively enforced, in order to be repeated authentically. "*Repeating is handing down explicitly*—that is to say, going back into the possibilities of the Dasein that has-been-there."[142] In going back, there is a turning to the past, yet there is also a forward orientation in handing down.[143]

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[139] Heidegger, *SZ*, 509; *BT*, 436.

[140] Mark Taylor articulates this very Derridian theme—that imitation implies distance—with characteristic lucidity: "perfect mimesis is no longer mimesis. If imitation were to realize itself completely, it would negate itself by actually becoming the thing imitated. Mimesis, therefore, necessarily bears witness to its own failure. Representation *is not* presentation. Instead of presenting presence, mimesis testifies to absence by tracing and retracing ever elusive presence" (*Erring,* 82).

[141] Heidegger, *SZ*, 509–10; *BT*, 437.

[142] Heidegger, *SZ*, 510; *BT*, 437.

Dreyfus and Jane Rubin articulate several helpful examples of what it would look like for an individual to resolutely take up and meaningfully inhabit a set of practices. More specifically, they propose that there are "marginal practices" from our past that "can be taken up and repeated in such a way as to resist leveling."[144] Certain historic practices need not be relegated to inauthenticity and the anonymity of *das Man*, but can instead be recovered in a liberating and fruitful way. These are ways of being together in community that resist leveling. One could take up authentic marginal practices unawares; one could also take them up explicitly. If taking them up explicitly, that means "choosing one's hero."[145]

Dreyfus offers several specific examples of "practices that were central in past epochs, like Christian caring in the early Christian communities and absolute commitment at the height of romantic chivalry, or Greek mentoring of adolescent boys"; these were "once central (and presumably therefore banalized)" but they "have now become rare and therefore

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[143] "As Paul Valery put it in his Notebooks, "*novat reiterando*": to renew through repetition, where repetition means precisely to re-petition the source. "Make it new!" (Ezra Pound's famous injunction to modernists) does not mean to invent ex nihilo but to descend into Hades and give dead languages a new vernacular, to bring into being a younger version of an earlier form or tradition. By retrieving and transfiguring a wide variety of strains in the literary heritage, the modernists showed in their innovations that the genuinely new does not chase after novelty" (Harrison, *Juvenescence*, 113).

[144] Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 328.

[145] Andrew Norris explains this idea of exemplarity in terms of Stanley Cavell: "Each party claims authority—to say, in the first person plural, what *we* say—but this is an authority that the other must *recognize*. Individual preference is at once granted—*I* must say this—and transcended—I say this as one of *us*. In his account of the distinctively political claim, Cavell extends this analysis to the citizen's ability to speak for her community. When I heed the other's claim, I open myself up to new modes of experience and common life, and I can in principle be *converted* from my current, more impoverished experience of that life. To so heed the other is to recognize her as speaking *for* me—saying what *we* say, who *we* are; and this is to recognize her as *exemplary* for me, as a model who pulls me away from my current self towards a better self. As I have argued in detail elsewhere (Norris 2017), this is possible only if the exemplar shows not just (a model of) that better self, but a model of *how to avert oneself to conformity*; and this can only be done by her *averting herself* from and in *her own conformity*. The exemplar who calls me to my (better) self and us to our (better) community can only do so self-critically" (Norris, "Being Realistic about Neoliberalism," *Constellations* [2019]: 19, DOI:10.1111/1467-8675.12444).

are no longer what one normally does. They therefore offer fresh ways of responding to the Situation."[146] If the situation is one in which caring professions and mentorship are not considered valuable, and therefore not considered to be worth cultivating or compensating financially, then repeating past possibilities, such as the practice of nursing or high school teaching, would be means through which "[a]n authentic individual could repeat the heritage unaware of its source" acting from a sense of duty or calling, "even though these are not the normal things to do these days when one generally seeks status and high pay."[147] Taking up a marginal practice is a way of resisting dominant, banalized practices of the contemporary moment, allowing the past to be a path to a novel future. Dreyfus says that taking up alternative, "old-fashioned" possibilities like nursing and teaching would "attract authentic individuals" because such practices "do not make good, average, everyday sense" and are therefore resistant to leveling.[148] How does this type of repeating practices resist leveling? Even if, for example, the devout Christians tries, in an act that defies the self-serving norms of their cultural context, to emulate one of Jesus's self-sacrificial actions with perfect accuracy, she will necessarily be doing something new, because she is enacting it now, in this moment, dressing the wounds of *this* person in today's hospital bed, not the leper from the first century; breaking bread with *this* hungry pariah, not the Samaritan of the gospel narratives. As Dreyfus so concisely puts it, "The tension between the past hero and the current Situation eliminates both universal moral guidelines and reliance on the normal,

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[146] Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 329.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid., 329.

making necessary a unique response."[149] Even the guidelines "feed the hungry" or "welcome the stranger" will require a new enactment for each occasion on which someone needs food or an outsider needs open-hearted hospitality.

Heidegger emphasizes that repetition of past practices and possibilities is a novelty, not a *recurrence* of the same; the past is not "actualized over again," nor does repeating "bind the 'Present' back to that which has already been 'outstripped.'"[150] Rather, repetition, in its element of innovation, "makes a reciprocative rejoinder to the possibility of that existence which has-been-there."[151] This rejoinder "is made *in a moment of vision*" and is therefore "a disavowal of that which in the 'today', is working itself out as the 'past.'"[152] In this way, the reciprocative rejoinder of repetition is a rupture, a disruption, rather than a continuation. Heidegger is enchanted by the idea that the visionary person, who can be anyone who is resolute, can act for this particular moment, this particular time, in response to the exigences of this particular now, a now which exists only because history has unfolded in a certain way up to this point. Where this vision comes from, and what is beheld in this vision, is left unsaid, though Heidegger explains the visionary moment of repetition as now-centric, emphatically present-minded, one that "does not abandon itself to that which is past, nor does it aim at progress" and which is "indifferent to both these alternatives."[153] And yet, as 'now'-focused as the resolute individual must be in her authentic retrieval of her heritage,

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[149] Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 331.

[150] Heidegger, *SZ*, 510; *BT*, 437.

[151] Heidegger, *SZ*, 510; *BT*, 438.

[152] Heidegger, *SZ*, 510; *BT*, 438.

[153] Heidegger, *SZ*, 510; *BT*, 438.

it is from the *future*, says Heidegger, that history's "essential importance" arises, rather than from our connection with the past.[154] In this sense, he adopts a progressive attitude, not a reactionary one.

The communal aspect of this futurity and resoluteness is in our "historizing in Being-with Others. In repetition, fateful destiny can be disclosed explicitly as bound up with the heritage which has come down to us."[155] While this may at first sound like a demand for "our" unquestioning, unwavering devotion to "traditional" ways of life, the educated reader must recall that destiny and fate, according to Heidegger's own definitions laid out above, are reinterpreted by him as concepts constituted by human choices, not by an irresistible external force. Just because destiny (the future) is "bound up" with heritage (the past) does not mean we must be uncritically subservient to tradition, never updating it. Instead, we must meet the demands of the day. Even if we look to models of inspiration from the past, to those who were self-sacrificial or wise, it is not possible to repeat that tradition perfectly; such inspired emulation will always be a new iteration (or "reciprocative rejoinder"). Dreyfus explains that "one cannot do in the present situation just what the exemplar from the past did, but if one is following an exemplar from the past one cannot do what one normally does either."[156]

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[154] Heidegger, *SZ*, 510; *BT*, 438.

[155] Heidegger, *SZ*, 510; *BT*, 438.

[156] Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 331. David Newheiser explains this same idea of freedom in the receiving of tradition as it appears in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*: "On this view, inheritance cannot function as a given, for that which can be inherited is never monolithic. Indeed, it is this problematic and conflicted character that keeps inheritance from being entirely passive. Derrida writes, 'If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal . . . we would be affected by is as by a cause.' Since inheritance is obscure, requiring continuous interpretation, fidelity must be active and engaged. By the same token, however, inheritance is not entirely within our power. Derrida explains, 'That we *are* heirs does not mean that we *have* or that we *receive* this or that, some inheritance that enriches us one day with this or that, but that the *being* of what we are is first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it or not.' In Derrida's account, we are shaped by a past that we did not choose and of which we are not fully aware" (*Hope in a Secular Age*, 121).

Because the resolute (and therefore "fateful") individual is ineliminably social, and "exists essentially in Being-with-Others," the individual's temporality, or "historicizing," is necessarily "a co-historicizing and is determinative for it as *destiny* [*Geschick*]. This is how we designate the historicizing of the community, of a people."[157] Dreyfus reads this as an opportunity or an invitation to decide *which* practices from history need to be recovered for *this* moment and generation given *its* particular crises. For example, in the age of the Anthropocene, we would do well to look for exemplars who model for us an investment—emotional and practical—in environmental health and ecology, adapting past practices of sustaining and respecting the non-human lives that inhabit our planet.

We never act in a vacuum and never operate from a tabula rasa but rather move toward the future out of the present which is shaped by the past.[158] Recognition of this historical situatedness does not entail surrendering to an authoritarian ethos or deferring to any given tradition simply for its own sake; rather, authentic community requires ongoing negotiation about ends and means, about which values, goods, ways of life, and needs we ought to prioritize, and creative reflection on how to secure them.

Conclusion

In the first half of this chapter, I explored the testimonial discourse, sacralizing social practices, and community-founding rituals that are on offer in Nicholas of Cusa's treatise on

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[157] Heidegger, *SZ*, 509; *BT*, 436.

[158] Heidegger recognizes that histories of colonization, warfare, and cultic practice shape present-day practices. "With the existence of historical Being-in-the-world, what is ready-to-hand and what is present-at-hand have already, in every case, been incorporated into the history of the world. Equipment and work—for instance, books—have their 'fates'; buildings and institutions have their history. And even Nature is historical. It is *not* historical, to be sure, in so far as we speak of 'natural history'; but Nature is historical as a countryside, as an area that has been colonized or exploited, as a battlefield, or as the site of a cult" (*SZ*, 513; *BT*, 440).

visionary experience, *De Visione Dei*. As opposed to the chattering masses that the critical theorists of chapter one so revile, Cusanus provides insights into the formation of community that maintains a balance between the 'each' and the 'all,' acknowledging both the necessity of and the limits to socially exchangeable translations of personal experience. In the second half of this chapter, I examined some competing interpretations of Heidegger's foundational concepts for social existence, especially the relationship between *Mitsein* and *das Man*, and the possibilities for authenticity that they may facilitate or inhibit. Authentic community requires our reciprocal rejoinders to inheritances that must be continually re-petitioned and reimagined.

Chapter 4: Creation, Creativity, and Art in Cusanus and Heidegger

In this chapter, I present Nicholas's and Heidegger's accounts of creativity as potential antidotes to both the mechanization associated with technological enframing and the aesthetic deterioration caused by the culture industry. Both Heidegger and Cusanus celebrate distinctively *human* making, as opposed to automaticity. I begin with a treatment of the interrelated themes of creation and creativity in Nicholas's thought, especially in *Idiota de Mente (Layman on the Mind)* and *De Visione Dei (On the Vision of God)*. I then draw on Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" to explore the relationship between creation, production, and world-building, especially the estranging yet revelatory function of great works of art that produce normative totalities for their communities. In this sense, the temple of Heidegger's "Origin" essay resembles the all-seeing portrait of Nicholas's group exercise, which founds the community and gives things their look. I then turn to Heidegger's "Building Dwelling Thinking," which explains human craft and creativity in terms of placemaking. Certain forms of artistic and architectural building can do the ongoing work of revealing new meaningful modes of comportment. These sorts of buildings can be sites of dwelling and unsettling, which demand not closure but creative, onward thinking.

Nicholas of Cusa on Divine and Human Creativity

For both Heidegger and Cusanus, the human is singular, social, and defined by creativity. Nicholas addresses the interrelated themes of creation and creativity from different angles over the course of his writing life. In *Layman on the Mind* and in *On Conjectures*, Nicholas meditates on distinctively human creativity in terms of our capacity to generate new ideas, rather than merely imitating naturally occurring phenomena, and our capacity to design instruments, arts, and whole cultures on the basis of these novel concepts—none of which

were anticipated or necessitated by a sovereign omniscience. In *On the Vision of God*, however, Nicholas applies his tenaciously dialectical reasoning to the question of divine immanence, and in so doing he infers—seemingly by accident—a fascinating coincidence of creating and being created; he suggests a reciprocal relation between divine and human creating, such that humans play an active role in forming God's own self. This reciprocity resembles the dialectical definitions that Heidegger gives to the notions of artistry, dwelling, building, and meditating.

According to Nicholas's anthropology, the human is an image without archetype or exemplar; the God in whose image the human is made is imageless and freely creative. This emphasis on human ingenuity is made possible in part by the fact that Cusanus modernizes the Neoplatonic account of activities of creation by locating those activities in a subject and in the mind of the human, as Ernst Cassirer has pointed out. Cusanus's mystical ninth-century forbear, John Scotus Eriugena, describes the simultaneously created and creating being by referring "to the non-temporal emergence of things from their Ideas, i.e., from their eternal prototypes and archetypes"[1] whereas Cusanus does not consider *ideas* to be creative forces but rather "he requires a concrete subject as the central point and as the point of departure for all truly creative activity."[2] For example, in *De Ludo Globi*, Cusanus describes humans as the ingenious makers of their equipment, as the conceivers of their own tools and designs, rather than construing humans and their minds as mere media through which eternal forms and ideas realize themselves—a version of Eriugena's idealism. Cusanus says: "The soul, by its own inventiveness creates new instruments in order to discern and to know. For

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[1] Eriugena, *De divisione naturae* 2.2, quoted in Cassirer, *Individual*, 41.

[2] Cassirer, *Individual*, 41.

example, Ptolemy invented the astrolabe, and Orpheus invented the lyre, and so on. [These] inventors created these instruments not from something extrinsic but from their own minds. For they unfolded their conceptions in perceptible material."[3] Only through the special talents granted by human consciousness, insight, and reasoning could we make instruments as refined as harps and compasses, using the strings and wood, or the metal and glass, that we find in our surroundings and that we then refine for our purposes. The instruments we make are based on *our* concepts, on the images that arise in the craftperson's mind. For example, spoons and jars, unlike statues and paintings that imitate a person's face or a landscape, do not have any natural precedent, no formal antecedent that they hope to replicate in a different medium. Cusanus ventriloquizes the inner monologue of the artisan in *Idiota de Mente*, writing:

> Outside of the exemplar in our mind, the spoon has no other exemplar. For although the sculptor or painter takes exemplars from the things he wishes to represent, I do not. I bring forth spoons and bowls from wood and jars from mud. Indeed, in doing this, I imitate the form of no natural thing. In fact such forms as spoons, bowls, and jars are made by human art alone. Hence my art is more of a perfection than an imitation of created forms, and in this it is more similar to the infinite art.[4]

Because the artisan creates with freedom from natural forms, they can be said to construct the genuinely new.

For Nicholas, human actors and human contemplators are required not only for creative activities such as music and astronomy, but also for assigning values, for evaluating and judging works of art and scientific experiments. In *De Ludo Globi*, Nicholas observes that "without the power of judgment and of comparison, every evaluation ceases to exist, and

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[3] Cusanus, *De Ludo Globi*, 2:1232.

[4] Cusanus, *Idiota de Mente*, in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, 1:527–601.

without it value would also cease. Wherewith we see how precious is the mind, for without it, everything in creation would be without value."[5] Value is conferred by the mind of the human subject; it does not exist intrinsically within the natural elements of the environment. Pauline Watts, alongside Thomas Carlson, explains that Cusanus presupposes a generative capacity and liberty in human volition, which issues in open-ended practices of cultivation: "Culture is not imposed on man by God, nor is its nature or growth in any way necessary or pre-determined. Culture is entirely dependent upon the freedom of man's will, on the freedom of an infinite number of wills."[6] The human must institute conventions guiding its activities and projects, must establish contracts, must construct "a 'world' of rules that then make possible, thanks to their constraint, an ongoing and open activity in which the creative human realizes itself—something like the playful game of culture," as Thomas Carlson puts it.[7] Carlson points out that the technical equipment we create not only expresses but *enables* our ongoing freedom; though some technologies are instrumental means to concrete ends, they also play a role in "actually forming a world that sustains those structures in and through which the human subject can think and act freely and creatively."[8] That world formation is premised upon our imagining and our reasoning, enacting our mental lives so that they are externalized in the tools and institutions and art we make.

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[5] Cassirer, *Individual*, 44.

[6] Watts, quoted in Carlson, *Indiscrete Image*, 104.

[7] Carlson, *Indiscrete Image*, 104.

[8] Ibid., 105: "Technological innovations, like the intellectual conjectures of language, writing, number, and syllogism, are forms of worldhood, created by humanity, which allow humanity to engage freely in further creative activity. Like God's own creation of a creative humanity, they are forms that we create in order to make possible the ongoing freedom of creation."

In his *Layman* dialogues, Nicholas explains processes of cultural production and creative activity by noting that the artisan's "mind marks off the boundaries of all things"[9] and that "mind measures all things,"[10] seemingly indicating a projective rather than a receptive paradigm of knowledge of objects. Mind marks off the boundaries of a slab of wax, which can be formed into many shapes according to the artisan's intentions and desires, and in this sense "mind is applied from outside the object. (What holds true for wax also holds true for clay and everything pliable)."[11] He emphasizes that an artist with a vision of what is not yet designed and present is needed in order to make anything: "Without mind no configuration can be made—whether in the art of sculpting or of painting or of building."[12] Thus, the human mind certainly performs more operations than mere reception and assimilation. Nicholas even goes so far as to claim that the human mind generates its own mathematical concepts for size, shape, distance, quantity: "Mind makes number; hence, multitude and magnitude derive from mind."[13]

Still, Nicholas continually highlights that the constructive capacity of humanity is also a receptivity. In ways beyond the mathematical, Nicholas notes that our human way of engaging the world "is seen to enfold all things in accordance with the nature of its contractedness" and in so enfolding and encompassing, our humanity "keeps them [all things] within the bounds of its own region to such an extent that none of them escape its

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[9] Cusanus, *Idiota*, 1:557.

[10] Ibid., 1:565.

[11] Ibid., 1:557.

[12] Ibid.

[13] "Mind makes a *point* to be the termination of a line, makes a line to be the termination of a surface, and makes a surface to be the termination of a material object" (Ibid., 1:565).

power."[14] The human is a microcosm that contractedly encompasses "God and the entire world."[15] Framing is what we do in order to create the conditions of appearance for the world around us, and Nicholas terms this framing and projecting 'enfolding.' For example, he states that "humanity's marvelous power to go forth unto all the things that are to be surveyed is nothing other than for its power to enfold all things within itself in a human way."[16] Our going forth toward things is also a simultaneous movement of drawing them into our perspective.

Our own self-creation is the telos of our activities. In *On Conjectures*, he states that "there is no other goal of humanity's action of creating than humanity itself. For when humanity creates, it does not pass beyond itself; rather, when it unfolds its power, it arrives at itself."[17] Our activities of making are what give us our identities. Using one of his favorite geometrical metaphors, Cusanus in fact labels humanity itself as an infinite sphere, saying that "the power of humanity is such as to unfold all things from itself within the circle of its own region and to bring forth all things from out of the power of its center."[18] While this may sound limiting and enclosing, he reminds us of the counter-intuitive fact that "oneness is infinity," so that plurality, not flattening homogeneity, is the result of human unfoldings.[19] There is also an immense plasticity to human being.

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[14] Cusanus, *De Coniecturis*, 1:236.

[15] Ibid., 1:237.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.: "For humanity is a oneness that is also a humanly contracted infinity" (1:236).

There are, of course, still limits to what our minds can generate and invent. There is a fundamental givenness that we measure. As Nicholas puts it, "the measure or end-point of each thing is due to mind. Stones and pieces of wood have a certain measurement—and have end-points—outside our mind; but these [measurements and end-points] are due to the Uncreated Mind, from which all the end-points of things derive."[20] The fact that the ultimate metric system remains hidden within the divine mind is double edged; that system underwrites and guides our mental measurements, yet it also guarantees that full access to objects and to certain knowledge will continually elude our grasp. As Thomas Carlson notes, "Cusa likens the human creation of conceptual things to God's creation of the real" in *De Ludo Globi*.[21] Cusanus makes a similar claim in *Idiota de Mente*, where he calls the human mind a "living mirror," created by God in a way that is analogous to the mirroring reflection of a hand-crafted spoon that is created by the artisan.[22] Our minds *assimilate* the many things that the divine mind *reifies*; whereas divine conceptions are reifying realities, human conceptions are mental images of those realities.[23] Because of this difference between creating and assimilating, between divine and human minds, our knowledge of reality is imprecise, and our concepts are conjectural rather than undeniable.

In several passages of *On Conjectures*, Cusanus shares with Heidegger a sense of the connection between nature and art, an alignment between the world's blossoming and the

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[20] Cusanus, *Idiota de Sapientia* and *Idiota de Mente* in *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, ed. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Banning Press 1996), 255.

[21] Carlson, *Indiscrete Image*, 104.

[22] Cusanus, *Idiota*, 211.

[23] "Our mind differs from the Divine Mind as seeing differs from doing. The Divine Mind *creates* by conceiving; our mind *assimilates* by conceiving—i.e., by making concepts, or intellectual viewings [*visiones*]. The Divine Mind is a reifying power; our mind is an assimilative power" (Ibid., 227).

human's poetic making. Our reasoning is able to emulate natural things, and is also able to produce surprising novelties.[24] According to Cusanus, our artistic productions and activities—including weaving, planting, cooking, and cobblery—originate from and end in the natural.[25] As Clyde Miller points out, in Cusanus's theory of conjectural knowledge, "we are measured by the things we know, *and* we construct the concepts and frameworks whereby we measure them, however 'conjecturally.'"[26] In this way, Nicholas the consummate dialectician shares with Heidegger the sense that receptivity and generativity are *co-constituted* in the measuring and building activities of the creative human.

The most stunning display of Nicholas's dialectical powers is his discussion of the confluence—approaching the indistinction or overlapping coincidence—of human and divine creativity in chapter twelve of *De Visione Dei*. There, creation takes on a meaning with surprisingly modern connotations in that we learn of the *reciprocal relation* between human and divine creating. Nicholas explains that God creates without restraints, without cosmic necessity or adherence to a preexistent cosmic order. God's freedom is God's absolute-ness, God's freedom from restrictions, and also freedom from *ends*. In chapter eight, Nicholas distinguishes between contracted, perspectival, conditioned human vision on the one hand and God's absolute vision, a "quantum angle," an "eye of infinite perfection" on the other. However, Nicholas ventures into rocky terrain when he meditates on the relationship

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[24] "Therefore, oneness-of-reason enfolds within itself the multitude of all perceptible things, both things natural and things produced by an art. Therefore, it brings forth from itself the forms of things natural and of things produced by an art" (Cusanus, *De Coniecturis*, 1:231). See also this quote on the connection between nature and artifice: "For art is a certain imitation of nature. It is evident that some perceptible things are natural, whereas others are products of an art. But it is not possible that perceptible things that are natural be devoid of art; likewise, perceptible things that are products of an art cannot lack a nature" (Ibid., 1:230).

[25] "The forms of things produced by an art are ordered toward the goal of natural things. For nature is the source and the goal of things produced by an art" (Ibid., 1:231).

[26] Clyde Lee Miller, "Knowledge and the Human Mind," in *Introducing*, 315.

between the subject and the object of creation, as well as the subject and object of seeing. He distinguishes his account of creation from Neoplatonic emanation by emphasizing that God's self-communication is a free act, in the sense that it is not bound by an eternal cycle of procession, remaining, and return. Yet a question arises for him: how can God create something other than God's self, if God's creating is God's seeing of God's self? That is, as Cusanus puts it in chapter twelve:

> If your seeing is your creating and if you see nothing other than yourself, but you yourself are your own object, for you are the seer, the seeable, and the seeing, how, therefore, do you create things that are other than yourself? For you seem to create yourself even as you see yourself. . . . Your creating is your being.[27]

This passage seems daringly to imply that within Nicholas's paradigm, God's own self undergoes continual development through the creatures who develop themselves. This divine development is at least in part the result of the activities of the free creatures created through God's vision. It is tenable and textually defensible to interpret some passages of the treatise as suggesting, along the lines of modern process theology, that creatures expand, extend, and unfold new possibilities and aspects of God. Louis Dupré articulates this idea with characteristic lucidity:

> The texts of *De visione Dei* imply that the presence of finite minds makes a difference to God's very Being. The reflective glance by which humans return to God's creative seeing of them opens up a dimension within God's Being that would not have existed without it. It enables God to see himself [sic] in the seeing of the creature. In creating, then, God initiates a reciprocal relation to the creatures.[28]

This reciprocal relation between God and creatures appears repeatedly in the passive phrasing that seems to describe God as the *object* or *patient* of creaturely activity. For example, Cusanus says, "Creating and *being created* alike are not other than communicating

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[27] Cusanus, *VG*, 257

[28] Dupré, "The Question of Pantheism from Eckhart to Cusanus," in *Cusanus: Legacy*, 87.

your being to all things."[29] Who is doing the creating in this sentence? Who is being created

in that sentence? He complicates this question even further a few lines later when he says "to

call is to create, and to communicate is to *be created*."[30] In God's own self-communicative

act, *God* is created. Later in the treatise, creatures seem to get a powerful role in *forming*

God. Nicholas meditates on God's infinity, saying, "You appear to me, therefore, O Lord, as

if you were absolute and infinite power to be, formable and determinable by every form."[31]

The "every form" to which he refers here are the myriad forms of the created world, to which

God conforms and by which God is determined as creatures look upon God from their finite

perspectives. God, as "absolute potency" and "infinity," resides "where the power *to be made*

coincides with the power to make."[32] It seems, then, that creatures are given a degree of

freedom and agency within the created world to continue carrying out activities of making,

and that God develops with and in response to the activities of creatures. As Thomas Carlson

has noted, for Cusanus, "the constructive freedom made possible by the lack of a priori

givens on this reading proves integral to the unfolding of the real itself. This implies the

inclusion within the real, or within nature, of a human—which is to say, a cultural and

historical—creativity that not only reflects but advances divine creativity."[33] This

advancement is infinite—and is an invitation to onwardness that is echoed in Heidegger's

call to ever learn to dwell, by building. Cusanus's emphasis on endless unfolding

complements Heidegger's desire for a thinking that does not calculate in advance but is open

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[29] Cusanus, *VG*, 257.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 263.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Carlson, *Indiscrete Image*, 97.

to new possibilities, and his desire for art forms that, in transcending their material composition, reveal new truths and gather new communities.

Creation, Production and World-Building in Heidegger's 'The Origin of a Work of Art'

> While wisdom gives the future a foundation in the past, genius effects breaks in the cultural continuum through its creative capacity to resist the dictates of tradition and generate the new—be it new tools, new knowledge, new worldviews, or new forms of expression. Through its innovations and revolutions, it effectively modifies, confounds, and adds to the reservoir of legacies that wisdom retrieves for transmission.
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> —Robert Harrison, *Juvenescence*

> Ultimate concern is manifest in the aesthetic function of the human spirit as the infinite desire to express ultimate meaning.
> —Paul Tillich, "Religion as a Dimension in Man's Spiritual Life"

Can humans really 'make' anything, or are we always only rearranging and receiving what existed before our arrival? Can we *create*, or can we only *produce*? How can art reveal truth, or even *make* truth? How does artistic production differ from technological activities, which also require manipulating materials, fashioning something complex out of what is available 'naturally'? How can we give an account of non-alienated and non-alienating *techne*, and how might that form of *techne* relate to *poiésis*? Heidegger's essay, "Origin of a Work of Art," addresses many of these questions about artistic production.

I begin this section by first providing a backdrop from Andrew Feenberg on how Heidegger's thinking about *poiésis* and *techné*, and the related domains of technology and art, evolved over the course of his writing life. I then exposit the foundational concepts of the 'Origin' essay, especially the revelatory, world-building function of great works of art—such as the temple—that produce normative totalities for their communities, noting the parallel ways that the portrait in Cusanus's *De Visione Dei* founds a community. Jay Bernstein will

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help me to illuminate the ways that Heidegger inherits and reinterprets the central concepts of

Kant's aesthetics to arrive at his account of the historically legislative power of artworks.

Andrew Feenberg notes that Heidegger's most famous treatment of equipmentality—

a concept related to artistic expression—appears in *Being and Time*, and its focus on tool use,

praxis, and labor lends itself to Marxist analysis.[34] As Feenberg puts it, in division one of

Being and Time, "making and self-making are intimately connected" because "Dasein's

answer to the question of its being is bound up with the technical practices through which it

gives meaning to and acts in its world."[35] Crafting artifacts is integral to self-understanding,

self-development, self-expression. Notably, however, "production drops out when Heidegger

explains authenticity in the second division of his master work,"[36] possibly because

Kierkegaard and Luther on conscience provide the conceptual background of division two,

displacing or overtaking the Aristotle-inspired concerns of praxis that had shaped division

one. Feenberg keenly observes that in Heidegger's later criticisms of technology, not only

does the problematic of authenticity (construed as a matter of individual conscience, resolute

action, and interior uniqueness) disappear, but also technical practice is precisely what ends

up "unmaking worlds"; technology (of a certain kind, anyway) destroys both self and world

in Heidegger's late essays. For this reason, Feenberg, extending the work of Marcuse, turns

to Heidegger's early work on Aristotle in pursuit of a non-instrumentalist model of praxis, a

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[34] Importantly, Herbert Marcuse also interprets the sections of *Being and Time* about conformism, factical possibilities, and resolute action through a neo-Marxist lens: "The self is thrown into a capitalist society where the alienation of production is the source of the inauthenticity that must be overcome. Now authenticity becomes the "radical act" of revolutionary refusal of the existing society" (Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, xii).

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

model that would meet the standards and values of neo-Marxism, which seeks a democratized socio-political arrangement that facilitates artistry and protects human dignity.

In Heidegger's 1923 lecture "Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle" (Heidegger 2002, 111ff)" (in which, Feenberg points out, "Aristotle is practically unrecognizable: the Greek philosopher is transformed into an existential ontologist avant la lettre"), he interprets Aristotle's notion of *kinesis*, movement, as "factical life," that is, as "practical engagements with the world" that lead to *techné* as a mode of revealing. Aristotle is thus credited with seeing the truths that would later ground Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*, since this lecture seems to anticipate the pragmatic idea that "everyday instrumental activity offers the basic access to reality."[37] Already in Heidegger's 1931 lectures on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, he presents *techné* as kind of emancipatory technology, as that which "realizes the inherent potentialities of things rather than violating them" and so is "respectful of human beings and nature," laying the groundwork for Heidegger's later criticisms of enframing and standing reserve.[38]

Feenberg follows Heidegger in drawing a distinction between the Greek notion of techné that builds worlds through craft, and modern technology that destroys worlds through dehumanizing manipulation. Whence this difference? The answer lies in the Greek distinction between *physis*, usually translated 'nature,' and *poiésis*, the practical activity of making an artifact. Philosophy starts from the premise that "humanity is a laboring animal constantly at work transforming nature,"[39] that is, through *poiésis* we humans are

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[37] Ibid., 4–5.

[38] Ibid., xiv.

[39] Ibid., 6.

continuously altering *physis*. While *physis* in the ancient Greek paradigm is "that which creates itself, that which emerges from out of itself,"[40] the products of *poiésis*, such as art, tools, and social conventions, come about thanks to forces and powers external to themselves—they must first be imagined and planned in the mind of the human maker before they come into existence. By contrast, the flower blooms organically, from its own 'essence,' and blooming is part of what it means to be a flower. The flower conceived in the Aristotelian paradigm is produced by its own "poetic" activity, since it is natural. However, artifacts do not emerge out of total subjective freedom—they belong to a particular *techné*. As Feenberg summarize it, "each *techné* contains the essence of the thing to be made prior to the act of making."[41] For example, "medicine is a *techné* that aims at healing the sick; carpentry is a *techné* that aims at building from wood," so the 'right way' to do things, according to the Aristotelian frame, is objective, in the sense that it is attached to and determined by purposes, rather than being a matter of mere whim or opinion.[42] Each *techné* requires knowledge about the facts of a certain region of life. The major consequence of such an outlook is that for the ancient Greeks—both Plato and Aristotle—"there is no radical discontinuity between technical making and natural self-production because they both share the same structure," and that structure, for both nature and culture, is teleological. This entails an anthropology that is quite foreign to the constructivism assumed by much of modern social theory. Since nature and culture are so teleologically aligned and intertwined, ancient Greek thought assumes that "humans are not the masters of nature but work with its

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 7.

[42] Ibid.

potentials to bring an ordered world to fruition. Neither our knowledge of that world nor our action in it is arbitrary but rather they expose and complete what lies hidden in nature."[43] As I argue below, Heidegger espouses a variation of this view in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art."

Now the distinction between ancient *techné* and modern technology becomes clearer. Modern technology is premised on a mechanistic rather than a teleological conception of the world, so that ends can be specified only by our will, rather than by the inner purpose of each thing. "Reason now concerns only means, not ends," and the instrumental reigns without values other than subjective assertions.[44] "Technology is "neutral" in the sense that it has no preference as between the various possible uses to which it can be put."[45]

This realization is why, according to Feenberg, Heidegger alters his interpretation of equipment and the salutary meaning-generation attached to production. "By 1939, Heidegger is denying that *techné* is at all helpful in understanding *physis*, precisely the opposite position from that of his earlier works (Heidegger 1998, 223). In the 1950 lecture on "The Thing," Plato and Aristotle are dismissed for having confused the essence of the thing with the *eidos* mobilized in the *techné* of its making (Heidegger 1971, 168)."[46] Feenberg also points out that

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[43] Ibid., 8.

[44] Ibid., 12.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 5. The following corroborates Feenberg's view. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," for example, Heidegger gives *techné* a strangely intellectual rather than pragmatic meaning, claiming that "*techné* designates a way of knowing. 'Knowing' means: having seen, in the broad sense of seeing which means apprehension of something present. . . . As knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, *techné* is a bringing forth of beings in that it brings *forth* what is present, as such, out of concealment, specifically into the unconcealment of their appearance. *Techné* never designates the activity of making" (Heidegger, "Origin," 35).

in fact Heidegger's technology critique still implies elements of the earlier approach to Aristotle, so the relationship between his early and late work remains complicated.[47]

Feenberg identifies two important shifts in Heidegger's 1930s treatment of technology. First, "He comes to believe that the revealing of being is not adequately modeled by notions such as equipment and techné."[48] Instead of understanding practical engagement to be universally revelatory throughout human history, Heidegger historicizes revealing activities, understanding them to be epochally defined, delimited, located, and therefore in need of illumination through a study of the 'history of being.' "This second shift motivates the contrast between techné and technology as historically specific modes of revealing,"[49] a contrast Heidegger emphasizes especially in "The Origin of the Work of Art," in which these two different forms of making are also two different forms of revealing.[50]

In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger justifies his quest for the origin, the cause, the point of emergence of a work of art by relying on the traditional philosophical assumption that "the origin of something is the source of its nature [*Wesen*]."[51] This approach makes good sense in many problem-solving and world-building contexts. For example, a physician who can identify the *origin* of a patient's symptom can then offer a correct diagnosis of the disease or illness causing that symptom, thereby clarifying the appropriate

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[47] Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, 5.

[48] Ibid., 28.

[49] Ibid.

[50] "This original practical relation to a world is described repeatedly in *Being and Time* in terms of the use of elementary hand tools. However, Heidegger does not say much about the relation between the analysis of worldhood and his concurrent research on Aristotle. In his 1931 lecture course on Aristotle's Metaphysics, the connection is made explicit (Heidegger 1995a, 117). The several lecture courses on Aristotle from the early 1920s to the early 1930s serve as a background to understanding the ontology of practice in *Being and Time*. In these courses, the Greek idea of being is interpreted on the model of techné" (Ibid., 27).

[51] Heidegger, "Origin," 1.

course of treatment. However, Heidegger defines the origin not simply as the beginning stage of a thing, but rather as "that from where and through which a thing is what it is and how it is."[52] The origin thus remains present in, effects, and guides the thing even as it develops and proceeds through subsequent stages of its existence—stages that may exceed and differ dramatically from its origin. Locating the origin in a single author, artist, or instance of creative insight turns out to be quite difficult.

To understand what even counts as an artwork, Heidegger asserts the importance of distinguishing "between beings which have the being of things and beings which have the being of works."[53] What are things? A stone, a lump of dirt, a cloud, a thistle, a leaf, and a hawk are in one sense "things"[54] in that they are entities we notice as we take a stroll through a rustic setting. But Heidegger then makes a further qualification: only that which is *lifeless* is what we deem a thing. Living organisms are not things, but specialized instruments brought about by human design are things.[55] Heidegger rejects the following three definitions of the thing: "(1) the bearer of traits, (2) the unity of the sensory manifold, (3) and as formed matter."[56] Such definitions, even when combined in various permutations throughout the history of interpretation, fail to distinguish properly between things, equipment, and

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 4.

[54] "The stone on the path is a thing, as is the clod of earth in the field. The jug is a thing, and the well beside the path. But what should we say about the milk in the jug and the water in the well? These, too, are things, if the cloud in the sky and the thistle in the field, if the leaf on the autumn wind and the hawk over the wood are properly called things" (Ibid., 4).

[55] "A human being is not a thing . . . we are reluctant to call even the deer in the forest clearing, the beetle in the grass, or the blade of grass 'things.' Rather, the hammer, the shoe, the ax, and the clock are things. Even they, however, are not mere things. Only the stone, the clod of earth, or a piece of wood count as that: what is lifeless in nature and in human usage. It is the things of nature and usage that are normally called things" (Ibid., 5).

[56] Ibid., 12.

artworks, each of which requires special treatment. A thing, such as a granite block, "rests in itself," whereas a piece of equipment, such as a shoe, "displays an affinity with the artwork in that it is something brought forth by the human hand."[57] Though it too is an artifact that comes into existence only through human activity, the artwork is distinct from equipment because it *appears* as if it has "self-sufficient presence" and so resembles "the mere thing which has taken shape by itself and is never forced into being."[58] Equipment is at the middle point of the spectrum. "Equipment occupies a curious position intermediate between thing and work"[59] because it lacks self-sufficiency and yet is the product of human labor, unlike the granite in the mountainside that long predates and is largely unaffected by human life.

Heidegger then contradicts himself so flagrantly that it is almost comedic. He first warns that we must not conflate categories, that we must not confuse the distinctions between thing, equipment, and artwork that he has laid out.[60] But he goes on to claim that in fact the best way to understand the being of a piece of equipment is *not* through the use of that equipment, but through an artwork, a graphic representation of the equipment, a *painting* of some peasant shoes by Van Gogh.[61] The image of the shoes tells us more about them than wearing them would. Van Gogh's "artwork let us know what the shoes, in truth, are."[62] We

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[57] Ibid., 10.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] "We must be careful to avoid turning thing and work into a subspecies of equipment. . .the best guarantee is simply to describe a piece of equipment quite apart from any philosophical theory" (Ibid., 13).

[61] "The equipmental being of equipment was discovered. But how? Not through the description and explanation of a pair of shoes actually present. Not through a report on the process of shoemaking. And not through the observation of the actual use of shoes as it occurs here and there. Rather, the equipmental being of equipment was only discovered by bringing ourselves before the van Gogh painting" (Ibid., 15).

[62] Ibid. Jay Bernstein observes an unresolved inner conflict in the essay, namely that "in the one discussion of a modern work of art in 'Origin,' that of Van Gogh's painting of the peasant woman's shoes,

are given a taste of a thesis that the subsequent essay sections will develop more fully: art is not dissimulation of which we should be suspicious. Art is truthful.

What about the question of authorship? The work of art, being a *work* rather than a given, naturally-occurring thing such as a stone, originates from the artist. Yet the artist is only an artist in virtue of her having made a work of art. They are in "reciprocal relation" to each other, mutually dependent: "The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other."[63] Such a view is tenable and straightforward enough. However, Heidegger then claims that this relation is possible thanks only to a third thing: "art," an abstract noun. "Art is the origin of both artist and work."[64] Artists rely on art to create their particular works. At this early point in the essay, the model of the artist as self-sufficient genius has already been cast aside in favor of a model of the artist as a kind of visionary or medium, as one visited by a muse. An artwork does not originate from its artist; rather, the artist originates from an Art that supersedes her.

In "Origin," Heidegger repeatedly downplays—or at least qualifies and limits—the creativity of the artist in the creation of artwork. He concedes that what "distinguishes the work as a work is the fact that it has been created" out of a distinctive medium.[65] But he also venerates the "constancy of the self-subsistence of the work," distinguishing the final art product from the productive process that yielded it. Great art has a life of its own, beyond its

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Heidegger appears to be forwarding the claims that, first, the painting reveals the true nature of equipment, namely, its reliability; and secondly, because the painting can perform this cognitive function we can deduce that the essence or nature of art is to reveal, disclose, bring into unconcealment the being or general essence of particular sorts of things. A modern work of art, then, is deployed to reveal the true nature of art, which, given Heidegger's thesis concerning the end of great art, it ought not to be able to do" (*The Fate of Art,* 109).

[63] Heidegger, "Origin," 1.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., 32.

maker, almost in spite of its maker. As Heidegger puts it, "in the work createdness is expressly created into what is created, with the result that it expressly rises up out of the work."[66] This createdness that rises up is not, however, evidence of an artistic virtuoso whose fingerprints are visible in their signature style. In fact, knowing the authorship of an artwork often only obscures its createdness: "Precisely where the artist and the process and the circumstances of the work's coming into being remain unknown, this thrust, this 'that [*dass*]' of createdness, steps into view at its purest from out of the work."[67] Again, Heidegger here rejects a certain version of the figure of the genius, who becomes the target of an attack, and whose model of artistic production Heidegger aims to replace with something less tainted with "[m]odern subjectivism" which "misinterprets creation as the product of the genius of the self-sovereign subject."[68] Artists do not autonomously create their art, and they do not create *ex nihilo*, because they always produce works within a historical moment and with materials from their surroundings. In this sense, artists produce; they do not create.[69] Thus no artist, however ingenious, can be the sole origin of an artwork. Producing a work of art shows how dependent we are upon what we do not make, how dependent we are upon the

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[66] Ibid., 39.

[67] Ibid. "That createdness stands forth out of the work does not mean that it should be a salient feature of the work that it is made by a great artist." Jay Bernstein interprets this assertion about the thrust of createdness as Heidegger's answer to the cosmological question that has puzzled philosophers across the ages. As Bernstein puts it, "what is (figuratively) brought into the open by a work is that there is something rather than nothing, that is the ultimate source of its sublimity; and only in virtue of its connection with this (figuratively concealed) revelation can a work open a world" (*The Fate of Art*, 123).

[68] Heidegger, "Origin," 48. Jay Bernstein notes that "it is precisely because works of genius are not the products of a sovereign subjectivity and because their excess beyond subjectivity entails a transcendental opacity that is their distance from subjectivity, that they can be brought into direct affiliation with Heidegger's thought of being as revealed in great art" (*The Fate of Art*, 101).

[69] Bernstein argues that Heidegger's account of great art rests on a distinction between "what is created as opposed to what is merely produced. Production, making, is always the re-production of what was first created" (*The Fate of Art*, 86).

existence of an array of things whose origin has no immediate explanation. Rather than emphasizing human agency and autonomy, Heidegger emphasizes the self-revealing and self-concealing qualities of *physis* that we receive. The appearance of great artworks is not solely the result of autarchic human subjects and their labor and ingenuity; rather, humans help to bring forth something, drawing the inner, nascent features into the light, making explicit what was previously implicit. In so doing, we reveal a createdness that supersedes human agency.

In addition to displaying createdness, artworks communicate a public message. In modern daily life, artworks often mingle with and lie around amongst our most homely, unglamorous utensils.[70] And artworks are made with resources that, on their own, are unrefined, uninteresting, and sometimes even unattractive, such as stones, wood, or even synthetic materials such as plastic.[71] Yet any artwork deserving of that title surpasses itself once it is composed. Artwork expresses and brings to light something beyond the oil-painting or the sculpture or the operatic aria itself, something beyond the object that the collector can encounter and enjoy. That is, an artwork "says something other than the mere thing itself is. . . . The work makes publicly known something other than itself, it manifests something other: it is an allegory. In the artwork something other is brought into conjunction with the thing that is made . . . the work is a symbol."[72] This is communicative dimension of art is one means by which a great work of art can set up a world.

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[70] "The picture hangs on the wall like a hunting weapon or a hat. . . .Works are shipped like coal from the Ruhr or logs from the Black Forest. During the war Hölderlin's hymns were packed in the soldier's knapsack along with cleaning equipment. Beethoven's quartets lie in the publisher's storeroom like potatoes in a cellar" (Heidegger, "Origin," 3).

[71] "The stony is in the work of architecture, the wooden in the woodcarving, the colored in the painting, the vocal in the linguistic work, the sounding in the work of music" (Ibid., 3).

[72] Ibid., 3.

What would such a world-instituting work of art look like? Heidegger suggests that the ancient Greek temple is an exemplary artwork of this kind. The temple is exemplary because it gathers, institutes, and continuously structures a whole cultural context, a whole world, drawing together "the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire for the human being the shape of its destiny. The all-governing expanse of these open relations is the world of this historical people."[73] Note the confluence of free and restrained terms. Yes, the temple and the world it builds shape the 'destiny' of human beings, but that governed expanse is also *open*, not predetermined, because it is a set of relations, not a grid of interlocked points. Around the temple arises a whole set of meanings, values, and interpretations about what to celebrate, what to lament, what to protect and what to alter, and these require ongoing human decisions.

In gathering together a cultural structure and a group of people with distinctive practices and language, Heidegger's temple thus functions in much the same way that Cusanus's portrait does in *De Visione Dei*. Both the Greek temple and the all-seeing painting found a social experiment, and draw together the people who engage with these aesthetic works, facilitating the negotiation of a communal identity. So social is the truth-projection of artworks that Heidegger defines community itself as art: "The origin of the artwork—of that is, creators and preservers, which is to say, the historical existence of a people—is art. This is so because, in its essence, art is an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes into being, becomes, that is, historical." [74] This idea is present in Cusanus's group exercise as well; the

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[73] Ibid., 21.

[74] Ibid., 49.

people around the portrait become themselves an artistic scene, a microcosm of the cosmos, which is itself the greatest artwork of the divine artist. Only by speaking and listening to one another do the participants historicize the truth of their experiences, and only then do they display, through their enactments, the meaning and public message of the artwork—the message of divine love. Heidegger argues that the appreciation of and response to a work of art—whether that be a temple or a painting—"does not individualize human beings down to their experiences but rather, brings them into a belonging to the truth that happens in the work. By so doing it founds their being-with-one-another [*Miteinandersein*] as the historical standing out of human existence [*Da-seins*] from out of the relation to unconcealment."[75] Artworks can be identified by the social cohesion that they found, and by the ways of life into which they invite us.

Jay Bernstein attributes this idea of communicative, socially foundational artworks to Heidegger's reception and modification of Kant's aesthetics. More specifically, Heidegger historicizes Kant's transcendental categories by claiming that artworks can legislate the norms of a culture, much like the way Cusanus's all-seeing portrait founds the community in de Certeau's reading of *De Visione Dei*. Bernstein persuasively demonstrates that Heidegger's "overcoming of Kantian formalism, his move into history, fundamentally involves letting concrete, empirical items, items that are irrevocably in history, possess a transcendental function, be legislative in the Kantian sense."[76] Artworks such as the Greek temple, which appear at a specific point in history and culture, can perform the legislative function that draws a community together—a function that in Kant can be done only by *a*

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[75] Ibid., 41.

[76] Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, 68.

priori principles of subjectivity.[77] Heidegger's major step in historicizing transcendental

Kantian categories is to treat Being as verbal rather than as nominal. Being is a *process*

through which things come to presence, thus revealing and concealing always occur together,

and thus Being is best understood epochally and historically. Art works are not eternal; they

are produced in particular cultural moments by finite people with historically conditioned

practices and hermeneutic lenses. Something remains hidden, even as things are uncovered in

historical development.[78]

For Kant, according to Berstein, "the act of genius conceptualizes free action as

creative and legislative rather than as rule following."[79] A work of fine art, a work of genius,

"must be groundless" in the sense that its rules are opaque to its maker and its audience, and

it must be "a free production, a production that cannot be explained or accounted for in terms

of its antecedents, either historically or psychologically."[80] For Kant, then, creative genius is

based on originality, which means that for him, the creation of fine art is an act of radical, "a-

categorical, transgressive freedom."[81] For Heidegger, by contrast, great art does more than

simply *reproduce* or reflect "the categorial framework of a social formation"; instead a great

work of art *produces* "a normative totality" for a culture and a historical people.[82] Heidegger,

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[77] "How is a *sensus communis* possible? Heidegger will claim that pre-aesthetic exemplary works, works of what he terms 'great art,' were historically legislative, doing for historical peoples what Kant has the principles of transcendental subjectivity doing for all peoples at all times" (Ibid., 71).

[78] "Each way of bringing things to unconcealment, of making them available (*überhaupt*), corresponds to a mode of being's concealment. Each epochal mode of presencing, and hence that in virtue of which an epoch is an epoch, just is a self-occlusion of being whereby it presents itself (presencing) as what it is not (a present thing or being - Ideas, God, the will, etc.). Being works historically through dissimulation" (Ibid., 81).

[79] Ibid., 8.

[80] Ibid., 92.

[81] Ibid., 92.

[82] Ibid., 86.

unlike Kant, understands works of great art to be epoch-initiating, thanks to their originality and their capacity to reveal things as a whole. "Epochs are normative totalities, inscribing the ever non-objective horizons of a world" and works of great art are "'places' where the discontinuity between epochs is enunciated, perhaps akin to the role fundamental theories play in most non-positivist conceptions of scientific progress and rationality."[83] Only through the unfolding of successive, distinctive historical periods do these time-bound categories of understanding, what we might call hermeneutic lenses, arise.

In describing the temple, and sculptures that are placed within it, Heidegger makes a distinction that sounds strikingly like the paradoxical theology of icons that Cusanus weaves into his treatise on mystical vision and coinciding opposites, which include both proximity and distance of the divine, both distinction and indistinction, both the representation and the unrepresented that the painting signifies. Heidegger says that "the work is not a portrait intended to make it easier to recognize what the god looks like. It is, rather, a work which allows the god himself to presence and *is*, therefore, the god himself."[84] Cusanus's painting—the oil on the canvas—is not God in God's sum total; rather, the painting allows a coming to presence of the divine in the group ritual performed around it. The relation between Heidegger's temple and the Eckhartian mystical tradition has been suggested by Mark Taylor, who builds on Derrida's comparison of Heidegger and Eckhart.[85] That Eckhartian mystical tradition is one that Cusanus and Heidegger inherit.

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Heidegger, "Origin," 22.

[85] In "How to Avoid Speaking," Derrida compares the threshold of translation to the threshold of the temple, connecting Eckhart's negative theology to Heidegger's abyssal nothing: The place is only a place of passage, and more precisely, a threshold. But a threshold, this time, to give access to what is no longer a place. A subordination, a relativization of the place, and an extraordinary consequence; the place is Being. What finds itself reduced to the condition of a threshold is Being itself, Being as a place. Solely a threshold, but a sacred

Heidegger's temple is an exemplary work of art because it provides an immersive and almost all-encompassing hermeneutical lens for a society. That is, the Greek temple sets up a world in that it "first gives to things their look, and to men their outlook on themselves."[86] The temple structures the community's common sense, their perception of their own activities, and their perception of things. Similarly, Cusanus's all-seeing painting looks on all things, institutes a community, and shows each brother the outlook they ought to have on one another, an outlook of infinite love. And like Cusanus's all-seeing painted face, which sees and is seen by a whole variety of living creatures—including eagles and trees[87]—so also Heidegger's Greek temple gives living plants and animals their look, in such a way that "trees, grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appearance as what they are."[88] Through the contrast with the erected temple building, the flora and fauna in the surrounding field are cast into relief. The temple's height in the sky draws the eye to and "makes visible the invisible space of the air," and the stationary groundedness of the building, its "steadfastness," "stands out against the surge of the tide and, in its own repose, brings out the raging of the surf."[89] An exemplary work of art such as this amplifies rather than diminishes the natural beauty of natural cycles, such as tidal

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place, the outer sanctuary (parvis) of the temple" (Derrida, "How," 121). In response to this evocation of the outer sanctuary, this *parvis*, Mark Taylor asks: "Which temple? What if Eckhart's temple stands in the midst of 'The Origin of the Work of Art'? Or what if Heidegger's temple, which is really Greek, stands in the midst of Eckhart's temple? It is well known that Heidegger sustained a lifelong interest in Eckhart. If Eckhart's temple is Heideggerian and Heidegger's temple is Greek, then which strand of the Greek tradition is woven into the text of the *via negativa*?" (Taylor, "No Not No," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 190).

[86] Heidegger, "Origin," 21.

[87] See Cusanus, *VG*, 244 and 246.

[88] Heidegger, "Origin," 21.

[89] Ibid., 21.

rhythms, or the light that changes at sunrise and at nightfall.[90] In this sense, Heidegger's temple founds the social *within* the ecological; it allows us to more fully perceive and appreciate the many life forms and dynamic processes of the planet in their many varieties. Equally, the social construction of the temple calls to light, and gives its appearance to, the elements of the surrounding 'natural' environment.

The temple's hermeneutical power lies not only in its ecological clarifications but also in its consecrating. Religion scholar J.Z. Smith similarly presents the temple—a built ritual environment—as a hermeneutical forcefield, where each thing takes on a meaning thanks to its ritualized location and usage. As he puts it,

> When one enters a temple, one enters marked-off space (the usual example, the Greek *temenos*, derived from *temno*, 'to cut') in which, at least in principle, nothing is accidental; everything, at least potentially, demands attention. The temple serves as a focus lens, establishing the possibility of significance by directing attention, by requiring the perception of difference. Within the temple, the ordinary (which to any outside eye or ear remains wholly ordinary) becomes significant, becomes 'sacred,' simply by being there.[91]

In Smith's account, it is we who sacralize things and places, we who designate and so grant holiness to the marked-off spaces and tools of our choosing. He implies that it may be fruitful to depart from typical Western formulations of the relation between memory and place, according to which "space is conceived to be already existent, as being divided up into empty loci into which the images by which memories would be recalled are placed. The loci are thought both to preexist and to survive the memories."[92] In line with the world construction done by Heidegger's works of art, Smith provocatively asks if perhaps a

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[90] "The gleam and luster of the stone, though apparently there only by the grace of the sun, in fact first brings forth the light of day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of night" (Ibid., 21).

[91] Smith, *To Take Place*, 104.

[92] Ibid., 26.

reversal of the notion of preexistent loci is needed: "What if space were not the recipient but rather the creation of the human project? What if place were an active product of intellection rather than its passive receptacle?"[93] Admittedly, this is more radically constructivist than Heidegger's middle position, according to which we do take some directives from the surroundings that impinge on us. Heidegger retains elements of the ancient Greek understanding of *techne* as guided by the principles that govern certain regions of existence, so that there are objectively correct procedures latent in our activities. Heidegger says of building construction that "to erect [*Er-richten*] means: to open up the right in the sense of the measure which guides us along, in which form that which is essential gives its guidance."[94] Heidegger, along with Smith, highlights that only through their being consecrated do things become sacred. But whereas Smith assigns humans a clear role as consecrators and place-makers, Heidegger implies that the artwork itself, the temple itself, is somehow the grammatical subject who does the consecrating. That is, the work "demands" a setting up "because it itself, in its own work-being, is something that sets up. . . . Rising-up-within-itself the work opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force."[95] Heidegger specifically defines the temple's setting up of a world as a sacralizing activity, as "an erecting in the sense of dedication and praise. . . . To dedicate means to consecrate [*heiligen*], in the sense that, in the workly construction, the holy [*Heilige*] is opened up as the holy and the god is called forth into the openness of its presence. . . . In the reflected glory of this splendor there grows, i.e. illuminates itself, what we called 'world'."[96] Though we do the calling forth

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Heidegger, "Origin," 22.

[95] Ibid., 22.

[96] Ibid., 22.

by constructing our buildings, that which we call forth is self-illuminating. Worlds require us to build them, but once built, they are not dependent on us for illumination.[97]

The temple can set up a world because it is more than mere equipment. The materials composing a piece of equipment—the stone and wood of an ax, say—are "used and used up" and "disappear into usefulness," whereas the materials composing the temple artwork appear in their fullness.[98] The temple allows materials "to come forth for the very first time . . . into the open of the world of the work. The rock comes to bear and to rest and so first becomes rock; the metal comes to glitter and shimmer, the colors to shine, the sounds to ring, the words to speak."[99] In the temple, the component parts and earthly elemental features are displayed and revealed rather than consumed or hidden. The ecological is aestheticized. In contrast to Heidegger's portrayal of technological enframing as a mode of activity that uses up and sics itself predatorially upon natural items that are construed as resources, artworks such as the temple allow earth and its many materials to remain opaque, mysterious. Jay Bernstein argues that Kant's account of genius and productive imagination influences Heidegger's accounts of our aesthetic and technical activities, though where Kant presented *genius* as "a non-historical principle of transcendental opacity," Heidegger presents *earth* as this same concept.[100] Earth is transcendentally opaque for Heidegger in the sense that "earth shatters every attempt to penetrate it," and though our "calculational intrusion" may *appear* to us like "mastery and progress in the form of technological-scientific objectification of

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[97] See Peter L. Berger, *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969) for a lucid presentation of this idea.

[98] Heidegger, "Origin," 24.

[99] Ibid., 24.

[100] Bernstein, *The Fate of Art,* 119.

nature, this mastery remains, nonetheless, an impotence of the will. The earth is openly

illuminated as itself only where it is apprehended and preserved as the essentially

undisclosable."[101] Earth or *physis* comes forth and rises up "in itself," not through human

activity. Earth or *physis* "lights up that on which man bases his dwelling," and it can provide

this basis because earth is the origin and the endpoint; "Earth is that in which the arising of

everything that arises is brought back—as, indeed, the very thing that it is—and sheltered."[102]

Earth is "the self-closing ground" on which rests our projective (active) and thrown (passive)

human existence, our historically contextualized and delimited poeticizing.[103]

If the exemplary, world-gathering work of art that Heidegger selects as his primary

model is *ancient*, and not modern, if it is a temple from millennia ago that can no longer be

accessed in its original context of daily use, how can the temple exemplify anything truthful

to us today?[104] How might we constructively read this essay in a spirit of onward thinking, a

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[101] Heidegger, "Origin," 25. Peter Gordon finds this description of earth's opacity dissatisfying as call for ecological responsibility. He argues that the distinction between world and earth needs modification if we are to grant rights of some kind to nature as something distinct from culture: "We cannot permit culture to dominate nature, but this is precisely what [Heidegger's] hyperbolic thesis of linguistic constructivism promotes. Nor can we build a responsible environmentalism merely on the basis of the mythopoetic distinction between "world" and "earth." Only a deflationary version of Heidegger's philosophy of language can allow for the possibility of our encounter with a nature whose plenitude always exceeds the force of a merely human *poiēsis*" (Gordon, "The Critical Appropriation of Heidegger's Philosophy: Five Motifs," in *After Heidegger?*, ed. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt [New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018], 37).

[102] Heidegger, "Origin," 21.

[103] Ibid., 47. "The earth is the unforced coming forth of the continually self-closing, and in that way, self-sheltering. . . . As the self-opening it will tolerate nothing closed. As the sheltering and concealing, however, earth tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there" (26).

[104] Some readers answer this question by arguing that the tension between the transcendental and the empirical is unresolved in "Origin." Jay Bernstein argues that because Heidegger says epochal distinctions are wrought by aesthetic novelties, exemplary works such as the Greek temple are "de facto answers to the paradox of legislative authority, that is, the paradox as to how to put the law above man and thereby establish the validity of man-made laws" (*The Fate of Art*, 129). The problem is that "[i]f one insists that what is man-made is merely empirical, or what is transcendental is necessarily atemporal, or *a priori* or formal, then this paradox has no solution." (129). Unfortunately, "Heidegger accepts the terms of the paradox, and thereby denies the solution exemplary works yield" (129). Such denial is why Bernstein reads Heidegger's essay as anti-modern, turning history into fate and detaching exemplarity from freedom. Heidegger fails to realize that his veneration of antiquity and his anti-modern aesthetic conclusions are self-undermining insofar as his conception of great

spirit of futurity? Heidegger's remarks on homeland and the reluctance to leave a place add

to the difficulty of finding a futural, onward attitude in the interstices of the "Origin"

essay.[105] However, the careful reader must attend to the fact that artworks such as the temple

have a dual function: there is both strife or disruption *and* preservation in the projective

clearing of the artwork's truth-telling. Because the exemplary work of art reveals truth

historically, within a particular epoch, to a particular community, it must show something

that was not shown previously. There is thus an element of rupture and strife in a work of art

that reveals its novelty to its audience. The artist, the poet, the maker's "projection comes out

of nothing in the sense that it never derives its gift from what is familiar and already there."

The artist, in her poetizing projection, does not repeat; she surprises and estranges. And

though art is "a becoming and happening of truth," we are told that "truth will never be

gathered from what is present and ordinary."[106] Truth, as it happens in art, *clears*, in the sense

that one clears off a countertop to make room to place something there, or clears out the

debris from a field to be able to sow crops. Truth happens through art by displacing what was

previously there, so that "an open place is thrown open, a place in which everything is other

than it was."[107] The revelation of truth in art is transformative, and almost apocalyptic in its

disruptive remaking. In that sense, the artwork's "unconcealing" projection causes

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art "involves projecting back into the Greek past a conception of art which only modernity makes possible" (Ibid., 72).

[105] See Heidegger, "Origin," 21, 50.

[106] Ibid., 44. Paul Tillich explains this Heideggerian idea in his analysis of modern Protestant art: "The expressive element in a style implies a radical transformation of the ordinarily encountered reality by using elements of it in a way which does not exist in the ordinarily encountered reality. Expression disrupts the naturally given appearance of things. . . . That which is expressed is the 'dimension of depth' in the encountered reality, the ground and abyss in which everything is rooted" (Tillich, "Protestantism and Artistic Style," in *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press), 74.

[107] Heidegger, "Origin," 45.

"everything ordinary and hitherto existing becomes an unbearing."[108] According to these descriptions, nothing is left untouched and all is upended by the artwork's manifestation of truth. Conflict between the ordered and the exceptional arises with the emergence of an artwork: "A beginning always contains within itself the undisclosed fullness of the extraordinary, and that means strife with the ordinary."[109] In the work of the artist, this "strife" between the ordinary and the extraordinary is due to a "rift" that is "the strife between measure and unmeasured," between the natural limits and bounds within which an artist must work, and the disruptive bringing-forth that their work yields.[110] Bernstein attributes this notion of artistic novelty to the fact that Heidegger's great art historicizes Kant's fine art—works which are defined by their disruptive, 'unmediated' quality which set in motion "the possibility of another history. . . . The point is not that they spring from nowhere, but rather that they cannot be accounted for in terms of their antecedents (e.g. as reasons, causes or ends)."[111]

Still, there is as much discussion of continuity as there is of novelty in "Origin" essay. Heidegger points out that "this art which is in nature is made manifest only by the work,

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[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., 48.

[110] Ibid., 43. Mark Taylor riffs on the meaning of the artwork's rending, and the cutting, dividing work done in the temple: "The origin of the work of art, in whose cleft Heidegger's Greek temple stands (and falls), is a certain *Riss*—tear, tear, fissure, gap, flaw, crack. Perhaps this *Riss*, which rends the text of negative theology, points toward a different space and a different time. "Temple," after all. derives from the Latin *templum*, which, like *tempus* (time) comes from the Greek *temnos*. While *temno* means 'cut,' *temnos* designates that which is 'cut off.' Accordingly, *templum* is a section, a part cut off. What, then, is the time and place of the severed part—la part *maudite*? Perhaps the time/place of the *templum* is the time/place of a threshold that cannot be crossed or erased. Something like an invisible sieve, a filter that permits the eye to see" (Taylor, "No Not No," 190).

[111] Bernstein, *The Fate of Art,* 87. "Mediation is something that occurs within a (continuous) history, within a historical totality, and hence cannot be applicable to comprehending what brings a world into unconcealment as a world. To put the same point otherwise, it is part of what is meant by calling art 'creative' that no account of the elements or antecedents of a work is sufficient to explain what it is that is achieved in it" (87).

made manifest because it is found in the work."[112] Art is artifice, not simply an extension of nature; art reveals more than what was there naturally. And yet a continuity persists that renders some surprises as developments of precedents. Heidegger repeatedly describes art and creation using metaphors of stability, not rupture, where art is the unveiling of something nascent that has long been present, not something radically new: "art is *the fixing in place* of the self-establishing truth in the figure" and "bringing the work-character of the work into motion" in fact "happens in preservation. Thus art is: the creative *preservation* of the truth in the work."[113] Because truth is self-establishing, and because art is the happening of truth, all art is truthful, and art cannot be anything but a preservation of truth, under new, creative guises. On Heidegger's definition, art cannot be false or deceptive or misleading. Art's truth projection is by no means stochastic or rhizomatic; Heidegger insists it "is never carried out in the direction of emptiness and indeterminacy" but rather "is cast toward the coming preservers, a historical humanity."[114] In that sense, Heidegger's account of artistic creation is teleological, but without an articulated or substantive telos.

From Space to Place: Making Room for Building

It is our practices of dwelling and building, not our mathematizing, that open up spaces in the plural, as opposed to general and empty space in the singular. While the temple is the center of the "Origin" essay, in "Building Dwelling Thinking," the bridge is Heidegger's primary example of a building that produces a location and lets already-present features appear. Building is making but is also sparing of things within their limits, so

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[112] Heidegger, "Origin," 48.

[113] Ibid., 44.

[114] Ibid., 47.

building and dwelling are about both creation and reception. In "Building Dwelling Thinking," Heidegger draws a distinction between two different meanings of building: cultivating and constructing. Cultivation of, say, soil and vines, requires "preserving and nurturing" rather than making, because such cultivation "tends the growth that ripens into its fruit of its own accord."[115] Activities such as shipbuilding and temple-building, by contrast, are constructive in that they make rather than simply preserve; artifacts such as temples and ships do not ripen into existence on their own. They come about only through human labor. The task is to learn how to build in a way that unites these two meanings. Building *as* dwelling is the ideal because it "unfolds into the building that cultivates growing things and the building that erects buildings," encompassing and harmonizing both types of world-making.[116] The temple that amplifies rather than diminishes the crickets and the ocean tides that surround it is an example of this type of building as dwelling.

To understand how to build this sort of building, the builder must be able to recognize the difference between places, spaces, and space. Place is a location with cultural significance; space is often conceived mathematically in terms of extension. Buildings, in the proper sense of that term, are locations that allow a site.[117] A bridge is one such example of a building that gathers, that is, it makes way for a site to emerge and have a locale. A bridge is a place, a location, and "the space allowed by the bridge contains many places variously near or far from the bridge."[118] However, those places "may be treated as mere positions between which there lies a measurable distance," and from such a perspective, the "nearness and

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[115] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 145.

[116] Ibid., 146.

[117] Ibid., 152.

[118] Ibid., 153.

remoteness between men and things can become mere distance, mere intervals of intervening space."[119] If represented and thus treated as a collection of mere positions, places lose their distinctiveness, their character, their identity. They become interchangeable, as that which "can be occupied at any time by something else or replaced by a mere marker."[120] What is the problem with interchangeability? Why be preoccupied with the endurance, permanence, or stability of a place? Is that not a naïve, nostalgic refusal of the Heraclitan flux and entropy that so obviously characterize the natural and cultural histories of the planet? Here, the concern is not with change as such, but with the rapidity with which spaces can be replaced, becoming empty containers—parking lots, warehouses, quickly erected, quickly abandoned. Short-term business models, and the death of brick-and-mortar, pose real threats to urban health. The erosion of public places—parks, gardens, community centers—are perhaps signs of too much spatial thinking, and too little emplacement.

To open up a site, cultural meaning must be distinguished from the metrics of distance, size, weight, and density. Thought of from a common-sense angle, this is quite obvious. For example, in "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger shows that a purely quantitative assessment of cultural artifacts would be absurd; it would be inappropriate and misleading to quantify the materials used in an artwork with weight and number, with measurements of density, rather than appreciating the artwork's materials in their aesthetic opacity. Asking for a report only about how many *pounds* of paint the artist swiped onto the canvas, or for the length of the painting's frame in inches, would ignore everything interesting about the painted image. Weight does not determine heaviness, nor do light

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[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

refraction equations measure shine.[121] "World is not a mere collection of things—countable and uncountable, known and unknown—that are present at hand."[122] In the context of scientific research and its projective ground plan, "Every place is equal to every other. No point in time has precedence over any other."[123] This contrasts with the emplaced quality of the temple, and the ritualized time of the practices done in and around it.

Heidegger worries that the mathematization of space is mistakenly understood to be the foundation of reality and of our experience.[124] We abstract from intervals of space to "the mere dimensions of height, breadth, and depth" and are left with extension, which is then abstracted to "analytic-algebraic relations," which then "make room" for "the purely mathematical construction of manifolds with an arbitrary number of dimensions."[125] It is interesting that Heidegger writes of mathematical innovation here with a locative metaphor— these manifolds, these algebraic relations, these magnitudinal computations, and measurements "make room" for the possibility of many dimensions, for expansion into a hitherto unknown—a kind of onward thinking. Yet Heidegger remains emphatic that cultural meaning cannot—or ought not—be replaced by computation or the reduction of all things to the definitions proffered by physical sciences. He notes in the "The Thing," that nearness in

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[121] "If we try to grasp the stone's heaviness in another way, by placing it on a pair of scales, then we bring its heaviness into the calculable form of weight. This perhaps very precise determination of the stone is a number, but the heaviness of the weight has escaped us. Color shines and wants only to shine. If we try to make it comprehensible by analyzing it into numbers of oscillations it is gone. It shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained" (Heidegger, "Origin," 25).

[122] Heidegger, "Origin," 23.

[123] Heidegger, "Age of the World Picture," 60.

[124] "The fact that they are *universally* applicable to everything that has extension can in no case make numerical magnitudes the *ground* of the nature of spaces and locations that are measurable with the aid of mathematics" (Heidegger, "Building," 153–54).

[125] Ibid., 153.

its most meaningful sense is not indicated by quantitative units of measurement or by literal proximity: "Short distance is not in itself nearness. Nor is great distance remoteness," as is evident in the modern audiovisual media that can sometimes alienate us rather than draw us into enriching experiences.[126] "The frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness," if we always calculate and never meditate, but, more hopefully, it is also true that we can keep things close to the heart, so that "what is incalculably far from us in point of distance can be near to us."[127]

If we consider the jug only in terms of the quantities of fluids or gases it contains at any given moment,[128] we miss the aesthetic and religious meaning of the jug, which receives and dispenses wine, filling and pouring out, signifying the gushing gift of existence.[129] Heidegger's secularization narrative, his account of demythologization, is contained within these remarks about the jug, which ceases to pour out a holy libation and becomes merely a decanting tool at the bar.[130] The meaning of the jug's pouring, what it signifies socially,

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[126] Heidegger, "The Thing," 163: "Man puts the longest distances behind him in the shortest time. He puts the greatest distances behind himself and thus puts everything before himself at the shortest range. . . . What is least remote from us in point of distance, by virtue of its picture on film or its sound on the radio, can remain far from us."

[127] Ibid.

[128] "Physical science assures us that the jug is filled with air and with everything that goes to make up the air's mixture. . . . When we pour wine into the jug, the air that already fills the jug is simply displaced by a liquid. Considered scientifically, to fill a jug means to exchange one filling for another" (Ibid., 167).

[129] "The gift of the outpouring as libation is the authentic gift. In giving the consecrated libation, the pouring jug occurs as the giving gift. The consecrated libation is what our word for a strong outpouring flow, 'gush,' really designates: gift and sacrifice. 'Gush,' Middle English *guschen, gosshen*—cf. German *Guss, Giessen*—is the Greek *cheein*, the Indoeuropean *ghu*. It means to offer in sacrifice. To pour a gush, when it is achieved in its essence, thought through with sufficient generosity, and genuinely uttered, is to donate, to offer in sacrifice, hence to give" (Ibid., 170).

[130] "It is only for this reason that the pouring of the gush, once its nature withers, can become a mere pouring in and pouring out, until it finally decays into the dispensing of liquor at the bar. Pouring the outpour is not a mere filling and decanting" (Ibid., 171).

ritually, and spiritually, is not reducible to the measuring of air or liquid, to quantities of containment.

Similarly, it is our practices of dwelling and building, not our mathematizing, that open up spaces in the plural, as opposed to general and empty space in the singular. "'[S]pace,' contains no spaces and no places. We never find in it any locations, that is, things of the kind the bridge is."[131] A bridge is a building in virtue of the fact that it gathers together earth and sky, allowing them "to enter into a site by arranging the site into spaces."[132] Locations, not space, ground buildings. And yet a reversed order of causation also obtains. That is, "buildings produce locations."[133] In such production, "the joining of the spaces of these locations necessarily brings with it space, as *spatium* and as *extensio*, into the thingly structure of buildings. But the building never shapes pure 'space' as a single entity," never makes something from out of a formless and empty void. Building is responsive in that it "takes over," that is, inherits and adapts, "the standard for all the traversing and measuring of the spaces that in each case are provided for by the locations that have been founded."[134]

Heidegger's treatment of spatiality, space, and place in "Building Dwelling Thinking" aligns with his treatment of spatiality in *Being and Time*. In that early work, in division I, on the worldhood of the world, Heidegger there too objects to abstractly mathematizing that which is better understood pragmatically, in terms of everyday usage. He argues that our relations to our tools, including the "'in-order-to', the 'for-the-sake-of,' and the 'with-which' of an involvement," are relationships of concern, and that they therefore "resist any sort of

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[131] Heidegger, "Building," 153.

[132] Ibid., 155.

[133] Ibid., 156.

[134] Ibid.

mathematical functionalization."[135] His interest in unseating quantitative analysis from its place of priority in the philosophical tradition endures across his corpus, as these examples show. Continuing his discussion on the spatial aspects of environments and equipment, Heidegger notes that the proximity or closeness we experience to our tools "is not to be ascertained by measuring distances" but rather through "'calculative' manipulating and using."[136] We experience a tool as directionally oriented not strictly in the sense of "its position [*Stelle*] in space as present-at-hand somewhere" but also in the sense that "as equipment it has been essentially fitted up and installed, set up, and put to rights."[137] Longitudinal measurement cannot register, express, or capture the regional, emplaced quality of our ways of moving through the world. For equipment to have a place—say, for a pot, a pan, a cutting board, and a knife to be stored near one another in a kitchen, conveniently within reach when they are each needed in the meal preparation process—is different than their "just occurring at random in some spatial position."[138] For example, the cook encounters the kitchen as a location of culinary activities and cooking equipment, "as one place out of a whole totality of places directionally lined up with each other and belonging to the context of equipment."[139] The cupboard that holds the cast iron skillet, the wooden block that safely stores the knives with their blades covered and their handles exposed, the dish rack beside the sink, close enough for the water to run off and drain, the hook on which the oven mitts hang—we encounter these in their relation to our purposes, not in inches or

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[135] Heidegger, *BT*, 122.

[136] Ibid., 135.

[137] Ibid., 135–36.

[138] Ibid., 136.

[139] Ibid.

centimeters of distance from the stovetop. In any practical context like this—whether it be a kitchen, a laboratory, a chapel, or a woodworking shop—"in each case the place is the definite 'there' or 'yonder' of an item of equipment which *belongs somewhere*."[140] The cabinet is 'there'; the wine glasses are 'yonder.' The kitchen—or the lab, or the chapel, or the workshop—is the 'whither' "which makes it possible for equipment to belong somewhere, and which we circumspectively keep in view ahead of us in our concernful dealings," and this whither is a "region."[141] The region defines the network of relationships between utensils. In Heidegger's redescription of indoor places, such as a room, he explains that our orientation is based on our implicit interpretations and their use-contexts: "the 'above' is what is 'on the ceiling'; the 'below' is what is 'on the floor'; the 'behind' is what is 'at the door'" and these 'wheres' "are not ascertained and catalogued by the observational measurement of space."[142] Outdoor places are similarly arranged according to a confluence of our cultural interpretations about what light and dark symbolize, beyond the geographic or the geometric: "Churches and graves, for instances, are laid out according to the rising and the setting of the sun—the regions of life and death."[143]

Buildings produce locations, but buildings also take their directives from the locations they build. This mutuality and cooperation characterize the relation to the environment that we ought to strive for and that we often fail to achieve. The common-sense view of

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[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid., 136: "The kind of place which is constituted by direction and remoteness . . . is already oriented towards a region and oriented within it. Something like a region must first be discovered if there is to be any possibility of allotting or coming across places for a totality of equipment."

[142] Ibid., 136–37.

[143] Ibid., 137.

production is "an activity whose performance has a result, the finished structure, as its consequence."[144] However, Heidegger highlights that making of this kind is "a producing that brings something forth" in the sense that a building such as a bridge "brings forth the thing as a location, out into what is already there, room for which is only now made by this location."[145] The new light shed on what was already in that place, what was already present, is as important as the finished structure that now stands in that place. The fact that production is a kind of bringing-forth is related to Heidegger's interpretation of the Greek definition of *techné*, which he takes to mean "neither art nor handicraft but rather: to make something appear, within what is present, as this or that, in this way or that way. The Greeks conceive of *techne* [sic], producing, in terms of letting appear."[146] This ancient understanding of *techné* as a form of letting appear persists, albeit in a concealed form, even in our modern "technology of power machinery."[147] The acknowledgment of the persists of letting-appear can be read as a subtle indication of techno-optimism and openness to the technologically mediated aesthetic future in Heidegger's thought.

If building—as in the erecting of buildings—is not fully captured in the Greek notion of *techne* nor "in terms either of architecture or of engineering construction, nor in terms of a mere combination of the two,"[148] then what does it mean to build a building? We understand building only if we see that it is a "letting dwell. Building accomplishes its nature in the

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[144] Heidegger, "Building," 157.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

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raising of locations by the joining of their spaces. Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build."[149] Spaces (not space) such as bridges for river crossing, "open up by the fact that they are let into the dwelling of man."[150] What does it mean to let locations into our dwelling practices?

While the temple is the center of the "Origin" essay, in "Building Dwelling Thinking," the bridge is Heidegger's primary example of a building that produces a location and lets already-present features appear. The classic village bridge makes use of the banks between which it stretches and "brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighborhood. The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream."[151] In this way, the humanly devised, constructed, and inserted structure that is the bridge rests within rather than setting upon its surrounding scene, and its design is shaped by, is appropriate to, is in accordance with the ecological context of its use. "The bridge lets the stream run its course" while also allowing that people may "come and go from shore to shore."[152] Though we might expect him to denounce the more industrial structures that now cover our urban landscapes, Heidegger says that even the modern multi-lane highway bridge which "is tied to the network of long-distance traffic, paced as calculated for maximum yield" is nonetheless a structure that "escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks and in the end . . . to the other side."[153] Even the arched and sloping interstate freeway

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[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid., 154.

[151] Ibid., 150.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

connections *gather* the earth and the sky; these bridges "always and ever differently" usher their human users through and across their many thresholds and places.

Hubert Dreyfus reads the highway bridge discussion of Heidegger's "Building Dwelling Thinking" essay as referring to the "postmodern autobahn interchange, in the middle of nowhere, connecting many highways so as to provide easy access to as many destinations as possible" and therefore Dreyfus reads it as a moment in which Heidegger "overcomes his Black Forest nostalgia" in order to offer a way of thinking in a distinctively, epochally modern way about positive relationships to technical products that can still gather us, rather than merely dispersing us as endlessly disaggregated resources.[154] Dreyfus argues that the highway bridge, though built to optimize options and to keep us flexible, can nonetheless bring our activities into temporary focus. Though our mortality and fragility mean our identities are temporary, our worlds still require our "active engagement"[155]; speeding along the highway overpass can remind us of our many contextually adaptive skill sets. In that sense, "even a technological thing may gather together . . . people, equipment, and activities into local worlds, with roles, habitual practices, and a style that provide [world-] disclosers with a sense of integrity or centeredness."[156] Dreyfus then argues that we in technological modernity live ineluctably in a plurality of local worlds, moving constantly between them. There is no single local world into which we could be gathered. Any aggregation and centering that might occur would be limited. That is, "Neither equipment nor roles could be gathered, but the *skills* for treating ourselves . . . and the world as a series of

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[154] Dreyfus and Charles Spinosa, "Heidegger and Borgmann on How to Affirm Technology," in *Philosophy of Technology*, 356.

[155] Ibid., 357.

[156] Ibid.

open possibilities are what are drawn together so that various dispersed skillful performances become possible."[157] Though we live in a plurality of worlds and thus have a plurality of identities dependent upon the kind of engagement and disclosing we undertake at a given moment, we can nonetheless experience a gathering of our "background skills" if we can learn to adeptly "shift back and forth between pre-technological identities with their style of coping and a technological style."[158] This adept shifting would allow us to have a positive relationship to technology without being subsumed by a fixed, technologically determined or mediated identity. In this way, Dreyfus helps us to move toward the onward thinking that Heidegger recommends.

To read Heidegger as a thinker of open-ended onwardness may seem impossible given that he describes *dwelling* as the human mode of being in the world. "The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *buan*, dwelling."[159] However, dwelling is not an activity of forceful domination—it is not an aggressive practice of overtaking, and it is not a violent assertion of the will on the world around it. Real dwelling, while certainly including the ongoing, artistic activity of building, is according to Heidegger's etymology in fact a kind of letting be and sparing, of safeguarding in freedom. "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."[160] To spare is not to project in advance but to release things to themselves: "[t]o dwell, to be set at

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[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid., 358.

[159] Heidegger, "Building," 145.

[160] Ibid., 147.

peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its essence. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing*."[161] The releasement of sparing is at odds with the imposition of a stasis that conforms to our plans; this sparing asks for a kind of gentle abandoning.

Again, the astute reader interested in understanding Heidegger's idiosyncratic definition of dwelling must keep in mind that Heidegger cannot resist pairing opposite verbs together: "going through" spaces, in movement and dynamism, coincides with resting, staying, standing still: "we always go through spaces in such a way that we already experience them by staying constantly with near and remote locations and things."[162] Building requires dwelling, but dwelling is ever ongoing—it is a task that is never completed. Our plight is that we must "ever search anew for the nature of dwelling" and we "must ever learn to dwell." We are nomads because we are humans whose forms of inhabitation can be thought and re-thought *ad infinitum.* Here, homelessness is the starting point with dwelling as its ever-receding end goal. The dwelling itself is ongoing, is homeless, is a call to which one ever learns to creatively respond. To build out of "dwelling" as it is used here is to build precisely because one does not yet feel at home, and to think for the sake of dwelling is to think anew, again and again, "from the workshop of long experience and incessant practice."[163] Thinking, like building and dwelling, is ceaseless, which is why building and dwelling "have become worthy of questioning and thus have remained worthy of thought"

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[161] Ibid.

[162] Heidegger, "Building," 155: "Man's relation to locations, and through locations to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling."

[163] Ibid., 159.

and is why "thinking itself belongs to dwelling."[164] Dwelling is not standing motionless in an empty house; to dwell is to incrementally furnish, to do the ongoing work of making a site inhabitable. Thinking is not the work of considering the same thought over and over; thinking is the building upon thoughts once inhabited in pursuit of those not yet thought.

In the same way that Heidegger overturns the meaning of dwelling in "Building Dwelling Thinking," so too does he reverse or at least complicate the meaning of meditation and settlement with his notion of releasement in "Memorial Address." Mediative thought allows us to exercise our creativity in response to the needs of the moment. The great irony of the division between what Heidegger calls calculative versus meditative thinking is that in fact it is meditative thinking that is dynamic and ever moving, creative and surprising, whereas calculative thinking, the supposed hallmark of scientific innovation and novelty, turns out to be that which remains static, stale, rote, hackneyed. Calculative thinking may indeed "race from one prospect to the next," never stopping to collect itself, but this automaticity is precisely what renders it a kind of thoughtlessness.[165] Unlike calculative thinking, the practice of genuine thought, or meditative thinking, requires ever more tirelessness, vigilance, and creativity. Meditative thinking "demands of us not to cling one-sidely to a single idea," which is why it can be "the ground and foundation for the new autochthony" in an age of dispersal and displacement.[166]

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[164] Ibid.

[165] Heidegger, "Memorial Address," in *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 46.

[166] Ibid., 53.

Rootedness in this paradigm, then, is less about permanent settlement than ongoing openness and attention. Meditative thinking must "work unceasingly"[167] to reflect not upon how to be entertained but rather upon "what concerns each one of us immediately and continuously in our very being."[168] The implication of these adverbs of ceaselessness and continuity is that the work of genuine thought never arrives, never rests at its final goal. Though "the old rootedness is being lost in this age," meditative thinking entails the possibility of rootedness "out of which man's nature and all his works can flourish in a new way" without requiring dogged attachment to the status quo so much as receptivity to the incalculable.[169] The incalculable, the mystery, is "that which shows itself and at the same time withdraws."[170]

Heidegger seeks a way to articulate how humans receive their measure from the world, rather than projecting their own self-generated measurements. In this sense, he and Cusanus share a concern to articulate an artistic humanism that is not chauvinistic, a humanism that appropriately appraises the way that creative human subjects are also subjected to an openness that exceeds them. Ernesto Grassi argues that Heidegger's philosophy of the revealing of Being "results in the attitudes of "hope" and "openness."[171] This is because Heidegger's criticisms of calculative thinking and prediction rest on the idea that they prevent discovery. As Grassi puts it:

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[167] Ibid., 53.

[168] Ibid., 44.

[169] Ibid., 53.

[170] Ibid., 55.

[171] Grassi, *Heidegger*, 82.

The rational process only makes evident what is already included in the premises or presuppositions. The only thing that can surprise us in the sphere of the rational is a false result, and this is always explicable as an imprecision in the application of the rational process of thought, hence, as an error, an incapacity. Hope is an attitude that can only be found in the context of *inventio*, of "discovery," never in a rational deduction. A rational process can never permit us to discover anything; it presupposes that we have already found our premises. Hope as a basic attitude is directed towards an expectation of the "new," the indeducible, and in this sense, the "unusual." It belongs to the sphere of the ingenious, not that of the rational.[172]

Openness requires letting go of the expectation that our world will conform to our pre-structured schemata; it requires "releasement toward things," which has the potential "to recapture the old and now rapidly disappearing autochthony *in a changed form*."[173] Releasement re-places that which has gotten dis-placed by thoughtless calculation. To hold oneself with releasement and openness is to invite the new, the not-yet-seen, "through persistent, courageous thinking."[174] What calculative (and in that sense fearful) thinkers fail to realize is that this aim for total familiarity actually encumbers the work of real thought and discovery, because it is the posture of estrangement that properly yields understanding. "Man will know, i.e., carefully safeguard into its truth, that which is incalculable, only in creative questioning and shaping out of the power of genuine reflection. Reflection transports the man of the future into that 'between' in which he belongs to Being and yet remains a stranger amid that which is."[175] To remain a stranger means never to settle but instead to stay opened, onward, released toward the opacity of the world. The homelessness that drives dwelling, the settling that invites nomadic thought, the finding of founding as finding, and the rootlessness that makes way for roots are so many re-pronouncements and transfigurations on the way to

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[172] Ibid.

[173] Heidegger, "Memorial Address," 55.

[174] Ibid., 56.

[175] Heidegger, "Age of the World Picture," 136.

creative thought. As Stanley Cavell notes, "onward thinking, on the way, knowing how to go on, are of course inflections or images of the religious idea of The Way, inflections which specifically deny that there is a place at which our ways end."[176]

Conclusion

The human being, and all the plasticity contained in that idea, has the capacity for so many activities: to build and to measure, to make and to dwell, and to reveal and to produce. Both Cusanus and Heidegger understand creative potential to be the distinguishing feature of the human, whether that creativity is expressed in crafts, painting, architecture, mathematics, or language. Our human identity consists in these forms of world-building. Yet our expressive capacity is not only a promise but also a danger if it fails to register the needs of the others on which our lives are premised, and our freedom becomes dangerous when it becomes self-undermining, when we quantify all qualities and replace the revelatory work of the arts with the calculative optimization of certain forms of technique. Cusanus and Heidegger, each in their own way, provide perspectives from which we can reconsider our modern condition, in order to allow both wisdom and genius to shape our aesthetic and scientific pursuits.

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[176] Cavell, "Thinking of Emerson," in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 136.

Addendum

Reading Heidegger Responsibly: The Task of Criticism

The relationship between Martin Heidegger's philosophical writings and his biography, in particular his participation in Nazi politics, has been the subject of ongoing debate in the scholarly literature.[1] The more recent publication of his *Black Notebooks*, which are full of offensive material, generated another explosion of commentary on his complicity in this dark period of twentieth-century history. That commentary questions the extent to which his philosophical insights are extractable or separable from his political decisions. In short, how can one responsibly study Heidegger in light of his shameful politics? We can begin by considering the suggestions offered by scholarly experts who have thoughtfully addressed this difficult question.

Like many scholars of modern continental philosophy, David Ferrell Krell regards Heidegger's 1926 magnum opus, *Being and Time*, as his greatest contribution to twentieth-century thought. Importantly, Krell sees in Heidegger's corpus a kind of break, a rupture, a baffling division between the philosophical richness of *Being and Time* on the one hand and the unhinged, "paranoetic," vituperative polemics of the *Black Notebooks* on the other. Such a bipolarity in the writing causes a feeling of whiplash and disoriented horror in the reader, as well. As Krell aptly puts it, "if the temporal ecstases of Heidegger's *Being and Time* represent the best of thinking, the *Notebooks* represent something else—something akin to tragic collapse. Perhaps this Janus-head, or bicameral brain, or galloping schizophrenia is the

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[1] See, for example, Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), Victor Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991)*, and Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

situation in which Heidegger leaves his readers today."[2] Heidegger's innovative account of

ecstatic temporality sounds nothing like the broken tirades of his later journals. Both Krell

and Jewish mysticism scholar Elliot Wolfson point out that the *Notebooks* contain anti-

Semitic remarks alongside denouncements of Nazism and National Socialism, rendering

Heidegger's diatribes in the *Schwarze Hefte* all the more bewildering.[3] The publication of

these alarming private notes has understandably repelled many, who would prefer to pass

over altogether anything authored by Heidegger.

Elliot Wolfson offers counsel to such concerned audiences in his book devoted to

Heidegger, Nazism, and philosophy. There he adopts the attitude of Jacques Derrida's

statement from the 1988 Heidelberg conference on Heidegger's writing and politics: in *Being*

and Time "there are still, in this text of Heidegger, immense resources."[4] Because these

resources are valuable and pertinent, Wolfson summons us to invest ourselves in the effort of

reading, despite the discomfort that comes with acknowledging that "Heidegger was both a

Nazi given to anti-Semitic jargon and an incisive philosopher whose thinking not only was

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[2] David Ferrell Krell, *Ecstasy, Catastrophe: Heidegger from* Being and Time *to the* Black Notebooks (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), x. Krell attributes Heidegger's apocalyptic tone in the *Notebooks* to his paranoetic, rather than paranoid, thinking. "The paranoid sufferer can blame this or that being (*Seiendes*) for menacing his or her life and making them miserable. For Heidegger, by contrast, no one and no thing is to blame, but only beyng" (6). From such a paranoetic state there is no way out: "Neither the piety nor the self-stylizations of Heidegger's rhetoric can therefore rescue him from the dire history of beyng, that is, the history in which beyng comes to nothing. The piety and the self-inflation, along with the strident polemics, are mere lapses—they are collapses of thinking. It is therefore not a question of whether Heidegger is to be condemned or forgiven: these texts of the 1930s are unforgiving" (7).

[3] See Krell, *Ecstasy*, 6: "The bulk of these remarks on *Judentum*, most of them from the years 1938 to 1941, are mindless and vulgar, and one is shocked to read them. Yet some of those remarks are more difficult to comprehend, inasmuch as Heidegger is often mocking or berating the National Socialist regime precisely for its racism and biologism. Whereas it is never a question of "exonerating" Heidegger for these defamations, it is a matter of showing how complicated a reading of the *Notebooks* turns out to be." Elliot Wolfson notes that in the *Notebooks* "Heidegger mentions Nazism explicitly as an example of philosophical bustle that . . . falls outside the domain of essential knowledge and, in the end, signifies the consummation of modernity" (*The Duplicity of Philosophy's Shadow: Heidegger, Nazism, and the Jewish Other* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2018], xvi).

[4] Wolfson, *Duplicity*, xii.

responding to the urgencies of his epoch but also contains the potential to unravel the thorny knot of politics and philosophy relevant for the present as much as for the past."[5] Wolfson's work demonstrates that Heidegger's contributions to the disciplines of hermeneutics and phenomenology remain deeply influential and worthy of study.

Unlike Krell, Peter Gordon sees less of a schizophrenic rupture than a disturbing continuity in Heidegger's early and later writings, worrying that nostalgic provincialism is present even in the pragmatic agency—set within an environment, making use of equipment in artisanal labor—of division I of *Being and Time*.[6] However, Gordon, who has written extensively on the German Jewish authors Franz Rosenzweig and Theodor Adorno, wisely reminds readers that critical appropriation—which is neither blind fidelity nor blind rejection—is demanded not only of those who engage with Heidegger but of anyone interested in the task of genuine philosophical interpretation. It is imperative to make case-by-case distinctions between the authorial circumstances of a text and the arguments of a philosophical text: "a truly critical appropriation of an intellectual inheritance must also allow for at least the possibility of validity-claims that transcend the moment of its original articulation."[7] Gordon notes that forgetting or violating this basic hermeneutical principle, especially when engaging with a philosopher as bedeviled by controversy as Heidegger, "would abolish the very distinction between insight and ideology, dispensing with the baby alongside the bathwater. We should not forget Adorno's remarks concerning the risks of an

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[5] Ibid., xv.

[6] Gordon, "Critical Appropriation," 30. On the potentially troubling undertones of Heidegger's discussion of *Umwelt* and *Zuhandenheit,* see Gordon, "Prolegomena to Any Future Destruction of Metaphysics: Heidegger and the *Schwarze Hefte*" in *Heidegger's Black Notebooks: Responses to Anti-Semitism* ed. Andrew Mitchell and Peter Trawny (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 138–40.

[7] Gordon, "Critical Appropriation," 29.

aggressively political hermeneutic, which would 'extirpate, with the false, all that was true also.' To read philosophy only as ideology would be to annul the very sense of philosophical reading itself."[8] Sifting the wheat carefully from the chaff is the only means by which to decide what is worth transmitting and what must be discarded, and it is the only way to avoid the performative contradiction of an *a priori* condemnation of philosophical texts as propagandistic.[9]

That Gordon uses *Adorno* to defend Heidegger from wholesale dismissal is itself a striking reminder that the practice of measured judgments is very difficult to cultivate, since Adorno was anything but a sympathetic reader of what he termed Heidegger's "jargon of authenticity." Gordon exhorts us to be more sensitive in our reading of Heidegger's philosophical works than the inadequate, often inflammatory examples we have been given. That is, "[a]lthough Heidegger himself may have (too frequently) collapsed the distinction between philosophy and political ideology, his own transgression gives us no license to repeat the error."[10] Gordon then performs the kind of critical appropriation he hopes others will also undertake, examining five motifs of enduring philosophical value in Heidegger's corpus: the critique of the disembedded Cartesian subject, the existential analytic of the lifeworld, history as an *a priori* horizon of understanding, language and world-disclosure,

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[8] Ibid. Here, Gordon cites Theodor Adorno's "Baby with the Bathwater," in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, tr. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 43–45.

[9] "If one adopts *a priori* the suspicious interpretive posture that regards all philosophical argument as nothing else than ideology in disguise, one denies in advance the very possibility of rational argumentation itself: the result is a performative contradiction. This holds true for any philosophical text. It applies to any discussion of the troubled pairing of Kant and Judaism and it applies, too, for any discussion of the even more vexed pairing of "Heidegger and the Jews"" (Gordon, "Prolegomena," 142–43). Gordon also notes that the metaphors we use to describe our assessments of an author's corpus should be very carefully selected: "I am not convinced that all of Heidegger's philosophy is now contaminated by Nazism or anti-Semitism (and I might add that I share Peter Trawny's sensitive warning on the dangers of pursuing philosophy according to metaphors of purity and contamination)" (145).

[10] Gordon, "Critical Appropriation," 29.

and a revival of the pathos of human finitude. This selection of topics is an intimation of the range and depth of Heidegger's philosophical contributions, which merit further attention from interested readers. The breadth of Heidegger's influence is further underscored by the fact that Gordon turns to the second-generation critical theorist Jürgen Habermas as a model for how to critically appropriate Heidegger's post-metaphysical philosophy from the politics of his day, rather than turning to the aforementioned French poststructuralist Jacques Derrida, as John Caputo has done.[11]

Gordon by no means accepts Heidegger's own narrative about his authoritative interpretation of fundamental ontology or of the history of philosophy. Gordon argues that any pretension to systematicity and "an integral whole" must be rejected in favor of "thoughtful appropriation only where [philosophy] can be redeemed, as Adorno might have said, in its fragments. The philosophical tradition itself appears to us today less as a monument unbroken in its grandeur than as a field of ruins that we can sift through in search of momentary insight."[12] The fragmentary appropriation of an author's writing need not signal a chaotic carelessness, nor is partial appropriation an approach without precedent. After all, making refined distinctions is the heart of philosophical method; as Gordon points out, "[c]ritique (as we know) derives from the Greek word for separation, and there is nothing more philosophical than the critical practice of separating and breaking apart the

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[11] Gordon, "Prolegomena," 147: It is salutary "to follow the paradoxical strategy that was first described by Jürgen Habermas in his *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* article from 1953: "Mit Heidegger gegen Heidegger denken," to think with Heidegger against Heidegger." On reconsidering justice and Heidegger's myth of being through the work of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, see John Caputo's *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 186–209.

[12] Gordon, "Prolegomena," 145–46.

illusory unities of the philosophical canon."[13] Following that directive is what allows philosophy to survive.

Surviving fragments are often assembled in surprising, unexpected configurations by their inheritors. For example, it is in fact Heidegger's Jewish contemporaries who critically appropriate and take inspiration from Heidegger's own breaking apart of the illusory unities of Hermann Cohen's neo-Kantian liberalism, as Daniel Herskowitz's recent book beautifully illustrates.[14] While much has been written about Heidegger's relationship to Christianity— both his roots in it and his impact on it—Herskowitz highlights the Jewish perspectives that saw in Heidegger's historically-grounded existentialism an attractive alternative to the comprehensive structures and mechanistic bourgeois rationality of the Weimar era, a version of modernity that failed to give voice to individual concreteness and experiential wisdom.[15] In the eyes of the younger generation of Jewish intellectuals—including Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, and Emmanuel Levinas, to name only a few—Hermann Cohen was guilty of conflating Judaism with enlightenment values and thus did not offer a satisfactory account of authentic heritage (though Cohen's motivation for presenting an idealistic, German-friendly Judaism may have been laden with pragmatic political urgency: assimilation was more attractive than annihilation, a choice that summarizes so much of the diaspora experience and its tragedies). Herskowitz emphasizes the fact that "the disillusionment with, and rebellion against, the Cohenian picture was shared both by Heidegger and the majority of the Jewish

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[13] Ibid., 148. Stanley Cavell, who reads Heidegger with Emerson and Thoreau, also rejects the unity of the canon by evoking the image of the nomad. He presents "the philosopher as the hobo of thought," not as a permanent resident ("Finding as Founding: Taking Steps in Emerson's 'Experience,'" in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, 139).

[14] See Daniel Herskowitz, *Heidegger and His Jewish Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[15] Herskowitz, *Heidegger*, xvi.

thinkers" that the book examines, and "the inspection of the possibilities and pitfalls of Heidegger's philosophy was part of the Jewish attempt to work out how it is best to proceed after the downfall of reason and liberalism."[16] That we are in many ways *still* working out how to proceed in a postliberal modernity plagued by irrational violence shows just how important this line of post-Weimar inquiry was. If we wish to respect rather than to patronize or dismiss the Jewish authors who engaged with Heidegger's thought—including Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Hannah Arendt, Abraham Heschel and Leo Strauss—we must take seriously the fact that "these thinkers did not only share many of his theoretical assumptions and agendas, but also actively drew on his thought as a fertile source for their own purposes."[17] It is simply inaccurate, then, to regard Heidegger's philosophy as something tainted beyond use. The Jewish figures of Herskowitz's analysis overturned the expectations and social trajectories of their day by employing the existential analytic of a surprising spokesperson. Through creative appropriation they were able "to think through the place of Judaism and Jewish existence in the modern world. Perhaps ironically, then, Heidegger's thought proved itself to be fertile ground for reconceptualizing what it means to be Jewish."[18] Legacies can be revised, and redemptive reconstruction can draw on unlikely materials. These modern Jewish reconsiderations of Heidegger's work are inspiring examples

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[16] Ibid., xx.

[17] Ibid., xv. Herskowitz vigorously defends the intellectual integrity of the Jewish authors treated in his monograph: "many of those who found Heidegger's philosophy meriting serious consideration did not suffer, as it has been suggested, from "false consciousness," nor were they "unJewish Jews" attempting to "deny their own Jewishness," and none deserve the somewhat dismissive title "Heidegger's Children." Indeed . . . Heidegger's thought–with its non-rationalistic bent, its secularized Christian categories, its obscure references to "gods," and its possible links to nationalistic fascism–served as a key reference point in the various attempts to negotiate the boundaries between Judaism, Christianity, and secularism in twentieth-century Jewish thought" (xii); "depicting the Jewish encounters with Heidegger as simply a confrontation with a Nazi thinker amounts to a grave misconstrual of the seriousness with which his philosophy was approached" (xv).

[18] Ibid., xxiii.

of what can be assembled from the fragmented and fragmentary traditions of philosophical thought.

Conclusion

Over the course of these four chapters, more than a little ground has been covered, both historically and thematically. I began in the first chapter with a treatment of Heidegger, Horkheimer, and Adorno's complementary analyses of modernity's crises, evident in the social and material conditions that homogenize and restrict individual human expression and development. Though mass anonymity and machination as the dominant form of production threaten to efface the human individual and the fragile thing, there remains the possibility that advanced technological acuity and the revelatory powers of art, if placed in proper relation to each other, might continue to bring forth worlds, rather than predatorily setting upon this one. What is medial about technology, and the questions concerning it, is that there are both active and passive elements, both projective and receptive dimensions to these unveiling occurrences. The possibility of the recovery or preservation *poiésis* underwrites the hope—however faint—that aesthetics and instrumentation may be harmonized.

As opposed to the effacement of the individual diagnosed in chapter one, Nicholas of Cusa's mystical thought celebrates the singular, non-interchangeable quality of finite particulars and of each human being. My second chapter showed that Cusanus at the origins of modernity and Heidegger at the end of modernity offer us two different but complementary ways to understand the uniqueness of the individual. Nicholas bases his account of unique individuals on the notion that the fullness of infinity is given to each and all—to each finite thing in the cosmos, and to each finite person, who is commanded to be free and to be one's own self. This model of selfhood shares affinities with the concepts of 'mineness' and authenticity in Heidegger's account of the individual, whose uniqueness is defined by mortal finitude and the experience of the call of conscience.

In chapter three, I showed that the aporia in Cusanus's portrait exercise about how to reconcile uniqueness with communal commensurability articulates, in a different idiom, a central question for interpreters of Heidegger's *Being and Time*: can individual authenticity be social, and if so, how so? I explored how the group exercise around an all-seeing portrait in the preface of Cusanus's *On the Vision of God* models the emergence of the kind of community whose social contracts are founded on discourse and belief—belief that is required when verification is limited. Cusanus's exercise invites us to recognize the difference between a community and an anonymous crowd. The testimony, empathy, listening, and preservation of multiplicity in the communal contemplative practice of *On the Vision of God* offers an alternative to highly conformist, anonymous models of sociality. Relatedly, I examined competing interpretations of Heidegger's foundational concepts for social existence, especially the relationship between *Mitsein* and *das Man*, and the possibilities for authenticity that they may facilitate or inhibit. Authentic community requires our reciprocal rejoinders to inheritances that must be continually re-petitioned and reimagined.

In chapter four, I highlighted the theme of human creativity in both Cusanus's and Heidegger's thinking, and I showed that Cusanus's portrait and Heidegger's temple offer two different but complementary ways to understand the kinds of poiésis that can institute and sustain a community. Cusanus's emphasis on endless unfolding complements Heidegger's desire for a thinking that does not calculate in advance but is open to new possibilities, and his desire for art forms that, in transcending their material composition, reveal new truths and gather new communities. Certain forms of artistic and architectural building can do the ongoing work of revealing new meaningful modes of comportment. These sorts of buildings

can be sites of dwelling and unsettling, which demand not closure but creative, onward thinking.

Future Directions

Where has techno-modernity developed since Heidegger issued his mid-century warnings about the dangers of unfettered human dominion? In what ways might Cusanus's and Heidegger's concerns—about the preciousness and fragility of individuality, about the oft-overlooked expressive powers of art, about the incursion of calculative reasoning into incalculable matters—have become even more pressing today? David Albertson reminds us that "Heidegger astutely perceived in the 1930s that we are beginning to live and think within a homogenous, numerical grid stretching out into infinite space, whose unreal dimensions threaten to overshadow or impoverish the sensible plenum of the *Lebenswelt*."[1] Since then, our lifeworld or cultural milieu has been overlaid with numerical grids in ways that extend far beyond Heidegger's admonitions.

Artifice and artificiality have become something of an ethos, thanks especially to internet cultures. Nowhere else in modern life is the ubiquity of artifice, or of performance and simulation, more pronounced than on social media platforms, where individual identity can be styled, repackaged, and re-presented in infinitely mutable layers to an audience of equally self-simulating and dissimulating users.[2] For example, user-selected filters applied to images of landscapes or of one's own face can ensure that only the preferred (unblemished, well-lit, aptly-framed) version of daily life appears on one's account. Backdrops and music

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[1] Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies*, 277.

[2] For a beautiful and astute examination of performance, artifice, and identity on the myriad screens of contemporary life, see Jia Tolentino, *Trick Mirror: Reflections of Self-Delusion* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020).

can be added to video recordings so that the original circumstances of the recording are all but unrecognizable, a drab adolescent bedroom becoming a glamorous production studio with the tap of a few icons. The "reality" that each person documents and shares online is often one that has been painstakingly staged, edited and curated—and sometimes willfully distorted. However, the philosopher or social critic suspicious of "virtual" culture must be in search of criteria for distinguishing harmful human practices from harmless ones, and must reckon with the possibility that online artifice and the meticulous curation of one's public identity differs only in degree, and not in kind, from the identities we perform for one another in the flesh. For example, in embodied life, we choose to wear certain garments or costumes (and varieties of cosmetics, prostheses under different guises) to certain social or professional events, and we choose our words in response to the particular conversation partner(s) we are engaging at a given moment. The majority of language users, whether communicating in person or online, develop code-switching skills—the ability to move between generational and situational "dialects" of a language—fairly quickly, adapting both the content and the style of our speech to the demands and the constraints of the occasion at hand.[3] Such adaptation and shifting—whether in language use or in sartorial and cosmetic choices—need not necessarily be read as inauthentic or dissimulating, though the opportunities for malevolent deception and outright fraud, especially online, increase with every additional layer of distance between the speaker and the hearer, between the original and the copy. If the arguably harmless application of filters and backdrops to our online images—made possible by the democratization of the auteur's tools, whose widespread access means that

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[3] For a lucid, playful and well-researched account of online discourse, code-switching, linguistically-mediated identity formation and community-building in the digital age, see Gretchen McCullough, *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language* (New York: Riverhead, 2020).

every person with a cellphone camera can now be the director and the star of their own films—is roughly equivalent to our harmless (and often artful) application of cosmetics and branded clothing to our fleshly bodies for the sake of the (often quite meaningful) performances we stage in the physical buildings in which we congregate, then perhaps criticism of the dangers of social media platforms and the types of artifice they cultivate and encourage must come from a different direction. For example, the ease with which a copy of a user account or even an entire personal identity profile—replete with supposedly non-replicable biometrics—can be produced poses an immense threat to practices of authentication, to say nothing of individual authenticity. Digital augmentations and simulations of the human face come with security risks[4], and with under-studied risks to the developmental health of young people. Perhaps these digital masks are causing identity crises and psychological pathologies whose full effects we will only discover once a generation of "digital natives" come of age.

Taking a much-needed empirical approach to digital culture, in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff explores the mechanisms operative in the contemporary economy of technology that pose threats to individual freedoms, to democracy, and even to capitalist economies themselves. She does so through appeals to the canon of sociology's founders—Durkheim, Marx, and Weber, among others—and on the basis of years of interviews with data scientists and the corporate policies their employers have

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[4] For example, in *Image: Three Inquiries in Technology and Imagination*, Thomas Carlson observes that "pervasive systems of technological surveillance focus increasingly on forms of facial recognition that capture any and all faces by wholly impersonal and statistical means" (13). In addition, "the production of "deep fake" videos and their dissemination on a global scale at the speed of light are now becoming as easy and as common as word processing. Consequently, we are involved increasingly—and often unknowingly— in modes of seeing that take as perfectly real what is, in fact, utterly fictitious. Notable especially for their "face swap" function, deep fakes make use of "real people, real faces" and "close to photorealistic footage" in order to present us with "entirely unreal events" (192).

generated. She is particularly troubled by what she terms "surveillance capitalism," a species of capitalism that "unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data" which is then processed by "machine intelligence" used not only to predict human behavior, but to shape it and even automate it.[5] If in Kierkegaard a certain kind of privacy—rendered as total anonymity—can be dangerous because it shields people from being accountable for their words, then under surveillance capitalism there is the simultaneous danger that individuals in fact have *no* privacy, either online or in the physical spaces that have been mapped out by the technology corporations who know the location, consumption habits, and preferences of each account user, whose information they sell to the highest advertising bidder. That we have allowed a handful of technology corporations to conduct non-consensual experiments with the psychological well-being of the global population while also creating massive archives of each user's private information for marketing (and other, sometimes darker) purposes may seem unthinkable, but these facts do not surprise readers of either dystopian literature or of modern philosophies of social criticism. Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Horkheimer, and Adorno did not predict the precise contours of our contemporary moment, but they certainly sketched outlines that look hauntingly familiar from today's vantage point.

Decades ago, before the cultural dominance of digital media platforms, fake news crises, and online social networks, Hubert Dreyfus connected Kierkegaard's criticisms of the press in *Two Ages* with the problems of anonymity, flattening, and commitment-free attitudes emerging in internet communication.[6] The press and the Web can function like rumor mills,

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[5] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future and the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs), 14.

and, as has been seen all too recently in the U.S., as instruments of mass disinformation.[7]

Free-wheeling with the facts, flitting from website to website or tweet to tweet is possible

because the "anonymous spectator takes no risks" and "keeps open all possibilities and has

no fixed identity that could be threatened by disappointment, humiliation, or loss. . . . On the

Internet commitments are at best virtual commitments and losses only virtual losses."[8] While

certain online commitments and losses remain merely virtual, such as those experienced by

avatars in fictional gaming universes, other virtual commitments do impact real individual

lives, for good and for ill. Dreyfus, echoing Kierkegaard, argues that we must to connect the

virtual with the actual, by somehow overcoming "risk-free attraction" and instead

"supporting and encouraging unconditional commitments and strong identities in the real

world where risk and failure and disappointment is inevitable."[9] What is the nature of that

"real" world if we have now moved into an epoch of hyperreality, and what would it mean to

have a strong identity if simulacra are the only sources of self-knowledge available to the

individual? In other words, in what additional ways has techno-modernity developed since

Kierkegaard's anti-press polemics, and since Heidegger's famous technology essay?

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[6] See Dreyfus, "Anonymity vs Commitment: The Dangers of Education on the Internet," in *Philosophy of Technology*, 642: "What Kierkegaard envisaged as a consequence of the press's indiscriminate coverage and dissemination is now being realized on the World Wide Web. All qualitative distinctions are, indeed, being leveled. Relevance and significance have disappeared. . . . Nothing is too trivial to be included. Nothing is so important that it demands a special place."

[7] As Dreyfus explains, "Just as no individual assumes responsibility for the consequences of information in 'the Press', no one assumes responsibility for the accuracy of information on the Web. The information has become so anonymous that no one knows or cares where it came from. Of course, in so far as one does not take action on the information, no one really cares if it is reliable. All that matters is that everyone passes the word along by forwarding it to other users. . . . The Net is thus a perfect medium for slander and innuendo" ("Anonymity vs Commitment," 642).

[8] Ibid., 643.

[9] Ibid., 646.

In "Gathering Remains," a chapter from *Image: Three Inquiries in Technology and Imagination*, Mark Taylor addresses these questions, examining our contemporary situation. He periodizes rapid changes in economics and technology by suggesting that within less than a century, human civilization has moved from a culture of dematerialization to a culture of digitization to one of virtualization.[10] In the middle of the twentieth century, we moved from Guy Debord's society of spectacle—a consumerist situation that elicits pseudo-desires that are fulfilled by consuming images, copies, representations, fakes in place of real sources of satisfaction—to Jean Baudrillard's hyperreality of simulacra, that is, to a culture of copies for which there is no original. Whereas in Debord's spectacular social conditions we suffer alienation from ourselves and from the world that comes to us only through the mediation of myriad (false) appearances or advertising images, in Baudrillard's hyperreality, Taylor says, "alienation is impossible because there is no real from which one can be alienated. This development involves a seismic shift in the way meaning is constituted—if nothing anchors signs, then meaning is no longer referential but now is relational."[11] The problem with a relational rather than a referential account of meaning is that an escape route back to reality no longer exists, and a narcissistic form of human autonomy reflects itself to itself in its mass-marketed creations. That is, "[i]n postmodernism, the spectacle becomes an all-encompassing self-reflexive play of screens and mirrors," a turn that Taylor says Heidegger

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[10] Taylor argues that "in recent history, there have been three overlapping forms of capitalism—industrial, consumer, financial, which are all characterized by changing currencies of exchange—things, images, code. These different regimes mark three distinct historical epochs, which, in turn, have created the conditions for different cultural formations." See also "The progression from dematerialization to virtualization involves a process of aestheticization through which "reality" is transformed into images, which, in turn, are programmed as code" ("Gathering Remains," in *Image*, 30–31, 33).

[11] Taylor, "Gathering," 45.

anticipated in his famous technology essay.[12] This groundless or even nihilistic play of

relations defines economic structures as well. In his diagnosis of algorithmic financial

systems, Taylor builds on Horkheimer and Adorno's insight that a certain form of late-

capitalism, like a certain form of instrumental rationality, undermines itself, but Taylor also

connects the contradictory or self-undermining characteristic of contemporary economy to

the Baudrillardian problem of simulacra, exemplified by the trading of virtual assets and their

strangely arbitrary price differentials—a form of exchange so far removed from actual goods

that actual people might value, use, or enjoy that it bewilders the onlooker.[13] Taylor worries

that a posthuman era is emerging that will be marked by a ceaseless effort to translate and

therefore reduce everything—all materials and all of reality—to algorithms and digital

codes.[14] Taking a position related to but also divergent from that of Dreyfus, Taylor proposes

that the only solution to what he takes to be the anti-human attitude of posthumanism is to

return to, or to gather the remains of, materiality and the fleshly world, especially through the

making of opaque, and therefore un-codable and incomprehensible, forms of art.

French philosopher Bernard Stiegler also expands out from Heidegger, Horkheimer,

and Adorno to examine our contemporary situation of what he calls "industrial populism"

and its states of shocked stupidity, arguing that the economic arrangements of our

technological developments are causing regression and idiocy, rather than progress and

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[12] Ibid., 44.

[13] "Art for art's sake has become money for money's sake, profit for profit's sake. In automated high-speed networks, capital loses its productive function and becomes a circular process of self-replication. In this speculative economy, the purpose of capital is capital—code produces more code, algorithms create more algorithms in recursive loops that are decoupled from anything other than themselves" (Ibid., 51).

[14] "When everything is coded or codable, the line between human and artificial intelligence becomes obscure, and the universe becomes a supercomputer running programs and algorithms that evolve without human intervention" (Ibid., 77).

enlightenment. This variety of capitalism creates social conditions that "turn consciousness,

that is, the seat of spirit, into a simple reflex organ: a brain reduced to an ensemble of

neurons, such as those controlling the behavior of a slug. A brain so stripped of its

consciousness becomes a simple trade value . . . on the audience market."[15] Echoing

Horkheimer and Adorno, he links the loss of capacities for rational reflection to an increased

vulnerability in the face of commodifying forces that seek to monetize the self. He argues

that "program industries" transform complex, willful human consciousness, the seat of

individual responsibility, into mere "reflex systems" and collections of drives or impulses

that are "responsive to the solicitations of marketing, which systematically reinforce the

behaviors" that are toxic.[16] So-called "information technology" in particular is the target of

his criticism because of its complicity in the loss of individuation processes and in the loss of

knowledge. Though we would expect cognitive growth thanks to access to massive digital

archives, Stiegler instead sees "cognitive impoverishment."[17] However, he also remains

hopeful that the library—even in its digital, networked form—can continue to function as

"the place of the conservation and elaboration of forms of knowledge—of their memory" and

that books, as finite "spirit-invested objects" remain important technical instruments, or

organs, of infinite spirit.[18] Stiegler is not opposed categorically or on principle to technical

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[15] Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-enchantment of the World: The Value of Spirit against Industrial Populism*, trans. Trevor Arthur (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1.

[16] Ibid., 4.

[17] He appeals, for example, to "cognitive overflow syndrome, which, rather than facilitating decision-making (the synthesis that must follow from the analytic acquisition of knowledge), paralyzes it: information is not transformed into knowledge or *savoir-faire* but into an accumulation of hard data" (Ibid., 83).

[18] Ibid., 85.

protheses of various kinds; instead, he seeks a type of "supplementarity" that facilitates rather than erases individuation, subjectivity, and responsibility.[19]

How does Nicholas of Cusa fit into these hyper-modern narratives? A possible objection to my drawing on Cusanus's thought as a resource for highlighting the value and dignity of the material universe, and the value and dignity of finitely creative humans, is that his mystical thinking is nonetheless undergirded by and oriented toward a type of transcendence and duality according to which the material and historical is subsumed by the immaterial and eternal. It is possible that in its striving for immaterial immortality, the cybernetic posthuman project of certain tech-utopians is in fact the literalization of what was previously only a mystical metaphor in neo-Platonic Christian sources. For example, the capacities of the super-human bodies that philosophy professor Eric Charles Steinhart anticipates in the immediate self-transcendent future sound strikingly similar to the experience of shared optical perspectives that Cusanus describes in the recommended exercise of *De Visione Dei*.[20] Steinhart's computational understanding of the universe and of

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[19] "Supplementarity: that is, facticity, artificiality and prostheticity . . . have always inhabited, and have always been the condition of, all critique, all logos, all Aufklärung, all subjectivation, all autonomy and all responsibility, all existence, all Da-sein, and so on and so forth" (Stiegler, *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21st Century*, trans. Daniel Ross [Malden, MA: Polity, 2015], 78. We need a "conception of invention, thought as a quantum leap into individuation within and beyond reason, in a complex of moments that weave a threefold process of individuation: at once psychic, social and technical – wherein repetition, supplementarity and tertiary retention together constitute the primordial element, an 'element' that is always already 'supplementary', an elementary supplementarity" (79).

[20] Whereas Cusanus requires his participants to walk around a painting, the evolved, augmented bodies that Steinhart describes will simply receive and transmit optical information from each other in order to replicate and share perspectives: "The signals in your ghostly optic nerves can be transmitted directly to the optic nerves of your visitor. Thus your visitor can visually experience your world from your first-person perspective. Your visitor can see exactly what you saw exactly as you saw it" (Eric Charles Steinhart, *Your Digital Afterlives: Computational Theories of Life after Death* [New York: Palgrave, 2014], 7).

sight literalize the Cusan metaphor of God's all-seeing, creative vision.[21] Future scholarship

could explore these conceptual connections further.

In these remarks on the triumph of artifice over authenticity and the incursion of

algorithm into reality, my aim has been to resist the powerful temptation or the impulse

toward a curmudgeonly, if not fully luddite, attitude to which so many diagnosticians of

technological modernity fall prey. If we fail to examine empirical facts about our

contemporary world with requisite attention and patience, if we let uninterrogated nostalgia

overtake the ability to assess the merits of new situations, if we rage and thrash at the notion

that our own positions may require significant revision in order to be appropriate to the

demands of the day, then we have failed as thinkers, as scholars, and as citizens. The task of

the philosopher is to allow historically distant sources to speak to the present; the carrying

out of such a task, then, requires knowledge of both the sources and the present. It would be a

gesture of ingratitude and deep naïveté to dismiss the many gains of technological

modernity—advanced medicine, democratic forms of government, a free press, reliable

agriculture, however fragile each of these have been shown to be—as mere concessions to

enframing attitudes, or to the culture industry and its impressionable mass audiences. Such a

dismissal would overlook the promises on the horizon, the future full of the possibilities that

our collective knowledge and powers of action leave open. The diagnoses of social

conformism, purposeless optimization and efficiency, and unrestrained, misapplied

quantification that I laid out in my first chapter no doubt remain relevant to the contemporary

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[21] Mark Taylor points out that Steinhart's argument "rests on the conviction that the universe is, in effect, an infinite computational machine that is the functional equivalent of the Logos or the mind of God" ("Gathering," 65). In Cusanus's thought, the cosmos is an extension of God's very being. What differentiates Cusanus's mystical cosmology from Steinhart's computational cosmology is that Cusanus never uses machine metaphors, because the cosmos, and perhaps God's very self, are open-ended and dynamic.

moment, with the dominance of social media platforms and their influence on users' identity formation, with technology corporations threatening to monopolize whole spheres of commerce and the labor forces on which they rely, and with a shrinking public square—virtual or otherwise—in which to engage in constructive civil discourse. However, these dangerous forms of late-modern life need not have the final word, nor should they overshadow the possibilities latent in our present reality. I have endeavored to bring out not only the valid criticisms but also some of the hopeful elements within Adorno, Heidegger and Nicholas of Cusa's thinking, because they each recognized something we are at risk of forgetting: that the riches of our human past, and their archives too expansive for any one person to exhaust in a lifetime of reading and learning, are gifts far too valuable to discard, even in our moments of greatest despair about the fractured, suffering state of the world. Wisdom can be retrieved from so many points in that sprawling history.

Heidegger famously stated in a late-life interview that "only a God can save us" from the adverse conditions of technological modernity, but we need not follow this gesture of resigned despair. The Jewish and Christian sources that shaped his and Cusanus's thinking contain the parallel claims that cosmic redemption arrives through divine action *and* that humans can and ought to do redemptive work, repairing the world, within historical time. If such a construal of redemption is too theological a description of the transformation that some readers might envision for the future, then a growth or blossoming is an image worth conjuring in the daydreams of what is to come. Vines shoot up and flowers bloom even from the crevices of places thought to be uninhabitable.

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