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**HEIDEGGER: ONTOLOGICAL POLITICS TO
TECHNOLOGICAL POLITICS**

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Abstract

***Heidegger: Ontological Politics to Technological Politics.* By Javier Cardoza-Kon**

As Heidegger himself has done with Nietzsche in claiming that he will articulate what Nietzsche *meant* but never said metaphysically, I also do with Heidegger in terms of politics. On my reading there are two kinds of politics in Heidegger's middle and late thought that are, for the most part, murky and confused. There is a politics of ontology the deals with the encountering and articulating of what beings are and what Being itself is. There is also a politics on the more familiar level of societies and the policies that different groups establish and follow. It is in terms of the second type of politics that Heidegger is most often attacked, and for good reason. My dissertation will motivate an understanding of Dasein and Heidegger's thought beyond Dasein in terms of these two types of politics. This will serve to bring Heidegger's "turning" and eventual ruminations on technology into focus. I examine what it was in the confused and unarticulated relation between the two types of politics that not only allowed for his foray into Nazism, but also informed his Machiavellian views on technology. I conclude with an examination of contemporary issues in politics by putting Heidegger into a dialogue with Gianni Vattimo concerning the issues of violence, liberty, and the proliferation of 3-D printed firearms in the U.S.

Dedication.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to Xenia Gilg, David Hoy, Carlos Sanchez, and my mother Linda for believing in me and helping to make it possible for me to pursue this noble path. Thank all of you from the bottom of my heart.

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Introduction

“When we understand thinking to be the distinctive characteristic of man, we remind ourselves of a *belonging* together that concerns man and Being. Immediately we find ourselves grappling with the questions: What does Being mean? Who, or what, is man?” (I&D, 30)

Following the seminal work *Being and Time* Heidegger is said to go through a “turning” (*die Kehre*) that sees him leaving behind the project he calls “fundamental ontology,” or the question of the “meaning of Being.” Through his so-called middle period in the 1930s and through the early 1940s, Heidegger’s ontological engagement becomes centered on what he calls the “truth of Being,” which is articulated as a history of Western metaphysics. Ultimately, this history of metaphysics manifests itself in Heidegger’s “late period” as “technology.” It is also during the middle period that Heidegger struggles with his unfortunate foray into Nazi politics. This is a popular theme in Heidegger scholarship with spirited arguments on all sides. Some interpretations attempt to separate Heidegger’s philosophy from his Nazi involvement while others seek to dismiss Heidegger’s post- *Being and Time* work altogether, while still others wish to defend Heidegger and still others have just wanted to explore and

document his involvement.¹ While Heidegger's political involvements with Nazism remain inexcusable, his political views and involvements are integral to understanding the "turning" and his later thought on technology as the manifestation of the final metaphysics of the Platonic legacy, which he calls the history of Being. With this in mind, it becomes apparent that even the lauded and controversial essay "The Question Concerning Technology" is rich with political overtones and criticisms that reframe the circumstances under which the truth of Being presents itself.

As Heidegger himself has done with Nietzsche in claiming that he will articulate what Nietzsche *meant* but never said metaphysically, I also will do with Heidegger in terms of politics. On my reading there are two kinds of politics in Heidegger's thought that are, for the most part, murky and confused. There is a politics of ontology that deals with the encountering and articulating what beings are and what Being itself is. There is also a politics on the more familiar level of societies and the policies that different groups establish and follow. It is in terms of the second type of politics that Heidegger is most often attacked, and for good reason. In the following I will motivate an understanding of Heidegger's middle and late

¹ For condemnation see, first, the most controversial and, arguably, most one-sided reading of Heidegger, *Heidegger and Nazism* by Victor Farias. A close second is Emmanuel Faye's *Heidegger: the Introduction of Nazism to Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars 1933-1935*, Herman Phillipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation*. Jürgen Habermas offers perhaps the most compelling criticism of Heidegger and his engagement with Nazism in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. There is also the compelling criticism levied by Levinas. See *Entre Nous* for example. There are those who wish to defend: Julian Young *Heidegger: Philosophy, Nazism*. Those who "defend" via the claim that Heidegger had no choice in the matter of National Socialism, Iain Thomson *Heidegger On Ontotheology*. And there are those who wish to explore and inform the discussion: Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis* and Richard Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* and Hugo Ott, *Heidegger: a Political Life*. Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*.

thought in terms of these two types of politics. This will serve to bring Heidegger's turning and eventual ruminations on technology into focus. In the end I will examine what it was in the confused and unarticulated relation between the two types of politics that not only allowed for his foray into Nazism, but also informed his Machiavellian views on technology and what might be done to counterbalance them. This will allow for an inquiry in to the relevance of Heidegger's political thought in today's situation.

At the beginning of Heidegger's middle period (roughly 1928 to 1946) Heidegger begins to understand that his work up to that point falls within the selfsame modernist framework that he is struggling to free his thought of. At this time he also becomes the first National Socialist Rector of Freiburg University.² This is the initial intersection between his politics and philosophy. In fact, it is in the "Rectoral Address" that we find Heidegger explicitly identifying the importance and task of philosophy as intertwined with politics.³ As Heidegger moves through this period his fundamental questioning about Being shifts to that of the "truth of Being." This shift begins with a series of essays between 1929-1931 following *Being and Time* in which he begins to understand the history of metaphysics since Plato as the history of an "error" – echoing Nietzsche in his understanding of Plato's categories of "truth" as relegated to the "supransensory" world. This contrasts the pre-Platonic notion of truth as *a-lētheia* that describes the categories of Being based on the encounters

² Heidegger tries to deny this in the posthumously published *Der Spiegel* interview.

³ For an extensive discussion on this see Richard Wolin's *Politics of Being* and Karl Löwith's "The Political Implications of Heidegger's Existentialism."

(“uncovering” “unconcealing” or “revealing”) of mankind with his surroundings, which has been displaced by the Platonic forms.⁴

This marks the beginning of Heidegger’s attempt to find a way to abandon the modernist categories of truth in terms of objective “correctness” and to recall the early conception of Greek “truth” as *alētheia* – a recollection that he sees as important in his overall project of articulating how mankind might come back into an open relationship with Being. This is expressed by Heidegger in his 1935 lectures that were later published as *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. At this time Heidegger noted a metaphysical “heritage” that begins with the Greeks and is expressed in terms of the polis. This philosophical and political work is an attempt to examine the historical metaphysical “inception” of the West in an examination of the Greeks and their ontological understanding. Essentially, an examination of the beginning of Western metaphysical understanding as the bedrock upon which all Western history has followed would inform Heidegger’s project to “reground” the ontologically deprived West that he finds himself in.

For Heidegger the question of what the truth of Being is forms the key to understanding the history of metaphysics that he sees as the foundation of the catastrophic technological and political machinations of mid-twentieth century world politics and events. As such his middle period thought begins to understand Being in terms of how it “presences” itself to us. What this means is that Heidegger has

⁴ See Heidegger’s essays “What is Metaphysics?,” “On the Essence of Truth, but particularly “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth.”

shifted his project from fundamental ontology and begins to formulate a history of how beings (entities) and Being have been encountered by Western humankind. While the project of “fundamental ontology” has shifted, it still rests on the “ontological difference,” which articulates the distinction between beings (entities or *das Seiendes*) and Being (*Sein*) or what it is that makes beings intelligible as such. Being, as what makes things intelligible as such, is the way in which the world appears to humankind, while the beings that show up within it are only intelligible in terms of this world. The terms in which Being is articulated today, in “this world,” and those historically prior are what I call the “categories” of Being. Hence, Wrathall can say something like “In our age it seems plausible to say that gold’s essential features (in the traditional sense) are found in its atomic structures, because knowledge of the atomic structure give us the best grasp on how to turn gold into a resource” (HU, 32). In this case the category of Being in “our age” is defined by usefulness and resources, so this is how something like gold will appear to us – in terms of its use. This could be contrasted with the medieval period in which the dominant category of Being is divine and so gold is intelligible as “noblest of the metals” and so is understood in terms of “the extent to which it approaches God by being like Him” (HU, 29-32). The ontological difference forms the bedrock and motivation for Heidegger’s work from the earliest period.⁵ During the “turning”

⁵ See, for example *Fundamental Problems of Phenomenology*, “We said that ontology is the science of being. But being is always the being of a being. Being is essentially different from a being, from beings. . . We call it *the ontological difference* – the differences between being and beings” (FPP, 17).

Heidegger does not abandon this distinction or the problems associated with it. Rather, it becomes a history of how we have interacted with beings.

It is this interaction that is the basis for what I see as Heidegger's "political" thought. The first and "grounding" kind of politics I understand as "ontological politics." The second kind of politics that is informed by or "grounded in" the former I call "ontic politics" or "outward politics." This distinction is based on the articulation of the terms "ontic" and "ontological" in the introduction on *Being and Time*, "Ontological inquiry is concerned primarily with Being; ontical inquiry is concerned primarily with *entities* and the facts about them" (B&T, 31-32/SZ, 11-12. fn. 3). The "history" of metaphysics not only tells the story of how we encounter beings (and hence conceive of Being) but also how we encounter each other. These interactions become "political" when, on the one hand, we form a conception of Being itself, that characterizes the intelligibility of all beings; in turn we order, govern, and relegate beings according to how we think they should be given the way we encounter them (ontological politics). On the other hand I see Heidegger's politics in the ordering, relegation, and governance of populations and their attendant materials, structures, values, etc. that is informed by an ontological understanding (ontic politics) – this kind of politics is couched in the former kind.⁶

Being as historicized means, then, that rather than examining the nature of beings (entities) in order to discover a permanent and unchanging essence that is

⁶ One of Levinas' biggest criticisms of the later Heidegger is precisely that he does not or cannot account for the "other," especially in an ethical sense. See for example *Entre Nous*.

common to all beings (hence, Being), that the very way we have encountered beings has fundamentally changed beginning since the pre-Socratic thinkers and so has, consequently, how we understand the Being of those beings.⁷ In turn, the understanding of Being is expressed outwardly as societal structures. Indeed, on the “middle period” of Heidegger’s thoughts Richard Wolin points out that Heidegger’s “treatises and lectures contain copious instances of a ‘*seinsgeschichtlich*’ (literally: as viewed from the standpoint of the history of Being) or historic-metaphysically grounded understanding of political reality” (POB, 14). This is also called the “history of metaphysics” by Heidegger.

This description of the grounding of a “political reality” provides an opportunity to understand the “culture” of a people in terms of their ontic politics. In this sense, “culture” is the framework of traditions (including religious practices, ceremonies, etc), values, and everyday dealings with others that is kept in check and preserved by “ontic” policy. For example, the Greek polis was characterized by certain rules in trade, days for religious practices, divisions of labor, division of gender, etc., which leads Heidegger, in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, to discuss the polis as the “site of Being.” For him, these ancient Greek practices of the polis symbolize the inception of Western metaphysics as we know it (see Ch. 1 for a detailed discussion). Indeed, even the charges brought upon Socrates of worshipping

⁷ Richard Wolin puts his understanding of historicity slightly differently, “Historicity means precisely this: the repetition of an ‘essential historical moment’ that serves to inform and guide the ‘futurity’ of a given historical collectivity” (POB, 87). This “essential historical moment” is Wolin’s articulation of the historical point at which one epoch of Being-conception gives way to a new one that characterizes an epoch.

false gods and corrupting the youth were, at bottom, charges of violating the societal standards (religious, pedagogical, etc.) that bound and maintained the city of Athens as a unity. These standards, which are themselves expressions or manifestations of how Athenians conceived their very Being and the Being of all things around them, are upheld in ontic politics and enforced by the state.

Heidegger tells the story of the history of metaphysics as plagued by a “forgetfulness.” This forgetfulness comes in the form of a sort of tunnel vision in which all intellectual disciplines and, hence, all ways that we interact with beings and each other, has historically turned away from the question of Being itself in favor of beings – that in everything we do and have done as humans of the West we are engaging with Being, but do not see it. Instead, the deepest we go is the significance of our everyday dealings with entities and others. This means that for Heidegger the categories of Western metaphysics and the sciences have always been in terms of beings while any inquiry into Being is overlooked or ignored. Perhaps “ignored” is not entirely informative. Rather, in the history of metaphysics since Plato Heidegger sees Being conceived of as an unchanging “objective” truth that beings are mere instances of. Given this, the claim goes, Being did not admit of anything worth inquiring into beyond the nature of beings themselves. In other words, the permanence of Being has been assumed to make itself obvious in beings. While Heidegger’s “late thought” is characterized by his criticisms of technology as the final manifestation of nihilistic Western metaphysics, his overall philosophical project is driven by an inquiry into Being as the un-examined bedrock of a “history of

metaphysics” that he sees as, in the end, the explanation for the catastrophic events of the 20th century.

This seems to suggest that Heidegger remains entangled in the metaphysical quagmire he has wanted to escape. However, he differs from metaphysicians before him (Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hegel, Kant, etc.) in that the attempt to articulate a “history” of Being reveals the “truth of Being” not as objective or eternal, but as, rather, a succession of events. What this points towards is a multiplicity of “truths” or “epochs” of Being and, thus, a break from the modernist methodological approach of approaching ontological unitary understandings.⁸ Given the multiplicity and seriality of the history of Being articulated by Heidegger, Vattimo has made the claim that this interpretive understanding of the most basic “truth” indicates the “tendency of contemporary philosophy to think of itself as a ‘sociology,’ or as a theory of modernity” (NE, 10). Indeed, the articulation of a history of Being seems to say that what is being examined is a history of interpretation shown forth by different persons at different times in different places. This also seems to fit well with my claim that even Heidegger’s thoughts on technology are implicitly political. Perhaps even the later thoughts on *Gelassenheit* are political. However, the criticism of such an “interpretive” and political understanding of what was once respected in philosophy as metaphysics now seems to be under fire as not being pure philosophy, but, as pointed out, more of a “sociology” – that philosophy in this regard has become an

⁸ See Gianni Vattimo’s essay “Postmodernity, Technology, Ontology” (NE, 16-20).

account or “theory of modernity.” While, as stated, this seems right, I do think that Heidegger does, at bottom, have a project that is of philosophical interest.

However, the degree to which Heidegger’s ontological and political considerations cross and cause each other to become murky is problematic, which, in the hopes of clarifying these themes, I have introduced the distinction between “ontological” and “ontic” politics. The following chapters are to explore Heidegger’s struggle between politics and the history of metaphysics. This struggle, as stated above, becomes what Heidegger calls a “history of Being,” of which the ultimate and latest manifestation is “technological.” Behind the metaphysical articulations and politics is a question that seems perhaps even more basic than that of the event of Being.

During the time of his “turning” we see Heidegger enter the overt political arena of National Socialism and attempt to ground this foray philosophically. At this time Heidegger also begins to articulate a need to return to a Pre-Platonic concept of “truth” and, hence conception of Being – since the categories of Being are determined by how they are encountered or “uncovered” hence, Heidegger’s need to discuss *alētheia*. The call to this inception becomes an articulation of the politics of the *polis*, which sheds some light on the thought behind his hopes for National Socialism in Germany – that it allows him to “lead” the Führer in his mission to spiritually revive the German people through a return to the ancient categories of truth and the place of the “event” of Being as *polis*.

These endeavors ultimately lead Heidegger to political and professional disaster following World War II. But it is in the Nietzsche lectures that Heidegger claims to have “confronted” National Socialism. After having worked through Heidegger’s understandings of *polis* and *polemos* and its implications for his political endeavors in Chapter One, I will follow in Chapter Two with an analysis of Heidegger’s use of the word *Auseinandersetzung* as a translation of *polemos* and which he used in his statement concerning “confronting” National Socialism through coming to understand Nietzsche as the last of the Platonic metaphysicians. I will also connect *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger’s overall theory of “truth” as unconcealment. Chapter Three is to examine exactly how Heidegger appropriates Nietzsche as the last of the metaphysicians and how this could have possibly been a “confrontation” with National Socialism. Simultaneously, Heidegger’s articulation of the “truth of Being” and the history of metaphysics begins to take shape.

Chapter Four examines Heidegger’s articulation of technology as *Gestell* and it is here that I put together all the elements of the previous chapters to read Heidegger’s thoughts on technology as the way in which his politics has shifted – hence the title *Ontological Politics To Technological Politics*. Essentially the claim is that Heidegger’s confusing and unclear conception of politics as, on the one hand, having to do with how we relate to things and others we encounter in the space in which we “dwell,” and on the other in terms of how we “govern” based on these underlying ontological compartments comes to be expressed in the undifferentiating nature of *Gestell*. At this point the late Heidegger has completely abandoned his

thoughts on returning to the politics of the *polis* and has instead called for an entirely new thought that is grounded in something other than the metaphysical tradition we have inherited – that is, Heidegger’s coming of a “new god.”

So, The question becomes, how does one think what is “unthought” or up till now in our history of Being, “unthinkable?” That is, in articulating the history of Being and the breakdown of the modern subject/object distinction and the simultaneous breakdown of the ontological distinction between beings and Being in the face of the so-called *Gestell* that characterizes our “technological” world, how are we to think what Heidegger calls a *new* “inception” of Being – the “*ereignis*?”⁹ And is Heidegger able to open or identify a space in the question of the “truth of Being” within which the thinking outside the old metaphysics can begin? What would this mean for politics or the possibility of political engagement? This question is explored in the conclusion as a dialogue between Heidegger and the contemporary political thinker Gianni Vattimo.

Our starting point, or guiding stance, then, is taken from a statement in Heidegger’s middle period: the assertion that “the understanding of Being belongs to Dasein” (IM 31/EM 22). What this means for me, and what sets the tone for this overall engagement, is that for the human Da-sein to be as such – for Being to be significant to it – means to be political. And to be political, in turn, means for Dasein

⁹It becomes evident in the up to now unpublished writings of 1936-1938 – translated in English as *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning (Beitrage Zur Philosophie [Vom Ereignis])* that Heidegger was already in the process of articulating the “new” event of Being. See also the 1941 lectures *Basic concepts (Grundbegriffe)*.

to engage with what it is to be.¹⁰ So, to establish a new historical "inception," a project that reaches back to Heidegger's "fundamental ontology" and continues to the end with a preparation for "new gods," means not only to begin a new history by re-establishing and redefining the categories of Being, but also to usher in a new politics – both in terms of the political relation between mankind and the understanding of Being - but, in turn, in how we encounter beings and each other.

¹⁰ Although this issue is not yet addressed in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, the distinction between questioning the Being of beings and the event of Being (in the verbal sense, the action of Be-ing) or "enowning" (*ereignis*) is already taking shape for Heidegger. For further discussion see Polt "The Question of Nothing" (2001). 58

Chapter 1: Cultural Identity and Two Politics

I.I

To begin in a seemingly superficial fashion with what Vattimo would call the “sociological” issue of “Germanness” or “cultural identity,” which is the context within which and from which the intersection between thought, politics, and history emerges in Heidegger’s work. This initial approach is related to what Heidegger, as early as *Being and Time*, but also in his middle and later periods, described as “destiny” (*Geschick*).¹¹ *Geschick* means, literally, the totality or the “ensemble” (*Ge-*) of the “sending” (*Schicken*) or, as Vattimo explains “the sendings or apertures of Being that have conditioned and made possible the experience of humanity in its historical phases prior to us” (NE, 7). Heidegger recognizes that individuals and groups or communities as a whole, upon “entering” the world, become carried along with a historical current that is already underway and, as such, already has its own momentum (see also footnote 6 in the introduction). *Geschick* is an important concept to keep in mind concerning the intersection between thought, politics, and history. This intersection begins to reveal itself in the works between 1927 and 1945, which is the period of Heidegger’s so-called “turning.” It is, therefore, in this predominantly Nazi era that we find perhaps the most interesting attempts at establishing an identity of the German people in terms of their Heideggerian “destiny.”

¹¹ See *B&T* sections 74-76 for a definition. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* destiny becomes that of German people and Europe, while later in “The Question Concerning Technology” it becomes a way of describing the culmination of metaphysics in technology.

The questions concerning the identity and the unity of the German people as such have permeated German thought through much of the tumultuous history of the German State. But it is in the post-World War I movements that we find perhaps the most interesting attempts at German self-definition manifesting in a brand of fascism: National Socialism. In the essay “Heidegger’s Polemos” Gregory Fried aptly notes that

Though the definition of fascism and the taxonomy of its various forms remains extremely controversial, most would preliminarily agree that fascist politics - through a dismissive disregard for established and limiting institutional norms and liberal universalistic notions of political enfranchisement, and through an aggressive manipulation of ideology and symbolism - seeks to bind individuals directly in an atavistic belonging to a group. Historically, this group identity has been defined in fascism through belonging to a nation or people. Significantly, race has not always been the criterion for such belonging, as it was for the Nazis.¹²

From this we can gather that fascist movements seem to define their membership via exclusionary methods. For Nazi Germany, race is a particularly easy and effective motivation for overall solidarity and more or less focused action, questionable as those actions are. The establishment of ancestral grounding is important in that it is the foundation from which and through which any cultural identity of the German peoples can be achieved.¹³ In the resurgent demand for German grounding and

¹² See Gregory Fried “Heidegger’s Polemos” *Journal of Philosophical Research* Vol. XVI. 1990-9 1. 160

¹³ In his discussion of the history of fascism, Robert O. Paxton notes that “Fascism, unlike other ‘isms,’ is not for export; each movement jealously guards its own people for national revival, and fascist

rootedness Heidegger thinks (at first) that he recognizes an expression of his philosophy in National Socialism. Heidegger expresses this through a foray into politics and in an attempt to locate a (re)grounding at the university through educational reformation. This attempt explicitly begins with Heidegger entering the Nazi political arena as Rector of Freiburg University in 1933 and comes to a head in the Nietzsche lectures between 1936 and 1940. It is ultimately through Heidegger's confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Nietzsche, which Heidegger later claims to be "a confrontation with National Socialism," that any political 'solution' along with any definitive notion of Dasein dissolves into what Heidegger designates as technology and the cybernetization of the West (DS 274). On my reading, Dasein, (Heidegger's designation for the conscious human animal),¹⁴ is inherently political – to be political is to be Dasein and vice versa. This is illustrated through the various permutations of Dasein throughout Heidegger's thought. By the 1953 essay "The Question Concerning Technology," Da-sein is in danger of becoming indistinguishable from Heidegger's *Ge-Stell* or technological circulation and standing reserve.

leaders seem to feel little or no kinship with their foreign cousins." And, "it is not the particular themes of Nazism or Italian Fascism that define the nature of the fascist phenomenon, but their function. Fascisms seek out in each national culture those themes that are best capable of mobilizing a mass movement of regeneration, unification, and purity, directed against liberal individualism and constitutionalism and against Leftist class struggle." See *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage University Press, 2004) 20, 39-40.

¹⁴ Or, as Richard Polt puts it, Heidegger "is describing us not just as *homo sapiens* but as Dasein – the being who understands what it is to be." "The Question of Nothing" *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried ed. (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2001). 69

In the opening of the most controversial period of Heidegger's career, his appointment as Rector of Freiburg University in 1933, Heidegger asks "Surely, self-governance means: to set our own task, to determine ourselves the way and manner in which it is to be realized, so that thus we shall be what we ought to be. But do we know *who we ourselves are*, this body of teachers and students in the highest school of the German people? Can we even know this without the most constant and unsparing *self-examination*" (RR, 470)? This question of cultural identity is at once ontological and political as well. For Heidegger it is this fundamental *not knowing of self* that inspires all current philosophical questioning and political striving. This question, which he traces back to the advent of Western metaphysics, is his basis for what he considers the deeper and hence more crucial ontological question of what Being itself is. That is, to ask *who are we?* Or *who am I?* is also to ask *what* beings are (the traditional metaphysical question) and, more deeply, what is the nature of Being itself and how is Being encountered.¹⁵ Hubert Dreyfus elaborates, "the practices containing an understanding of what it is to be a human being, those containing an interpretation of what it is to be a thing, and those defining society fit together. Social practices thus transmit not only an implicit understanding of what it is to be a human being, an animal, or an object, but, finally, an understanding of what it is for anything to be at all."¹⁶ So it is in our everyday practices and encounters with

¹⁵ See I&D "When we understand thinking to be the distinctive characteristic of man, we remind ourselves of a *belonging* together that concerns man and Being. Immediately we find ourselves grappling with the questions: What does Being mean? Who, or what, is man?" 30.

¹⁶ Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Heidegger on the Connection between Nihilism, Art, Technology, and Politics." in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* Charles Guignon ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 295.

other humans, animals, and objects that we articulate the way in which we interpret beings and, hence, Being itself. This articulation is how we, through social practices, answer the elusive question of what beings are and what it means to be.

For Heidegger, humankind is unique in the awareness or “discovery” of Being, thus is unique in articulating Being.¹⁷ However, Heidegger points out several times (In “What is Metaphysics?” “The Self Assertion of the University,” and elsewhere) that the enquiry concerning beings (entities) is one for the “positive: or “Ontic” sciences, while the question of Being itself is Ontological. This view stems from the earlier thought in *Being and Time*, but provides a basis for what Heidegger thinks is a major problem not only in education, but in everyday human affairs. It is the emphasis on the ontic sciences without recognizing or omitting the underlying ontological “pre-understanding” of the entities involved in any particular science (e.g. biology studies living beings, chemistry studies atomic and molecular interactions). It is an articulation of this omission that provides the basis for Heidegger’s criticisms that become the political categories of “Americanism,” “Soviet Communism,” and, eventually “technology.” In the 1927 essay “Phenomenology and Theology” Heidegger writes,

Ontic sciences in each case thematize a given being that in a certain manner is already disclosed *prior* to scientific disclosure. We call the sciences of beings as given – of a *positum* – positive sciences. Their characteristic feature lies the fact that the objectification

¹⁷ Or, as Richard Polt puts it, Heidegger “is describing us not just as *homo sapiens* but as *Dasein* – the being who understands what it is to be.” (“The Question of Nothing” in *A Companion to Heidegger’s Introduction to Metaphysics*. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried ed. (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2001). 69)

of whatever it is that they thematize is oriented directly toward beings, as a continuation of an already existing prescientific attitude towards such beings. Ontology, or the science of being, on the other hand, demands a fundamental shift of view: from beings to being (P 41)

For Heidegger, the ontological question of Being (*Seinsfrage*) has been increasingly ignored while the ontic account of beings has taken precedence. What Heidegger calls metaphysics, what beings themselves are, has dominated the Western conception of philosophy since the ancient Greeks. He states, “for metaphysics determines the history of the Western era. Western humankind, in all its relations with beings, and even to itself, is in every respect sustained and guided by metaphysics” (N4 205). However, having historically *presupposed* the Being of beings (or that which grounds or makes all entities possible in their being), the West has reached a point of ontological depravity that Nietzsche (on Heidegger’s reading) identifies as nihilism – a nihilism that manifests itself in the contemporary world as technology. As he states in the “European Nihilism” section of the Nietzsche lectures, “Being itself remains unthought in metaphysics. Metaphysics is a history in which there is essentially nothing to being itself: *metaphysics as such is nihilism proper*” (N4 211). That is, having been grounded in epochal metaphysical conceptions and having exhausted those conceptions without having at the same time made any attempt at inquiry or understanding as to what Being itself is, Western civilization has found itself in a state of ontological groundlessness, a state in which its world conception of beings is without grounding, hence without ultimate meaning or is i.e. “nihilistic.”

Heidegger charges the ontic sciences of outstripping ontological enquiry and sees this as a profound danger – a danger that can perhaps be recognized and rectified under the new National Socialist movement taking power in the early 1930s. He sees this as a possibility in that Germany doesn't necessarily stand in the same political (and ontological) waters as the US or USSR and is, hence, ripe for restructuring of a conception of Being that is neither influenced by or manifesting itself as mass production and profit of the free market system or the neutralizing and undifferentiated emphasis of the human as in communism. Heidegger sees a chance that the dominating politics in Germany could instead allow for an ontological conception of beings as other than mere resources in the machinery of technological politics. This is not to say that Heidegger thought National Socialism itself would do this, but that the change of political climate might allow space for the German University to accomplish, or at least spearhead, this historical task – that the totalitarian regime might find its spiritual center at the university that Heidegger happened to be Rector of. His “Self-Assertion of the University” is a call to rectify and unify the sciences through the re-establishment of philosophy as the “queen” of the sciences.¹⁸ It is a claim that the principle tenets of the positive sciences rest on an ontological bedrock, i.e. philosophy.¹⁹

¹⁸ see Iain Thomson's discussion in *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge Mass: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005) 104-114

¹⁹ See for example the 1966 Zollikon Seminars in which Heidegger makes the statement, “Phenomenology is more of a science than natural science is” (ZS 211). Also the essay “Phenomenology and Theology” in which Heidegger states, “Whatever is discloses itself only on the grounds of a preliminary (although not explicitly known), preconceptual understanding of what and

Heidegger's proposed restructuring of the German University in the face of ontological depravity is also a radical political restructuring during a tumultuous time for Germany. The very language of "self-assertion" and his repeated appeals to the German *Volk* are in line with the militaristic and nationalistic mood of the time – as demonstrated not only by Hitler in his speeches, but also by writers such as Ernst Jünger, whom Heidegger was reading in the early 1930s and whose militaristic language, which was also the rhetorical style of Nazi leaders and propagandists, is also present in speeches and writings like the Rectoral Address ("The Self Assertion of the German University") and "Political Texts: 1933-1934." The question *who are we?* itself is the question of the identity of modern Western mankind and, more specifically for Heidegger in the 1930s, German-kind. It is, hence, a political question. Heidegger elaborates, "The will to the essence of the German university is the will to science as will to the historical mission of the German people as a people that knows itself in its state" (RR 471). This statement suggests that the Germany of 1933 needs educational restructuring and unifying in terms of ontological grounding of the sciences; that the people, who have made vocal to the world their support of the new regime, do not know themselves or their situation and so also do not know what they are doing. However, the invocation of a German kind of science seems dubious at best, suggesting that Heidegger's authoritarian reforms of the university point to ontological inquiry as an exclusive, nationalist pursuit.

how such a being is. Every ontic interpretation operates on this basis, at first and for the most part, of an ontology" (P 50)

Beginning at least as far back as *Being and Time* we can find connections between politics, philosophy, and the overall need to consider Dasein politically. It is in this early masterwork that Heidegger establishes “Being-with” (*mitsein*) as a fundamental aspect of Dasein – the “the world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with Others*” (BT, 155/SZ, 118). Heidegger establishes *mitsein* as fundamental derivatively by establishing the “Other” as formational for Dasein, thus Heidegger’s statement that the “Other” are “those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too” (SZ, 154/BT, 118). *Mitsein*, then, is the aspect of Dasein that makes Dasein fundamentally political – both ontologically and ontically. Since Dasein always already finds itself in a world, to “Be-in” means equally to “Be-with” (Others).²⁰

Mitsein informs the concept of *Geschick*, which is also key in understanding the politics of Dasein. According to an account of Heidegger in 1936, during a conversation that related Heidegger’s philosophy to his politics in the 1930s, Karl Löwith observes “it was my opinion that the partisanship for National Socialism lay in the essence of his philosophy. Heidegger agreed with me without reservation and elucidated that his concept of ‘historicity’ was the basis of his political ‘engagement’” (HNS, 158).²¹ The seminal discussion of historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) can be found in sections 72-77 of *Being and Time*. Heidegger writes “Our fates have already been

²⁰ This is not the same “Other” that Levinas considers in his criticism of Heidegger. For Levinas the “Other” is always an ethical entity – something that Heidegger explicitly avoids.

²¹ It should be noted that Löwith and Heidegger went through a nasty period in which both refused to speak to each other. Löwith was himself exiled from Germany during the Nazi period and Heidegger stopped communication with him altogether. For a response to some of the things Löwith has said about Heidegger, see Heidegger’s statements in “Afterthoughts on the Spiegel Interview” (HNS, 67-75).

guided in advance, in our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities. Only in communicating and in struggling does the power of destiny become free. Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein" (*B&T* 436/*S&Z* 384-385). Our "fates" are guided in advance in that the ultimate fate of any individual lies in Being-towards-death as having been fundamentally thrown, while destiny is a matter of fate in the sense of Being-with-others, i.e. a society or nation of people. Heidegger elaborates, "But if fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with-Others, its historizing is a co-historizing and is determinative for it as *destiny (Geschick)*. This is how we designate the historizing of the community, of a people" (*B&T* 436/*S&Z* 384). Clearly, this addresses not only what Heidegger explains as being political ("Being-with-one-another") but in the need to "struggle" in order to "free" the destiny of an overall "generation," he is vocalizing a need for the overall and unifying self-identity of a people, hence cultural identity.

It seems, then, that what remains is the question of how something seemingly positive like the unification of a people could go so heinously wrong as it did with the Nazis, thus bringing into question whether a "unifying self-identity of a people" is necessary or even a good thing. For fascism, the emphasis on cultural unification had negative effects on any appeal to diversity or cultural pluralism, thus bringing into question how Heidegger could have ever found Nazism appealing as providing the space within which to "reground" the German people.

I.II

As Heidegger's thought matures, Dasein takes on a few different forms. Most notable for now is the shift from *Being and Time* and the 1935 lectures entitled *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. That is, in *Being and Time* Heidegger considers Dasein as, perhaps, universalistic, whereas by the time we get to *Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger wants to emphasize particularly German Dasein. This is indicative of the political climate in Germany in which Heidegger had been taking part. Support can be found for this claim in that in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* it is the Germans who are the metaphysical heirs of Greece and that German is the only true philosophical language along with Greek. This relation between the Greeks and Germans is no more astutely articulated by Heidegger than in the controversial statement (noted in Ch. 1 fn. 18) "For along with the German language, Greek (in regard to the possibilities of thinking) is at once the most powerful and the most spiritual of languages" (IM 60/ EM 44).²² This statement is drenched in political overtones that were popular in Germany at the time – and for Heidegger in the 1930s it means that the Germans, like the Greeks, must ultimately fulfill their place as an archetypal civilization on which the rest of the (Western) world would model itself.

²² See *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, For along with the German language, Greek (in regard to the possibilities of thinking) is at once the most powerful and the most spiritual of languages." (IM 60/EM 44) "Our people, as standing in the center, suffers the most intense pressure – our people, the people richest in neighbors and hence the most endangered people, and for all that, the metaphysical people." (IM 41/EM 29) "Asking about beings as such and as a whole, asking the question of being, is then one of the essential fundamental conditions for awakening the spirit, and thus for an originary world of Dasein, and thus for subduing the danger of the darkening of the world, and thus for taking over the historical mission of our people, the people of the center of the west" IM 52/EM 38.

On the one hand Heidegger seems somewhat justified in making this sort of linguistic claim. Greek and German share the characteristic of having transparent words, which means that words can be built with literal and apparent prefixes and suffixes. For example, in discussing *das Man* (the “they”), Heidegger describes Dasein as “Being-among-one-another.”²³ The German word used here is *Untereinandersein*. The prefix *unter* can mean “under” and also “among.” This leaves the word open for interpretation and so to say “try to hear the ‘under’” in *Untereinandersein* would make sense. This colors the notion of “falling” (*verfallen*) in *Das Man* in a different light than merely understanding the “among.” Similarly, the Greek word *hypokeimenon*, Aristotle’s metaphysical word to denote a substratum, literally means “under-lying” (*hypo-keimenon*). It would make sense to say “try to hear the ‘beneath’ in *hypokeimenon*.” This sort of transparency in words is not shared as widely by other languages such as English, which means that the philosophy done in other languages will also not be as transparent. This suggests that statements like Heidegger’s do not come from merely antiquated, hyperbolic or even racist beliefs, though they are beliefs that are also all of these things. Wolin recognizes a historical tendency on this subject, “His [Heidegger’s] belief in a special affinity between German language and culture and that of the Greeks was one shared by many of his countrymen since the end of the eighteenth century” (POB, 94).

On the other hand, Derrida recognizes the political overtones of this statement characterizing it as “always horribly dangerous and wildly funny, certainly grave and

²³ See BT 166/SZ 128

a bit comical” (OS 68). That is, identifying German as the only philosophical and “spiritual” language along with Greek is indicative of a dangerous belief in German (“Aryan”) superiority and “purity” characteristic of the Third Reich – something to keep in mind as we explore Heidegger’s deconstruction of the Greeks and his characterization of *polemos* as *Auseinandersetzung* (see Ch.2).

Heidegger makes his ontological diagnosis a political one even more explicitly in the 1935 lectures which are very much a call to any who would listen to take up the unique opportunity provided by the political and, for Heidegger, metaphysical situation of Germany in relation to other national powers. This is an opportunity to differentiate and perhaps reinvent an identity for the German people that is other than the dominant superpowers in the 1930s. Heidegger writes, “Russia and America, seen metaphysically, both the same: the same wretched frenzy of unchained technology and the boundless organization of the average man” (IM 40/EM 29). Here, Heidegger sees no difference between the capitalist United States and its competition-driven industrial and economic complex and the Soviet complex which is driven by communist principles. The basic claim is that both systems essentially render human beings as undifferentiated in the face of the overall political and industrial machinery in place; they are the same in that he sees both countries merely ordering and dominating all beings with no greater purpose than to maximize “power.” Given this diagnosis, it is surprising that Heidegger could not see, or at the very least did not seem to explicitly express, that Nazi Germany could eventually

become the most sinister expression of human ordering and disposal in the pursuit of power.²⁴

Not only does this political diagnosis given by Heidegger in the 1930s anticipate the Nietzsche lectures delivered between 1936-1940 and the 1953 essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” but Heidegger has here made explicit the connection between ontology, politics, and cultural identity while simultaneously addressing why Western mankind as a whole is in danger of losing any semblance of overall identity in the face of obsessive ordering and domination – and that the “destiny” of the German state is to resist this and lead the rest of the West in an “awakening.” So it is for Heidegger that Germany’s embracing of National Socialism provides the opportunity to be *other* than America and Soviet Russia and so also has the opportunity to ontologically restructure its own situational state.²⁵ As Heidegger

²⁴ Julian Young and, more recently, Aret Karedemir, have made substantial arguments to show that Heidegger did already, in the 1935 lectures, (implicitly) recognize National Socialism as also heading in the same direction as he sees the US and Russia. Karedemir writes, “Heidegger implies that modern Germany is no different from Russia and America with respect to the spiritual decline, considering that the spiritual decline and uprootedness of the world of machination reveal themselves not only in the American and Russian “frenzy of unchained technology” but also in everyday German life, insofar as in Nazi Germany, ‘a boxer counts as the great man of a people’ and ‘the tallies of millions at mass meetings are [regarded as] a triumph’ (IM 40/EM 29). . . Heidegger has in mind the German world heavyweight champion, Max Schmelling, in mind when he refers to ‘a boxer.’ And the triumphant mass meetings are the famous Nüremberg rallies, which were propagandized by the Nazis as the *Triumph of the Will*.” While this definitely allows us to question whether Heidegger already sees Nazism in a certain light, it is difficult to decisively conclude that Heidegger no longer saw an “inner truth and greatness” in National Socialism at this point. See Aret Karedemir “Heidegger and Nazism: On the Relation Between German Conservatism, Heidegger, And the National Socialist Ideology.” *The Philosophical Forum* [Volume 44, Issue 2 Pages 99 - 203, Summer 2013](#) (118). See Also, Julian Young *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). 117

²⁵ See *An introduction to Metaphysics*. “We lie in the pincers. Our Volk, as standing in the center, suffers the most intense pressure – our Volk, the Volk richest in neighbors and hence the most endangered Volk, for all that, the metaphysical Volk. We are sure of this vocation; but this Volk will secure a fate from its vocation only when it creates in itself a resonance, a possibility of resonance for this vocation and grasps its tradition creatively. All this implies that this Volk, as a historical Volk,

states in an essay written soon after the fall of Nazi Germany in 1945, “I saw in the movement that had gained power the possibility of an inner recollection and renewal of the people and a path that would allow it to discover its historical vocation in the Western world. I believed that, renewing itself, the university might also be called to contribute to this” (RR 483).

In the Rectoral Address, Heidegger makes this call citing “spirit” as “the power that most deeply preserves a people’s strengths, which are tied to earth and blood” (RR 475). And how would this inner recollection and renewal be possible? “Only if we again place ourselves under the power of the *beginning* of our spiritual-historical being (*Dasein*). This beginning is the setting out (*Aufbruch*) of Greek philosophy” (RR 471). The overall project, then, is returning to the Greeks in order to come to an understanding of the origins of the concept “Being” in Western civilization in order to begin anew. Historically, the Greeks were the first to engage Being and attempt an understanding that, as Heidegger sees, founded our modern-day conception of beings in the West and has also not been taken up again since this initial founding. Returning to the Greeks and engaging what Heidegger sees as the “inception” is necessary to “reground” Western mankind. Similarly, Wolin observes that for Heidegger “the political solution – if one is to be found – must itself be of an *eminently metaphysical character*: it must establish *an entirely new relationship*

should set itself – and thereby the history of the West – from the center of their future happening into the originary realm of the powers of Being. Precisely if the great decision regarding Europe is not to go down the path of annihilation – precisely then can this decision come about only through the development of new, historically *spiritual* forces from the center” (IM 41/ EM 29)

between man and Being” (POB, 84). While Wolin will, in the end, deeply criticize Heidegger’s equation of philosophy with metaphysics and, in turn, with Nietzschean eternally recurring will to power, technology, and nihilism (hence a deep criticism of Heidegger’s epochal “history of Being”), on this point he is articulating the basis for Heidegger’s fateful pattern of thought that culminates not only in his ontic political “blunders,” but also in his future articulation of the history of Being.

I.III

We can get a sense of Heidegger’s political reading of the Greeks from his interpretation of *polis* and *polemos* in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. The question of Being is inextricably linked to the historical and the political. Heidegger centralizes the *polis* as the “name for the site (*Stätte*), the Here, within which and as which Being here (*Da-sein*) is historically The *polis* is the site of history, the Here, *in* which, *out of* which and *for* which history happens” (IM 162/EM117). The *polis* is the *Da* of *Dasein* – the “here” of Being. That is, the *polis* is the locus in which Being manifests itself and, hence, makes itself historical. In other words, to speak of a “history” in this sense is not merely the recording and accounting of chronological events (what Heidegger calls “historiography”), but “history” in the sense that mankind (in this case the Greeks) come to a coherent understanding of themselves within a realm of beings – the Earth, the gods, animals, etc. What makes the polis central is that this is the place where these understandings are expressed publicly in the form of traditions and regulations. It is apparent, then, that for Heidegger Being shows itself in its “ranks and distinctions” only within the context of a social body.

On this, Hans Sluga states, “Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* is . . . no scholarly treatise on the polemical element in man’s political historical, and spiritual existence; it is an exercise in polemics in which the moderns are confronted with the ancients and in which such creative strife is meant to create new distinctions of position, status, and rank in what Heidegger perceives to be a flattened-out and measureless world.”²⁶ So again, Heidegger’s aim is to rectify the “flattened-out” and measureless world via a “confrontation” (*polemos*) with the ancient Greeks and it is the *polis* that is the site (*Stätte*), the space or clearing in which Being and its distinctions manifest in different beings.

Ontological and political comportment is established in the *polis* and thus the beginning of “history” or “historizing.” It is this beginning that is inherited by all mankind in the West such that “our fates are guided in advance.” For Heidegger this site of renewal of the German people (and presumably the rest of the West) is properly at the university – a proposition that, at the time and in the way Heidegger proposed it, i.e. as a reform that would realign the entire role of the university in terms of shifting its emphasis on the sciences, turns out to very closely resemble the Nazi policy of *Gleichschaltung*.²⁷ That is, the “reformation and revitalization of the German people,” as outlined above, is to happen at and through the university. The university is to be the formative *polis* of the German people as the new site of Being.

²⁶ Sluga, Hans “Conflict is the Father of All Things: Heidegger’s Polemical Conception of Politics.” *A Companion to Heidegger’s Introduction to Metaphysics*. Polt and Fried ed. (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2001). 224

²⁷ Or “synchronization.” This word was an ‘official’ Nazi word that referred both to the elimination of political opposition and the realignment of the German State as a whole with National Socialism.

It is from here that they will come to know who they are and their overall destiny as the metaphysical people - Heidegger's understanding of *polemos* and the *polis* in the context of the history of western metaphysics in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* is central to this claim. What he calls the "unconcealment" of Being is a social event, i.e. at the *polis* and since the Germans are the metaphysical "heirs" of Greece, they are also heirs of this ancient metaphysical model. For Heidegger, if the Germans are to fulfill their metaphysical "destiny" and "revitalize" the West in its decline, then it must first understand the "historicity" of its conception of Being and, hence, selfhood or "identity" of themselves as a people.

In identifying the fundamental question of metaphysics as "why there are beings at all instead of nothing," (IM 1/EM 1) Heidegger recognizes another fundamental question – namely, "how does it stand with Being?" Or, what is our present relation with Being itself? Heidegger is prompted toward this line of inquiry because he does not see a way of approaching the question of beings and nothing without first asking what "first *enables us to have access* to the Being of beings and thus makes it possible for beings to display themselves as such?"²⁸ This turns out to be not merely a question for determined philosophers, but is a fundamental question of politics and history as well. Heidegger readdresses this question by writing,

The question how it stands with Being proves to be the question of how it stands with our Dasein in history, of whether we *stand* in history or merely stagger. Seen metaphysically, we *are* staggering. Everywhere we are

²⁸ Polt, "The Question of Nothing" 2001. 58

underway amid beings, and yet we no longer know how it stands with Being. We do not even know that we no longer know it (IM 217/EM 155).

Here Heidegger makes explicit his course of inquiry in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* and claims that we, as historical Dasein in the Western world, have not always suffered from what Polt describes as this “ontological palsy,”²⁹ that at some point in the past, through articulations of Being, Dasein had a different relation with and comportment towards Being. Hence, the relation Heidegger notes between Being and history is important. Heidegger writes “The fundamental error. . . is the opinion that the inception of history is primitive and backward, clumsy and weak. The opposite is true. The inception [*Anfang*] is what is most uncanny and mightiest [*Unheimlichste und Gewaltigste*]. What follows is not a development but a flattening down as a mere widening out; it is the inability to hold on to the inception, it makes the inception innocuous and exaggerates it into a perversion of what is great, into greatness and extension purely in the sense of number and mass” (IM 165/ EM 119). This flattening down and widening out, Heidegger claims, is displayed most explicitly in the capitalist structures of the United States and the communism of the Soviet Union. However, as pointed out above, Heidegger believed that the National Socialist “revolution” could provide the fertile grounds from which a new “inception” and, hence a new “history” could be cultivated as a countermovement to the nihilism articulated by Nietzsche and embodied in the politics of America and Russia. So, the

²⁹ Polt, 58

overall aim of articulating a history of Being centered at the *polis* is not to merely return to the Greek inception of Being that has been handed down and forgotten, but to perhaps establish a new inception by going back to and confronting the ancient one.

The question becomes, then, how is it possible to think this new inception that has not been thought before? How is the unthought established? For Heidegger, a clue about how to go about this is by exploring the ancient categories of Being. This is initiated by tracing our Being-conception back to *alētheia* and *physis* via an analysis and dissemination of politics, poetry, language, and philosophy of ancient Greece. A place to look, then, may be Aristotle's famous assertion that "the state belongs to the class of objects which exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal."³⁰ Coupling this famous statement with Heidegger's assertion that "the understanding of Being belongs to Dasein" the overall discussion comes into focus. That is, for the human Dasein to be as such – for Being to be significant to it – means to be able to be political. And to be political, in turn, means for Dasein to actively engage with what it is to be.³¹ So, to establish a new "inception" means not only to begin a new history by re-establishing and redefining the categories of Being, but also to usher in a new politics – both in terms of the political relation between

³⁰ Aristotle, *Politics* T.A. Sinclair trans. (Penguin: New York, NY, 1992) Iii 1253a1. 59.

³¹ Although this issue is not yet addressed in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, the distinction between questioning the Being of beings and the event of Being (in the verbal sense, the action of Be-ing) or "enowning" (*Ereignis*) is already taking shape for Heidegger. For further discussion see Polt "The Question of nothing" (2001). 58

mankind and the understanding of Being, but, in turn, in how we encounter beings and each other.

I.IV

For Heidegger, the “inception” of western history is the birth of the *polis*, which signifies the beginning of political and philosophical activity in the Western world. The *polis* as the site of Being is also the place where, Heidegger believes, we will find the inception. Perhaps a short examination of the ancient *polis* may help here. A contemporary of Heidegger, French historian Jean Pierre Vernant, discusses the collapse of the palace-centered communities of pre-seventh century Greece, citing a lack of sovereign authority and chaos that went with it as giving “rise in a time of trouble to a moral thought and political speculation that amounted to an early form of human ‘wisdom’” or *Sophia*.³² With the historical disappearance of the monarchical sovereign and his “superhuman” ability to unify and govern came the aristocracy and the concept of *agon* or contest. *Agon*, which is the struggle of competition, is a key facet of the Greek makeup that survives beyond the aristocratic era and into the democratic – “An exaltation of the values of struggle, competition, and rivalry was associated with the sense of belonging to a single community.”³³ It was an ancient aristocracy that dissipated and left governing to a larger mass and was embodied by the *agora* or city center rather than a royal palace. With this came public worship,

³² Vernant, Jean-Pierre *The Origins of Greek Thought*. (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York, 1982). 40

³³ *Ibid.* 46

agonistic political debates, and publicly instituted law or proto-law, hence an early form of egalitarian society.³⁴

Between the eighth and seventh centuries BCE we see the dissipation of the Mycenaean-era sovereign, to be followed by the aristocracy, and, finally the genuine *polis*. This is a rough historical example of a seemingly natural movement from monarchy to aristocracy to democracy (though it is not quite that simple and is peppered with various tyrannies and oligarchies). The advent of the *Polis* is a point in history we may consider the beginning of the Heideggerian metaphysical makeup of the Greeks. Vernant notes that “the system of the *polis* implied, first of all, the extraordinary preeminence of speech over all other instruments of power. Speech became the political tool par excellence, the key to all authority in the state, the means of commanding and dominating others.”³⁵ Speech, as Vernant notes, “presupposed a public to which it was addressed,”³⁶ Heidegger has similar thoughts on this by claiming that language is the way that Dasein articulates Being as significant, that “essence and Being speak in language” (IM 57/EM 41). While it is apparent that by the 1935 lectures Heidegger is frustrated by failed political attempts as Rector under the new National Socialist regime of Germany, we see that he has not abandoned his assessments of the university, nor his Nazi politics. While recognizing his inability to effect change in an overt manner, he recognizes the responsibility and necessity for the teachers to effect change from within. Less than half way through *An*

³⁴ See Vernant, 1982. 1-48

³⁵ Ibid. 49

³⁶ Ibid. 50

Introduction to Metaphysics, Heidegger addresses a rigid and opaque language instruction in place for German students. He emphasizes two key points concerning the methods of training and the incompleteness or isolation of subjects from other, importantly related subjects. Discussing the “barren and spiritless language instruction in the schoolroom,” Heidegger states, “students should learn something from their teachers about the prehistory and early history of the Germans. But all of this will just as quickly deteriorate into the same barren wasteland if we do not succeed in restructuring the spiritual world of the school from within and from the ground up, which means furnishing the school with a spiritual, not scientific, atmosphere” (IM 56/EM 41). Heidegger’s point in addressing the state of German education in this manner is to illustrate that the grammatical forms of the German language are not “absolute, that instead, they grew out of a very definite interpretation of the Greek and Latin languages” (IM 56/EM 41). What this indicates is that not only is Heidegger seriously maintaining the contention that German is the philosophical language that is a direct descendent of Greek, but that without language, as the manner of articulating Being, there could not be a *polis* as such. With this Heidegger justifies not only his reasons for reformation of the university, but also his claims that the Germans are the metaphysical people of the West.

As pointed out above, for Heidegger the *polis* is the site of historical Dasein. This site is where the intersection of history, politics, and philosophy occurs through linguistic articulation. For Heidegger in the 1930s it is the university within which and from which the German people must reestablish their mode of articulating Being

and, hence, a re-centering of the *polis* within or as the university. A concern that immediately arises upon considering this project of Heidegger's is that it seems that a restructuring of this sort (as also discussed above in terms of "science") would transform the university into the center and, thus, sole place of ontological "renewal." This centering would, then, be the site of German ontological politics tout court and, consequently, be that which informs ontic politics – Heidegger's notion of "leading" the Führer becomes illuminated. But doesn't this sort of authoritarian positioning of the university fly in the face of what it seems that educational institutions should be about? That is, as separate from governmental functioning so as to allow for the disciplines to develop unfettered? It seems that Heidegger's reforms may actually entail something other than the aim intended. In any case, in order to achieve this restructuring as a recentering, Heidegger contends that "the first thing we need is a real revolution in our relation to language" and in order for this to happen the teachers must reform their methods and the university must "come to grips with its task" as the site of ontological (and spiritual) regrounding (IM 56/ EM 41). This could perhaps partially explain his audacious claims concerning the German language and its uniquely metaphysical qualities – he is articulating its importance to an overall identity of a people.

I.V

As the discussion of Heidegger has progressed, the intersection of philosophy, history, and all politics has been located at the *polis* and the site of the *polis* is

identified as the university. Further, Heidegger has indicated the importance of language as the articulation of Being. Given this “importance,” Heidegger considers poetry as an “originary” way that Being is articulated (along with philosophy).³⁷ Heidegger writes, “aside from the philosopher, the poet can also talk about [Being and] Nothing” (IM 28/EM 20). This points to Heidegger’s discussion of Sophocles’ first chorus in *Antigone*, which begins “Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing uncanner than man bestirs itself, rising above” (IM 156/EM 112). His interpretation focuses on man as the most terrible (*deinotaton*) of all things that are terrible and reads this as *unheimlich* or “uncanny.” In this case uncanny is used to describe an essential feature of Dasein as powerful or “violent” and is so because man “needs to use violence (*Gewalt*) – and does not just have violence at his disposal but is violence-doing (*gewalt-tätig*), insofar as using violence is the basic trait not just of his doing but of his Dasein” (IM 106/EM 115). This violence is not something confined to mere physical brutality, but is a description of how man confronts Being in a world of inexplicable beings, which man is himself a part of. Sluga describes this violence as taking form “in poetic saying, in thoughtful projection, in constructive building, and last (but not least) in state-creating action.”³⁸ So, the articulation of Being in thought or poetry manifests further in these very concrete and civilization-building actions.

³⁷ Heidegger contemplates the importance of poetry in many works and lectures other than *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. See, for example the works in *Poetry, Language, Art*, or the lectures *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*. In this last work, Heidegger writes “by speaking the essential word, the poet’s naming first nominates the beings as what they are. Thus they become known *as* beings. Poetry is the founding of being in the word.” Keith Hoeller trans. (Humanity Books: New York, 2000) 59.

³⁸ Sluga, 2001. 211

But how does this mean that man is uncanny? Uncanny can be interpreted as “terrible” in the sense of violence just discussed, but can also mean (as Heidegger explains in *Being and Time*) “not-at-home.”³⁹ This is important in our discussion because, as Sluga points out, where Sophocles seems to differentiate between the man who is high in the city, who “drives between the law of the earth and sworn justice of the gods,” and the man who is without a city, Heidegger, instead, identifies them.⁴⁰ The claim is, essentially, that those who “wrest” Being from concealment are the poets, priests, and rulers are the same as those without a place or city (*apolis*). It is them who “without city and sight, lonesome, un-canny (*Un-heimliche*), with no way out amidst beings as a whole, and at the same time without ordinance and limit, without structure and fittingness (*Fug*), because they are *as* creators must first ground all this in each case” (IM 163/EM 117). Essentially, it is those who first contemplate their place in the cosmos who establish an articulation of Being. But, in doing so, man is essentially faced with the universe as being manifested in beings as overwhelming, as “terrible.” That is, to ask the most fundamental of all questions “why are there beings rather than nothing?” is to confront the monstrosity that is existence as such, without any obvious or preordained rhyme or reason. The creator of the site of Being as *polis*, in asking this question, is transformed to a being who, having confronted the terrible, can never be at peace, can never be settled as one who is “at home” in this existence.

³⁹ In *Being and Time* Heidegger discusses uncanniness as not being at home, “In anxiety one feels ‘uncanny’ (*In der Angst ist einem ‘unheimlich’*). Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which is Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to the expression: the ‘nothing-and-nowhere.’ But here ‘uncanniness’ also means ‘not-being-at-home’ (BT 233/SZ 188).

⁴⁰ Sluga, 2001. 211

What this means, then, is that contrary to the traditional reading of *Antigone* as a tragedy concerning a cleft between and predominance of divine rule over human rule, Heidegger only writes in terms of human creation; he “takes the gods themselves, their temples, and their ordinances to be human and political creations and hence unable to serve as constraints on the life of the city’s creators.”⁴¹ It is then the creators, the poets, priests, and rulers, who are the uncanny in Sophocles’ chorus passage; they are those who articulate the relationship between the people, the Earth, and the Gods – i.e. articulate the categories and meanings of beings and Being - and who are, as a consequence, not on the same level as the rest of the population, but somehow stand outside it.

This discussion informs an understanding of Heidegger’s politics in the 1930s in the sense that these “rulers” of the *polis* seem to take on an authoritarian sort of character that is not very dissimilar to the one Heidegger had attempted to be as Rector or in the way that Hitler is viewed at the time – as the face of the “new” Germany that has risen from the ashes of the faltering Weimar Republic.

In his interpretation of Sophocles, Heidegger also notes that *all* of mankind is uncanny, not just the poets, thinkers, priests, and rulers, that “to be the uncanniest is the basic trait of the human essence” (IM 161/ EM 116). However, if the poet, thinker, priest, and ruler are the primary examples of tearing down and rebuilding of “forms,” this implies that they have an understanding of these forms on a higher or more acute level than the populace, thus in just being who they are rank and

⁴¹ Sluga, 2001. 211.

distinction is made. So, it appears that while *apolis* and uncanny are closely related, they are not the same. To be *apolis* is to stand outside the norms and traditions of the constituents, the populace while to be uncanny is essential to being-human. However, this is not to say that the poets, priests, etc. who stand outside traditions as creators and destroyers are without a political origin of their own. Hence, they “become *apolis*, without city and site, lonesome, un-canny, with no way out amidst beings as a whole, and at the same time without ordinance and limit, without structure and fittingness (*Fug*), because they *as* creators must first ground all this in each case” (IM 163/EM 117).

What this means in Heidegger’s bigger picture is that while we can view the Greeks in terms of gods and men, they can also be understood merely as men, and this because there would be no other way to get back to an “inception” of Being. Vernant echoes this, writing, “With Parmenides it [philosophy] took its own path; it explored a new domain and posed new problems unique to itself. The philosophers no longer inquired, as the Milesians had done, into the nature of order and how it was created and maintained, but into the nature of Being and Knowing and the relations between them.”⁴² And we should not forget that Heidegger identified the metaphysical task as addressing how it stands with Being – that is, how it stands with our pre-Platonic conception of Being that is “flattened-out.” So, the explanation of why we are “staggering” is addressed by Heidegger’s statement that “When the creators have disappeared from the people (*Volk*), when they are barely tolerated as

⁴² Vernant, 1982. 131

irrelevant curiosities, as ornaments, as eccentrics alien to life, when authentic struggle (*Kampf*) ceases and shifts into the merely polemical, into the intrigues and machinations of human beings within the present-at-hand (*Vorhanden* or “ontic”), then the decline has already begun” (IM 67/ EM 49). Again, we get strong indications of Heidegger’s politics: this is very much a critique of democracy as a whole – that when the Greeks became a democratic society it was an indication of the loss of “rank and distinction.” On this Wolin notes that on Heidegger’s view “in the modern world, too, the status of the authoritative few was jeopardized by democracy from below. . .” And that “Even the institution of the polis, which Heidegger often singled out for praise, was not admired for its intrinsic political character, that is, the democratic conduct of political life. It was merely the locus where the ‘thinking of Being’ took place” (POB 88). On the *polis* Heidegger, while making it the “site of Being” or, as I have established, the locus of ontological politics, is conspicuously exclusionary – he ignores the ontic politics of the Greeks. On this Wolin expands and is justifiably critical, stating “A less parochial view of the Greek heritage – not only an appreciation of the democracy, but a greater respect for another Greek “first,” the “rational concept” – might have mitigated his proneness to irrational political judgments” (POB, 88). Clearly Heidegger has omitted some key aspects in his focus on the inheritance of Greek metaphysics – if a people is guided by and grounded in their metaphysics and the “inception [of history] is what is most uncanny and mightiest,” then wouldn’t it follow that the *polis*, as the site of the beginning of Western history, would also be the site of a strong ontic politics and conception of

human intelligence – at least enough to warrant a deeper consideration than given by Heidegger (IM, 165/EM, 119)?

I.VI

For Heidegger in the 1930s it is the university within which and from which the German people must renew their mode of articulating Being in order to respond to the decline identified above. This indicates, hence, the *agora* of German spirit within or as the university, thus placing the university as the center – as the “new” German *polis*. So it would seem that despite the abdication of the Rectorship, which is perhaps an indication of an abandonment of Heidegger’s overt mission to restructure the university in the face of German National Socialism, that the overall project of returning to the Greeks to come to an understanding of the origins of the concept “Being” in Western civilization was still very much within his overall thought. We get an indication of his attitude of frustration concerning vacating the Rectorship in his statements concerning what philosophy is in 1935: Heidegger writes, “Philosophy is essentially untimely because it is one of those few things whose fate it remains never to be able to find a direct resonance in their own time, and never to be permitted to find such a resonance” (IM 9/EM 7). For Heidegger, the untimely essence of philosophy is, if not the entire reason, then a main reason why the attempt to reform the university under the National Socialist regime is short-lived. But, Heidegger also notes, “What is untimely will have its own time” (IM 9/EM 7), suggesting that perhaps philosophy anticipates rather than enacts and does not have

an immediate or readily apparent influence on an overall society, but inevitably will. In support of this he is easily able to point to Nietzsche who, on his reading, indicated a completion of Platonic metaphysics as nihilism and is the “last German philosopher” (RR 474). This, of course, was not made plain or understood until Heidegger identified it in the Nietzsche lectures, some 40 years after Nietzsche’s death, thus bringing the “untimely” Nietzsche into his own time.

On the other hand this diagnosis of philosophy could also just be a way of hastily explaining why his political attempts did not work in the way they were envisioned – that philosophy itself is not suited to be influential in its own time or as an immediate ontic political force. This latter idea seems more plausible at this juncture given that despite his political failures Heidegger still sees in National Socialism an “inner truth and greatness” (IM 213/EM 152). These considerations are important in understanding the evolution of Heidegger’s thought, who later came to identify *Gelassenheit* or “releasement” as the proper comportment of someone who is to hear the “call of Being” – indeed, Heidegger maintained that he saw no means of immediately changing the state of the world himself or that it was even humanly possible up to the latest time of his thought.⁴³ In contrast, Heidegger of 1935 still thinks in terms of “solutions” and “failures” to modern political and philosophical problems while the mature Heidegger, the post-World War II Heidegger who has explored his thoughts on technology mysteriously states “only a god can save us

⁴³See DS 329, “I know of no paths to the immediate transformation of the present state of the world, assuming that such a transformation is even humanly possible.”

now.” This not only points to a need for an entirely new structure following Nietzsche’s announcement that “God is dead,” but that even the search for a “solution” (as Heidegger is doing in the mid 1930s) is still conceived within the very framework that Heidegger identifies as the true danger to humanity.

As for cultural identity, it would seem that post World War II Heidegger’s work set aside the specific question of the German people and instead takes up the state of Western mankind, though not exactly in the same fashion as in *Being and Time*. Indeed, by the time of the Rectoral address, *Dasein* does not mean precisely what it meant in *Being and Time*⁴⁴ and it never does again. However, it seems that following his transitions in thought from *Being and Time* to his late and mature thought we find that the answer to how it stands with Being is not only dismal at best, but that a return to the “beginning,” (the Greek inception as that which is “greatest”⁴⁵) is to be merely a search as a setting-up or preparation for what he calls “new gods.” Thus, the study of the Greeks later becomes no longer is itself or a part of an overall solution. Heidegger could have set aside the issue of the German people for many reasons, among which the contingencies of the de-Nazification committees and the

⁴⁴ See footnote 5 of RR p. 473. Kartsen Harries notes, “I considered retaining *Dasein* as a by now well established, untranslatable technical term. But the reader should not assume that in the Rectoral Address *Dasein* means just what it does in *Being and Time*. Heidegger, e.g., speaks of the *Dasein eines Volkes. Volklich-staatlich*, too, poses a problem: thus the translation cannot capture the intimate union of *Volk* and *Staat* suggested by the hyphenated adjective.”

⁴⁵ See RR 473 “For if indeed this primordial Greek science is something great, then the beginning of this great thing remains what is greatest about it.” See also IM 165/EM 119 “The fundamental error. . . is the opinion that the inception of history is primitive and backward, clumsy and weak. The opposite is true. The inception is what is most uncanny and mightiest [*Unheimlichste und Gewaltigste*]. What follows is not a development but a flattening down as a mere widening out; it is the inability to hold on to the inception, it makes the inception innocuous and exaggerates it into a perversion of what is great, into greatness and extension purely in the sense of number and mass”

overall ant-Nazi sentiment could have equated with pro-German rhetoric. In any case, the unification of the German people in their “spirit” as an exclusive cultural entity has disintegrated. In its place what we see is the disappearance of East Germany behind the totalitarianism of Stalin and, on the other hand, the rebuilding of West Germany into a more prosperous and artistically and technically innovative nation. What stands out most about this is that West Germany became, whether forced or merely allowed to, much more diverse in terms of culture, art, and media than it had been at any point in the twentieth century.

Heidegger’s work on metaphysics and the Greeks remains central to his overall thought as it provides a ground or starting point from which he expounds his history of Being. While Heidegger’s own political activity and stance undergoes radical change during the years of the Third Reich, his readings of and fascination with the Greeks remain throughout his life and his deconstruction of the ancients is indispensable to locating Heidegger’s eventual confrontation with National Socialism and Nietzsche.

Revisiting Heidegger’s interpretation of Sophocles, though, we are provided with perhaps the clearest picture of where Heidegger is trying to go in 1935. Fried writes, “The polis creator possesses an amoral daring – in Greek *tolma*, which Heidegger translates as *Wagen* – the wager of leaping into the terror beyond the everyday, of wielding destruction, bursting the surrounding boundaries of meaning, tearing down old forms when they can no longer be preserved and then erecting new

ones in an appropriating interpretation of the old” (HP, 180). This describes not only Heidegger’s discussion on the ancient articulations of Being through a deconstruction of Sophocles, but also informs us of his own project. That is, in interpreting Sophocles and the ancients the way he is, Heidegger is himself “appropriating interpretations of the old” in order to reformulate the categories of Being in the 1930s.

Here “politics” is not only a matter of civic function, but also one of ontological articulation. On this Wolin observes, “That Heidegger came to view the *Seinsfrage* in the mid 1930s as essentially related to a series of epochal political questions and exigencies suggests the legitimacy of inquiring into a ‘politics of Being’” (POB 99). Given this, it is not hard to understand that if Heidegger sincerely believed what Wolin is suggesting, it is hardly surprising that he would seize on a political position of power (i.e. the Rectorship at Freiburg) in order to enact the reformation of the metaphysically nihilistic state of the Germans and, so, to fulfill the “destiny” of the German people as saviors of the West. Having come to this understanding of Heidegger’s project, it is hard not to see his position as dangerous and potentially disastrous – a potentiality that eventually manifests itself and causes much turmoil not only for Heidegger himself, but any and all intellectuals he was associated with and who had lived through the Second World War. But how could Heidegger have allowed this potentiality to manifest? What did he not see? Is it that in any and all cases to purposefully take a position as the “Philosopher King” who will re-articulate the categories of Being and, thus, redeem a metaphysically depraved

civilization, will always end in disaster? Or could it be that perhaps Heidegger missed the forest for the trees and jumped to the position of “creator” without adequately knowing what he was to create? It would seem, if we are to accept this last case, that perhaps there is something major about Being and beings that Heidegger missed.

Conclusion

In this first chapter I located the intersection of philosophy, politics, and history in Heidegger’s thought. I have also discussed his ideas on university reform and his political attempts to realize this reformation, but that his overall diagnosis of the state of affairs in Nazi Germany is not at all as he wanted them to be and is what prevents him, as Rector, from succeeding. From this it should be clear that Heidegger seeks to bring about reform as a professor rather than administrator and he explores the inception of Greek metaphysics as the site from which a new ontology itself must begin.

Additionally, this first chapter has shown that Heidegger sees the crises in philosophy, politics, and culture (in the 1930s) could begin to be understood and dealt with through a return to an original understanding of Being brought about by the ancient Greeks. In preparation for this we have discussed the *Polis* as the site in which philosophy, politics, and culture historically intersect. Heidegger’s attempt to “revitalize” Germany is grounded in a re-centering of the *Polis* in the German

University. That is, the site of revitalization is to have its locus in the restructured University.

The analysis in Chapter 1 involves political and historical starting points for what Heidegger sees as a pre-Platonic conception of Being that persists in modern times, though unrecognized and unsubstantial, but ultimately the underlying reason for the modern technological machinations and overall spiritual depravity. What is vital to keep in mind through this engagement is that the political dimensions I have identified, i.e. “ontic: and “ontological,” are always at play – that in everyday dealings in the world (with entities and people alike) human Da-Sein is always within and expressing a relation and understanding of Being.

Chapter 2: Polemos, Auseinandersetzung, and Unconcealment

Introduction

In the Introduction I established two kinds of “politics” in my reading of Heidegger – ontological politics and ontic governmental politics. These politics are located in their “inception” by Heidegger at the *polis* which has been understood as the site of Being and is also the metaphysical starting point of Western history. *Polemos* indicates an ancient Greek ontological politics of encountering and discerning our world and the things in it that, in Heidegger’s estimation, have now lost vitality. An indication of this loss is, for example, the “technological” politics expressed by both the American and Soviet systems. As an alternative, Heidegger opts for National Socialism during the 1930s – a decision we all know to have been disastrous.⁴⁶ However, even in the post-War “The Rectorate: 1933-1934” he recalls and seems to stand behind his early belief that “I saw in the movement that had gained power the possibility of an inner recollection and renewal of the people and a path that would allow it to discover its historical vocation in the Western world” (RR, 483). In this chapter the Greek word *polemos* takes center stage – it is the word that is translated by Heidegger as *Auseinandersetzung* in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*.

For the purposes of this dissertation, one particular use of this term will prove crucial. As already mentioned above: in looking back at his Nietzsche lectures, that is, at his reading of Nietzsche as the last and nihilistic Platonic metaphysician,

⁴⁶ See Wolin’s discussion on Heidegger’s “decisionism” and “historicity” (POB 53-66)

Heidegger describes them as an *Auseinandersetzung* with National Socialism (DS, 51). In this way, he relates the ontological struggle explicated in his reading of *polemos* with his ontological reading of the ontic modes of National Socialist politics and Nietzsche's thought (DS, 51). If we are to take Heidegger on his word, then the "confrontation" with National Socialism is not a mere opposition to the political powers in Germany at the time or a polemic, but a much deeper engagement with National Socialism – an engagement that is ontological in that it represents, or is a part of, Heidegger's own understanding of Being. This engagement is necessary in Heidegger's thought that leads to his articulation of technology and *Ge-stell* ("enframing"). It is the focus of this chapter to explore *Auseinandersetzung* and its importance for Heidegger's thought, especially his deconstruction of the history of philosophy. Specifically, I will examine the context in which *Auseinandersetzung* first gets used as a translation of *polemos*, and then, based on that, show how both terms are related to Heidegger's understanding of truth as *Unverborgenheit* ("unconcealment"), which is his translation of the Greek term *alētheia*. Then I will turn to and use a broader discussion of the concept of truth to illuminate the finer aspects of Heidegger's use of these words ("confrontation" or *Auseinandersetzung*) not merely in terms of opposition and unity, but also as demarcation and metaphysical "presencing." This is to provide a foundation from which we can build an understanding of the Nietzsche lectures in light of what we learn of Heidegger's notion of *Auseinandersetzung*. From this foundation and subsequent understanding of Heidegger's Nietzsche, we will be poised to understand the evolution of

technological politics as a manifestation of the crumbling metaphysical edifice of the West; ultimately we will be in a position to determine whether or not Heidegger was ever able to get to a new “inception.”

II.I

While the motivation for exploring exactly what Heidegger means by *Auseinandersetzung* originates in the late interview in *Der Spiegel* concerning the Nietzsche lectures (ca. 1936 – 1941), the word *Auseinandersetzung* appears in Heidegger’s documented thought a few years previous, during his discussion of Heraclitus’ Fragment 53 in his 1935 lectures published as *An Introduction to Metaphysics*.⁴⁷ This is where he first translates the Greek word *polemos* as *Auseinandersetzung*. In an everyday sense, the word *Auseinandersetzung* means a debate, conflict, or discussion. For Heidegger, however, the word holds an ontological meaning and signifies a “setting-out-and-apart-from one another”⁴⁸ in terms of rank and distinction - a theme heavily addressed in *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Heidegger reads *polemos* (*Auseinandersetzung*) as a way in which something is distinguished from other things. On this reading, conflict is what allows the world to present itself as such. That is, through confrontation with what is, i.e. encountering the “world as such,” Dasein comes to distinguish beings from each

⁴⁷ For Heidegger the term conflict is rooted in the reading of Heraclitus Fragment 53 (discussed below). I wish to note that Heidegger had earlier translated Heraclitus’ *polemos* as *Kampf* or “struggle” in *Gesamtaufgabe* 39 125-26. It was not until IM in 1935 that the word is changed to *Auseinandersetzung*. See Gregory Fried “Heidegger’s Polemos” JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH

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⁴⁸ This is also a very literal translation of the word.

other and itself from other beings, thus reinforcing the notion that Dasein, in its polemical relationship with world, is at all times engaged in ontological politics.

This conflict is not meant by Heidegger as ontic, destructive conflict in terms of warfare or physical struggle, but allows for the setting of distinction and rank, a way of discerning or forming “world” in which beings are encountered and discerned as this or that in terms of how they appear. Given the discussion of world formation, as opposed to an “ontic” level in which Dasein is faced with already given and particular political choices (e.g. liberal or conservative, left wing or right wing, American or Soviet) it is useful to emphasize the distinction between ontic and ontological politics. In the case of a discussion concerning *polemos* as a factor in world formation, ontological politics is at play. This is not merely a conventional politics in the commonly understood sense of interactions of humans within communities and communities with outside communities. It is, rather the primordial ground upon which all everyday politics rests – that is, the politics relating to the *polis* as discussed in Ch. 1.

The theme of world forming is seminally discussed in *Being and Time*. The understanding of worldhood or “worldliness” underpins any discussion of human Dasein and relations to Being. Dreyfus notes that “since worldliness is another name for the disclosedness or Dasein’s understanding of being, worldliness is the guiding phenomenon behind Heidegger’s thought in *Being and Time*” (BIW, 89). This earlier discussion provides a foundation upon which Heidegger develops his thought on

world, encountering, and *alētheia*. In this account Heidegger distinguishes between ontic and ontological senses of “world” that resonate with my similar distinction between ontic and ontological politics (see B&T, 93/SZ, 64-65). On the one hand Heidegger denotes things as “present-at-hand” (*vorhanden*) or what is the mere presence of an entity without any reference to an involvement with Dasein, such as a hammer that is considered merely in terms of its object and not its total involvement as useable (also, ontic). On the other hand Heidegger denotes things as “ready-to-hand” (*zuhanden*) or an entity that has significance as involved with the Being of Dasein (ontological), such as a hammer considered in its totality of involvement as hammering nails into wood that builds structures that are part of this or that project of Dasein. As ready-to-hand the hammer is not encountered by Dasein as mere “object.” Rather, in place of object is its use in the totality of the structure being erected, e.g. a house.

The first category of “world” is “ontical-categorical” and describes “universe” as a totality of objects or entities that are physically in existence and present-at-hand (*vorhanden*). The second, “ontological-categorical,” signifies the Being of the selfsame set of entities or objects present-at-hand that are understood in terms of a “totality.” Heidegger’s example is the “‘world’ of mathematics, [in which] ‘world’ signifies the realm of possible objects of mathematics” (BT 93/SZ 64-65). Dreyfus notes that this is what “Husserl called the *eidos* defining each region of being, and what Heidegger calls each region’s way of being” (BIW 89).

The third and fourth senses of “world” are important and serve as a jumping-off point from which Heidegger continues to develop his thoughts on worldhood.⁴⁹ These senses are much more complex and underpin any later discussion of world “forming” or encountering. The third sense of “world” is “Ontical-Existentiell” is “that ‘wherein’ a factual Dasein as such is said to ‘live’” (B&T, 93/SZ, 65). This kind of “world” can be understood in many different senses. For example, a person born in the South US in the mid-19th century could be said to have been born into the “world of slavery” or a physicist could be said to be part of the “world of physics,” which includes the totality of “equipment, practices, and concerns in which physicists dwell” (BIW, 90). This world, Heidegger adds, can be the “‘public’ we-world, or one’s ‘own’ closest (domestic) environment” (B&T, 93/SZ, 65). Human Dasein is always already within *the* world, that “it belongs to the very idea of world to be shared, so *the* world is always prior to *my* world” (BIW, 90).

The last of the four senses of “world” is “ontological-existential.” It is here that Heidegger brings up worldhood. Here, “world” *is and means* “worldhood.” Worldhood is the field of intelligibility within which individual modes or “worlds” (“world” in the third sense with double quotation marks) are possible. Heidegger writes, “Worldhood itself may have as its modes whatever structural wholes any special ‘worlds’ may have at the time; but it embraces in itself the *a priori* character of worldhood in general” (B&T, 93/SZ, 65). What this means is that a pre-experience

⁴⁹ Heidegger’s *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* also has enlightening discussions on world and worldhood. (see, for example, BPP 297, 165)

field of intelligibility must exist such that entities can be made intelligible as this or that and enfolded into whatever mode of “world” Da-Sein finds itself in. Discussing philosophy and “world-view,” Heidegger elaborates,

We must understand being so that we may be given over to a world that *is*, so that we can exist in it and be our own Dasein itself as a being. We must be able to understand actuality *before* all factual experience of actual beings. This understanding of actuality or of being in the widest sense as over against the experience of beings is in a certain sense *earlier* than the experience of beings. To say that the understanding of being precedes all factual experience of beings does not mean that we would first need to have an explicit concept of being order to experience beings theoretically or practically. We must understand being—being, which may no longer itself be called a being, being, which does not occur as a being among other beings but which nevertheless must be given and in fact is given in the understanding of being (BPP, 11).

Since Dasein is “*in each case mine [je meines]*” it follows that world is, as an existential, also always a case of “mineness” (*Jemeinigkeit*) (BT 67/SZ 41). Given this, worldhood is what is being described with the “understanding of actuality or of being in the widest sense.” Where Heidegger to say that this is “*earlier*” he does not necessarily mean in terms of chronological ordering. Rather, he means that in understanding beings in any way already points to an understanding of being “in the widest sense” David Hoy observes, “Worldhood is not itself a specific content. Instead it is that which makes it possible for content to appear as content, that is, as a feature of the world” (TOL, 64). Where Heidegger writes of the “wholes any special

‘worlds’ may have at the time” he is anticipating the understanding of Being as temporalized and historical, which Heidegger addresses in *Being and Time* division two and which is a feature of my earlier discussions on *Seinsgesicht* and *Geschick*⁵⁰ To have “world,” then, worldhood is a precondition. It is in worldhood that my designation of ontological politics becomes coherent as the field of intelligibility from which the ontic politics of the “world” is made possible.

Worldhood of the world is the foundation from which Heidegger is able to talk about the Greeks and their world forming in terms of *polemos* in 1935. To address world formation, in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes,

The *polemos* named here is a strife [*Streit*] that holds sway (*waltender*) before everything divine and human, not war in the human sense. As Heraclitus thinks it, struggle [*Kampf*] first and foremost allows what essentially unfolds to step apart in opposition, first allows position and status and rank to establish themselves in coming to presence. In such a stepping apart, clefts, intervals, distances, and joints open themselves up. In con-frontation [*Aus-einandersetzung*], world comes to be. [Confrontation does not divide unity, much less destroy it. It builds unity; it is the gathering (*logos*). *Polemos* and *logos* are the same.]⁵¹ (IM, 65/ EM 47).

⁵⁰ See, for example: Introduction on “*Seinsgesicht*” and Ch. 1 on “*Geshick*”

⁵¹ Bracketed section added in the 1953 edition

Here it becomes evident that *Auseinandersetzung* is far more than a simple word: it is a word that, for Heidegger, reaches back to Ancient Greece and forward into the precarious character of his time and on to his foreseen future of technicity. It is a word that peppers his thought from the mid 1930s to his death, a word that allows him access to the Ancient Greeks in a way that he sees as unique.⁵² In the above quote on Heraclitus, *Auseinandersetzung* seems to be the state of conflict as such. *Aus-einandersetzung* (rendered quite confusingly as “con-flict” in the English translation) is, then, the advent of this conflict, the setting out of discernible opposition in such a way that the “world comes to be.” Gregory Fried, in his 2000 study of Heidegger and his understanding of *polemos*, elaborates, “World for Heidegger is not merely the empty space within which objective reality takes up position; the world, rather, is a space within which beings become meaningful for Dasein in Dasein’s everyday involvements. There is a spatiality to the *Aus-einandersetzung*, the setting out from one another, as Heidegger emphasizes by hyphenating the word” (HP 33). The spatiality identified here by Fried is a way of describing how things are discerned from each other. That is, beings as entities are discerned as such and take on meaning as entities only if provided the space to be differentiated from others. This can only happen as an opposition – beings take on meaning as opposed to the other *different* beings. However, the space is not there before and then “filled up” by the meaning of beings, rather it is made by the

⁵² this uniqueness, as discussed in Ch.1, is expressed in the “dangerous and comical” belief in an exclusive relationship between German language and culture and that of the ancient Greeks – to remind the reader again, Heidegger’s deconstruction of the Greeks, especially in the 1930s is intermingled with Nazi politics

differentiation. The *Auseinandersetzung* is how beings and, thus Being, are discerned in their uniqueness.

World as it comes to be through *polemos* is a central theme in Heidegger's thought in the 1930s and is key in understanding the shift from the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*) in *Being and Time* to the "event (*Ereignis*) of Being" and the "history of Being" (*Seinsgeschichte*). It is in this shift to "truth of Being" that Heidegger begins to articulate a "history of metaphysics" as the epochal articulations of Being since Plato. However, it is in the presocratics that Heidegger sees in the inception of the West, that "becoming-a-world is authentic history" or the beginning of ontological politics (IM 65/ EM 48). Heidegger writes, "through world, beings first come into being" (IM 64/EM 47). So it is in confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) that the "world" comes to be as such and this world is world in that beings (entities) show themselves in their "rank and order" in a specific way. The world then is how that which "is" presents itself to us. The very encounter and grappling of Dasein with beings – the discernment and distinguishing of beings as what they are – is what constitutes "world" and the site of this grappling with beings in world disclosing is the *Polis* (see Ch. 1 for a discussion of *Polis*). When inquiring into this way in which beings show up is to ask the metaphysical question "why are there beings rather than nothing?" and, hence, an inquiry that "stands as the name for the center and core that determines all philosophy" (IM 19/ EM 13). For Heidegger the history of philosophical inquiry, as well as the history of Western civilization, is metaphysically rooted and is manifested politically.

In the previous chapter Heidegger's desire to restructure the German University in order to centralize this important institution as the well spring of a revitalized German culture and identity was discussed. Given Heidegger's call to return to the "originary" conception of Being as thought by the ancient Greeks and the discussion of the *Polis* as the site of historical Dasein, it has become apparent that Heidegger's notion of restructuring is essentially a placement of the *Polis*, as conceived in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, at the University in an attempt to reframe and restructure the contemporary and inadequate relationship with beings and, hence Being – an approach that ends disastrously. This leads, however, to deeper questions about the *Polis* itself: what is it that lies beneath the *polis* that allows it to become as it is, its *hypokeimenon*? To explore the material substratum of the *Polis*, we turn to Heidegger's discussion of pre-Platonic metaphysics.

II.II

In an attempt to answer this question, Heidegger invokes Heraclitus and the enigmatic fragment numbered 53. It is translated, "Confrontation is indeed for all (that comes to presence) the sire (who lets emerge), but (also) for all the preserver that holds sway. For it lets some appear as gods, others as human beings, some it produces (sets forth) as slaves, but others as the free" (IM 65/ EM 47).⁵³ On Heidegger's reading, confrontation is what allows the world to present itself as such in its ontological and political orderliness – a hearkening that, again, evidences

⁵³ Footnoted in the Polt translation of this passage in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* is what is called a more "conventional" rendering of Fragment 53, "War is the father of all and king of all, and it has shown some as gods and others as human beings, made some slaves and others free."

Heidegger's elitist politics at the time. On his reading, this "conflict" provides the setting of distinction and rank, of "clefts, intervals, distances, and joints (*Fugen*)" (IM 65/ EM 47)⁵⁴ *Fugen* literally means "joint." The joint is interesting in its function: it is simultaneously an indication of the irreconcilable separation of things, but is also that which joins or unifies things to be seen as a continuous whole rather than as discontinuous pieces – e.g. an "arm" or "leg" is seen as such only given the joining of two different parts at the joint. It is because of this that, in the bracketed section of the above quote that was added after the lectures before publication, Heidegger says that *polemos* and *logos* are the same – they both serve to gather and unify. So, *polemos*, *Auseinandersetzung*, or confrontation is not that which separates, but that which unifies. Quite literally, what is being said here is that conflict is necessary not only for "coming-to-be" of the world, but that this conflict unifies and solidifies this world as world. While Heidegger notes that the *polemos* noted here in Heraclitus is "not war in the human sense," it is hard not to once again hear the martial political overtones of the Nazis in this articulation of "world-coming-to-be" as a kind of violence that establishes "order and rank" – see below on "violence" (IM 65/EM 47).

Heidegger's use of the term *walten* is also very important in this and other passages concerning Heraclitus in getting at the material substratum of the site of Being (*Polis*). Translated as "sway" or "overwhelming sway" (*überwältigenden walten*) we see it in the beginning of the above passage, "The *Polemos* named here is

⁵⁴ Also, See Sluga, 1993 ". . . we must, in particular, return to the early, pre-Platonic conception of Being that still reigns, though unrecognized and flattened-out, in the West. Only by recuperating this beginning of our spiritual-historical existence and what is most uncanny and mightiest in it can we account for the origins of distinction of 'position and status ad rank' in the world." 209

a strife that holds sway.” It also appears in the paragraph following in which Heidegger identifies the “overwhelming sway” against which the poets, thinkers, and statesmen, “throw the counterweight of their work and capture in this work the world that is thereby opened up” (IM65/ EM 47-48). Heidegger then reiterates a very important identification of German and Greek terms which he discusses in the opening pages of *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (IM 14-19/EM 11-14). He writes “With these works, the sway (*physis*), first comes to a stand in what comes to presence (*anwesen*). Beings as such now come into Being” (IM 65/ EM 47). The sway (*Walten*) is identified here with the Greek term *physis*. *Physis*, as Heidegger discusses it, is a primordial and mysterious “appearing” of what is as such, described metaphorically as akin to celestial processes such as the rising of the sun, or the growth of plants, or as the birth of humans and animals as “coming forth” from the womb. It is the thing that humans, in their relation to beings, are yet ironically alien to and cannot grasp.⁵⁵ *Physis*, as the “coming forth” of Being, comes across in this context as the greatest and most fundamental of all mysteries, which is maddeningly inescapable, yet entirely elusive when mankind attempts to set a gaze upon it.

The mystery of *physis* is, in effect, the great question historically answered in a theological sense. Yet, even for the Olympian gods, Being is itself an ancient, elusive, and distant, but constant struggle. In his *Theogony*, Hesiod names Chaos as

⁵⁵ See IM 138/ EM 100 “Human beings continually have to do with Being, and yet it is alien to them. They have to do with Being inasmuch as they constantly relate to beings, but it is alien to them inasmuch as they turn away from Being, because they do not grasp it at all; instead, they believe that beings are only beings and nothing further. True, they are awake (in relation to beings), yet Being remains concealed to them.”

that which reigned before Earth, sky, time, etc.⁵⁶ Chaos is within the purview of Being, as much as any being is, but is chaotic in the sense that *polemos* has not come to distinguish and, hence, differentiate the stuff of the universe – it is the undifferentiated stuff of the universe. In this sense, Hesiod’s *Theogony* sees *polemos* appearing in the form of the primordial Gods (Gaia and Uranos) and their conflicts that form the world and eventually spawn the Olympian gods who, as later related by Homer, are rife with their own confrontation. While anyone who reads Homer or Hesiod will be quick to point out that the conflicts depicted between the gods do seem to be very physical and on the level of human warfare (even presented as historical conflicts like Troy), the Heideggerian reading is of these conflicts as a metaphor for a fundamental and symbolic world-forming strife of the ancient Greek people. Being as *physis* is *Walten* or the springing-forth of Being as such. Heidegger writes, “*Physis* is Being itself by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable” (IM 15/EM 11). *Polemos*, on the other hand, names the prevailing forthcoming of *physis* into the intelligible world. Where the polemical relationship between mankind and world ceases, for Heidegger, loses the weight of its meaning and becomes “now merely what is finished and as such is at the disposal of just anybody, the present-at-hand, within which no world is worlding anymore . . . beings become objects. . . as the fabricated, the object of calculation” (IM 66/EM 48). In other words the “sway” that gives things a significance becomes lost when it is no longer held up and recognized beyond the “mere” physical utility of an entity. Here again we find

⁵⁶ See Hesiod *Homeric Hymns, epic Cycle, Homerica*. Hugh g. Evelyn-Price trans. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998) 87.

Heidegger anticipating his later views on technology and the meaninglessness of objects as *Bestand*. But we also see an implicit explanation for his need to “reground” the German people – that if they do not re-enter the polemic domain of engagement with *physis* that the Germans will become as the ontologically deprived Americans or Soviets for whom “world” apparently has no more significance than the superficial “ontic” dealings of an ungrounded and meaningless life. The underlying “politics” of Heidegger’s account of *polemos* and *physis* is undeniable here.

In the recent book *All Things Shining*, Dreyfus and Kelly discuss *Physis* in terms of what they call “whooshing.” This term is adopted to name the Heideggerian “sway” of *physis* that is “overwhelming,” or provides life experiences that are “sacred,” or hold eminent meaning, in that they astound and overwhelm us and our everyday composure. They point out, in a similar way in which I do above, that *physis*, in the ancient Homeric sense was a term that named “nature” or that which is; in the way it presences itself. It is, to recall the mysteriousness of the term, both what is in the universe and the unseen “force” that “moves” everything in the way that it moves and appears. This occurs in a physical sense of the existence and “nature” of things, but we also interact with it and so participate in this universal energy. Homer’s stories describe the “whooshing” of *physis* in the shining of Achilles on the battlefield in his glory as the demigod warrior or of Odysseus reaching for the rock that calls him amidst a turbulent sea (ATS, 201). In terms of contemporary life, Dreyfus and Kelly speak mostly of amazing physical feats of athletic individuals like Michael Jordan or Muhammed Ali (aptly dubbed the contemporary experience of

“sacred community”). In this discussion, spectators are swept up in amazement and experience a sort of ecstasis along with the rest of the “crowd” – that in the situation of a public display of seemingly superhuman physical ability (for example) the cheering response of the crowd and the seemingly irresistible personal reaction in unison reveals “an important sense in which I am no longer the source of my own activity” (ATS, 203). This can also happen, for example, in the inspiring speeches given by Martin Luther King Jr. or in the captivating rhetoric of Hitler as he speaks of a thousand-year Reich. These last examples show how the “sacred” moment of revelry in that which inspires or overwhelms in its beauty can also be a serious danger. And it is here that we see how Heidegger could have been “whooshed” into Nazi “fanaticism” as his call for “regrounding” the “spirit” of the German people in the fashion of the ancient Greek “inception” had no guidelines beyond the call to return to the “confrontational” comportment of experiencing that is weighty with meaning – is, i.e., of *physis*.

II.III

In discussing conflict as *Auseinandersetzung*, Heidegger also addresses *logos*, stating, “confrontation does not divide unity, much less destroy it. It builds unity; it is the gathering (*logos*). *Polemos* and *logos* are the same” (IM 65/ EM 47). What is stated here is central to the exegesis of confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) in that it is not the kind of oppositional confrontation in which an opposite is to overcome or destroy the other. Rather, the opposition as such is primordial and in order for Being to show

forth, the confrontation must maintain itself. This is what the joints (*fugen*) mean - that the opposition is itself a whole, not the constituent opposites, much in the way an arm or a leg is not an arm or a leg without two parts joined by an elbow or a knee. In other words the confrontation is a *dynamic* that articulates *physis* as it comes forth. This is what Heidegger means when he states, “*Logos* is the constant gathering, the gatheredness of beings that stands in itself, that is, Being” (IM 138/ EM 100). The gathering or “gatheredness” is the whole of that which is confrontation. But, a confrontation between what and what? What are the opposites?

Discussing confrontation, Heidegger reaches back not just to Heraclitus, but also to Parmenides who, as is commonly thought (at least by Nietzsche), presents an opposing account of Being. On the one hand we are given a static conception of Being by Parmenides as *physis* which neither comes to be nor ceases to be; on the other that of becoming as put forth by Heraclitus as the river in which man may never step twice. This reading of Heraclitus, Heidegger claims, is not right. Both philosophers actually come to the same conclusion concerning Being. Considering Heraclitus, Heidegger addresses what he calls the most popular interpretation - that of “everything flows” – and reinterprets it. In this reinterpretation of the concept of becoming we get “the whole of beings in its Being is always thrown (*geworfen*) from one opposite (*Gegensatz*) to the other, thrown over here and over there – Being is the gatheredness of this conflicting unrest” (IM 142/EM 102). If we are to take Heidegger at his word, then *logos* is the same “gatheredness of this conflicting:” In other words the “unification” of Being as it comes forth is precisely its strife – beings

in their Being are made discernable as conflict. Being (*physis*) is the coming forth or unconcealment (*aletheia* or “truth”) of Being.

In “Unconcealment,” Mark Wrathall notes that for Heidegger “despite using the word ‘truth’ to name the subject matter of his thought, his primary interest was always unconcealment” (CTH, 338). Indeed, Heidegger himself reflects on this in his later lectures on Heraclitus “‘Aletheia as unconcealment occupied me all along, but ‘truth’ slipped itself in between” (CTH 338). Essentially, the point here is that Heidegger, from a time preceding *Being and Time*, has been engaging the concept “truth” in terms of *alētheia*, which he eventually articulates as “unconcealment” or *unverborgenheit*. Somehow, though, the term “truth” seems to insert itself in any discussion about unconcealment. Heidegger eventually drops the term “truth” when talking about unconcealment. Wrathall is helpful in his analysis of Heidegger’s articulation of “truth” as *alētheia*. He notes three kinds of “truth” in Heidegger’s thought before he came to his late conception of the “most fundamental form of unconcealment” in terms of what becomes known as the “clearing” of Being (*Lichtung*) (CTH, 340). The kind of truth that Heidegger sees as that which has typified Western conceptions of truth as *veritas*, or the propositional truth of correctness, he identifies as one reason why 20th century mankind has found itself engulfed in a nihilistic technological epoch.⁵⁷ However, propositional truth is also recognized by him as important in that it involves making assertions about entities,

⁵⁷ See Heidegger’s 1931-32 essay “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth” in which he, much like Nietzsche, sees the criteria of truth posited in terms of the “idea” which becomes “supersensuous” and, thus, unattainable and nihilistic transformation of the concept “truth” from *aletheia* to “correctness” (P, 155-182).

which is a part of what *alētheia* is – just that it has been used, rather, to indicate a problematic tendency to try relate this type of truth of correspondence “as a relationship between mental representations and facts or states of affairs in the world” (CTH, 343). Heidegger writes, “To say that an assertion ‘*is true*’ signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself. Such an assertion asserts, points out, ‘lets’ the entity ‘be seen’ in its uncoveredness. The *Being-true (truth)* of the assertion must be understood as *Being-uncovering*” (BT, 261/SZ, 218). This *Being-uncovering* is not the same as a model of truth based on the “correctness” of our assertion, but rather involves the encountering of entities.

The next sort is discussed in detail in *Being and Time* is that which “propositional truth is grounded” is the truth of beings (entities) in how we encounter them (CTH, 338). This is understood as “uncoveredness” or “discoveredness” (*entdecktheit*). It is in uncoveredness that an entity becomes “true” or “made available for comportment” and we can make assertions about it (CTH, 338). This occurs in our everyday “practical involvements with things in the world” (CTH, 339). This sort of “truth” is in turn grounded in what Heidegger understands as the “truth of Being” in which there is an “unconcealment” (*unverborgenheit*) that designates an overall understanding of Being itself, which conditions the possibilities of our assertions about beings. It is this type of truth that occupies Heidegger in his middle period during the 30s while we also see the beginnings of his thought on the “clearing” (*Lichtung*).

Unconcealment (*unverborgenheit*) itself already tells us something very important - that something is concealed. This means that concealment, in having to be unconcealed, has just as much to do with Being as unconcealment. In *Being and Time* Heidegger discusses the *lumen naturale* of Dasein as a metaphor for Dasein's fundamental character of disclosing (*erschlossenheit*). This account of Dasein as Being-in-the-world is that light which illuminates or "clears." That is to say that Dasein, as the light or the clearing, is a disclosing itself that brings things into the open (HP, 50). The clearing is the "there" of Dasein that gives Dasein what I call an "ontological space." This is fundamental in the sense that Heidegger goes so far as to say "*Dasein is its disclosedness*" (B&T, 171/S&Z 133). This ultimately leads Heidegger to two conclusions concerning truth as uncoveredness (*Entdecktheit*) (the state of being unconcealed or revealed, hence *aletheia*), "(1) that truth, in the most primordial sense, is Dasein's disclosedness, to which the uncoveredness of entities within-the-world belongs; and (2) that Dasein is "equiprimordially both in the truth and in untruth" (B&T 265/S&Z 223). This early account of Dasein as the clearing shifts in Heidegger's later thought to the clearing as Being (*Sein*) itself without which Dasein would be meaningless – the clearing is not asserted by Dasein in this later version, but is already its own clearing within which Da-Sein must find itself. Dasein is, following *Being and Time*, no longer that which actively "wrests" Being, but that which needs to allow Being to happen, hence *Gelassenheit* or the "releasement" toward beings (see Ch. 4).

In the midst of this shift, Heidegger's 1935 lectures involve the discussion of *logos*. In these discussions, *logos* addresses truth (unconcealedness) and untruth (concealedness). It is the gathering of the throwing of beings in their Being from concealment to unconcealment that is meant by this reading of *logos*. *Logos* is, then, the gathered confrontation that brings forth beings in their Being from concealment – they show themselves as this or that. The opposites, then, the “over here and over there,” are concealment and unconcealment. Heidegger elaborates, “Being means coming-into-unconcealment (*In-die-Unverborgenheit-kommen*); this gathering [that is *logos*] therefore has the basic character of opening up, revealing.” (IM 181/ EM 130).

However, Heidegger identifies *logos* as contrasting “clearly and sharply with covering up and concealing” (IM 181/EM 130). This statement does not seem to fit with the rest of the discussion concerning confrontation and the wholeness of Being created by this conflict as *polemos*. But, what is meant here is that *logos* as a gathering of conflict is that which brings beings forth as Being. The wresting of Being from concealment is what is meant by *logos* for Heidegger, hence *polemos* and *logos* are the same.

Mankind is at all times involved in the conflict with the concealment of Being. This conflict is what Heidegger considers a fundamental feature of Dasein in *Being in Time* – something that doesn't change even though the designation of “Dasein” and its relation to Being do. This is a fundamental feature in that, as enveloped in and intertwined with Being, mankind is at all times involved in the struggle to unconceal

beings in their concealment – that is to say that even though Heidegger’s thought of Dasein as actively engaging concealment in a struggle to unconceal as in *Being and Time* shifts to a more passive role in his later thought, mankind is nevertheless *involved* if even in a mere passive way of answering the “call” of Being.

Human Dasein has a *polemical* relationship with Being in that man is at all times involved in one way or another with Being, whether in active “wresting,” as Heidegger still seems to think in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* or in “letting beings be” as he begins to understand following the Nietzsche lectures. The very expression “letting beings be” implies that the conflict that characterizes *polemos* does not vanish when mankind gives up the struggle to actively dominate Being, but that in the very “presencing” of beings, that way of presencing has won out over others. However, the early and middle Heidegger, the politically active Heidegger who wishes to reground the German *Volk* in a new inception of polis-centered politics, still sees Dasein as active and personifying of the polemical struggle. This is what might be called the Hermeneutic of Dasein – Dasein is, in wresting Being, also interpreting Being and itself. As David Hoy puts it, “Dasein’s understanding of its world is . . . not distinct from its understanding of itself, but is at the same time an interpretation of itself.”⁵⁸ In the ontological sense that Heidegger intends to discuss truth, the truth of Being is unconcealment, *aletheia*. This means that there is no truth of Being without Dasein. Both Being itself and Dasein’s relationship to Being are fundamentally

⁵⁸ See David Hoy “Heidegger and the Hermeneutic Turn” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. Charles Guignon ed. (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993). 177.

polemical. On this point, Gregory Fried claims that truth possesses Dasein, that “Dasein neither creates nor possesses truth” (HP, 51). If truth is unconcealment (*aletheia*) and unconcealment is Being, then the polemical relationship that Dasein has with beings (thus, with Being) is something that can only be possessed and created of itself. If Dasein were to create truth or possess it, then the overall discussion would be meaningless for Heidegger because Dasein would then return to the solipsistic subjectivity that he seems to be trying so hard to leave behind in modern philosophy. This amounts to saying that Dasein is never the owner of Being, but merely a conduit through which Being announces itself.

Dasein as the passive conduit is the direction of thought that distinguishes the earlier Heidegger of *Being and time* and the later Heidegger. That is, the earlier thought emphasizes Dasein as that which actively grapples with the world in its interpretations, while the later Heidegger sees this as still too wrapped up in Cartesian subjectivism and instead sees “Da-Sein” – the being that is the “Shepherd” who answers the “call” of Being.⁵⁹ On this, one might say that Being is that which defines man inasmuch as without that which is shepherded, the shepherd is not a shepherd and, thus, lacks significance. That is, mankind cannot be said to possess the very thing that gives significance –i.e. “Being” itself - though man is everywhere encountering beings in their Being and so encountering the coloring and shaping of beings as well as of itself – this is, hence, “world.” This is a crucial point as it illuminates precisely why Heidegger’s later view of *Gestell*, as the essence of

⁵⁹ See, for example, “Letter on Humanism” (1946).

technology, is a danger, because it strangles the coloring and shaping: hence, a relegation of all beings, and Da-Sein, to the significance of mere resources to be used and circulated (see Ch.4). As stated above, *alētheia* must come with the *lethian* (hiddenness) – unconcealment implies and involves concealment as a fundamental feature of Being. Gregory Fried has described Heidegger’s ontological hermeneutics of truth in terms of the continual, unified confrontation between concealment and unconcealment, “Dasein does not simply engage in polemos as something external to itself. Dasein *is* polemos because Dasein’s existence is hermeneutic, and all interpretation is polemical” (HP, 52). What this means is that as an interpretive being (at least up to and including the Dasein discussed in 1935), mankind is always engaged with uncovering in terms of what has been understood in the Greek as *polemos*, in German as *Auseinandersetzung*, and in English as confrontation. All interpretation is the struggle and the violence of this struggle is precisely the engagement with things in the world, which forms an overall understanding of world and self.

The discussion of Dasein as polemical indicates a few things for us concerning Heidegger and his ontical politics at this point in the mid-1930s (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*): that he has not completed his “turn” in which beings and Being are no longer actively “wrested,” but are “let be.” He still sees a “violence” in the relationship between mankind and Being that is active on the part a

Dasein.⁶⁰ This relationship is still expressed in his pro-National Socialist leanings in which the “revolution” presents new possibilities of appropriating beings and, hence, Being. The politics of the *polis*, which he is trying to recall in these lectures, he sees as the active politics of confrontation, hence Fried’s assertion that all interpretation is polemical and that Dasein *is* polemos. So then, being-human as appropriating Being in its concealedness reveals a struggle or *polemos* which is gathered together (*logos*), in the showing up of Being, i.e. truth. So, to reiterate, in the mid 1930s for Heidegger truth can only be spoken of in terms of the human as the agent of unconcealment and interpretation. If we are to accept my earlier assertion that to be political is to be Dasein and to be Dasein is to be political, then it would seem natural at this juncture to state that if Dasein is polemos, then polemos is always a political activity – an ontological politics.

Conclusion

The question for Heidegger following the diagnosis that in our relationship to Being we are staggering is how do we stand up and walk? How do we become engaged with Being as the ancient Greeks were at the outset of what he calls our history? That itself is his *Auseinandersetzung* (polemos) with the history of ontology. Heidegger sees that he must engage the entirety of the history of Western thought in order to

⁶⁰ See for example some earlier thoughts in *being and Time* “Truth (uncoveredness) is something that must always first be wrested from entities. Entities get snatched out of their hiddenness. The factual uncoveredness of anything is always, as it were, a kind of *robbery*. . . . It is therefore essential that Dasein should explicitly appropriate what has already been uncovered, defend it *against* semblance and disguise, and assure itself of its uncoveredness again and again” (*B&T* 265/ *S&Z* 222).

come to the setting-out (“inception” or *der Anfang*), as it were, of history. Already in *Being and Time* Heidegger sees the necessity of a “destruktion” of Western thought (metaphysics) as a whole. Heidegger is already looking back to the ancients for the outset of the polemical relationship with Being and finds Parmenides, among others, as a primal source. This “return” as Heidegger puts it, is not a Luddite-esque sentiment to abandon our world of high tech gadgets for horse carriages and the like. Rather, as Heidegger reflects in 1973

It occurs as that hearing which opens itself to the word of Parmenides from out of our present age, the epoch of the sending of Being as enframing (*Gestell*).

In *Being and Time*, there is already such a *return*, although still somewhat awkward. Indeed, in *Being and Time*, it takes place as destruction, that is, as disintegration, dismantling of that which, from the beginning, is destined as *being* in the interrupted succession of metamorphoses which is metaphysics.

But there was not yet in *Being and time* a genuine knowledge of the history of Being, hence the awkwardness and, strictly speaking, the naiveté of the “ontological destruction.” Since then, this unavoidable naiveté of the novice gave way to a knowing (FS 77-78/VS 133).

However, Heidegger cannot just simply go back and “hear” Parmenides. We must keep in mind that the above statement was made 38 years after *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Heidegger does not engage Parmenides directly until 1942-43. This places the Parmenides lectures after the historic lectures on Nietzsche. Why does Heidegger wait until after Nietzsche to engage Parmenides? These two thinkers

could not be further apart for Heidegger. On the one hand we have the outset of the polemical relationship with Being in pre-Platonic Greece and on the other we have what is characterized as the completion of Platonic metaphysics. The answer seems to be one of re-situating his thoughts via his engagement with Nietzsche and finding a way to articulate a “history” of Being before he is able to return to Parmenides and read him in a different way. For Heidegger, Nietzsche provides an absolute indication of where Western mankind stands in relation to the beginning. It is no surprise, then, that it is only after engaging Nietzsche that Heidegger is able to even begin to articulate his mature thoughts on technology. It is, simultaneously, only after confronting Parmenides that Heidegger is able to speak of a “saving” from monstrous technicity.

In this chapter I have explored the significance of the word “*Auseinandersetzung*” as Heidegger’s rendering of the Greek word “*polemos*.” This has led to an understanding of *polemos* as a crucial aspect of world-forming and unconcealment. This establishes *Auseinandersetzung* and *polemos* as more than catch-phrases for Heidegger, but actually central to his overall engagement with Being. The following chapter engages Heidegger’s Nietzsche lectures and attempts an understanding of how these lectures could later be called an *Auseinandersetzung* with National Socialism.

Chapter 3: Auseinandersetzung, Nietzsche, and the Politics of Nihilism

Introduction:

To talk about what is meant here by Heidegger's "political" thought is to understand it in terms of what he means by a "history of Being." This means that this history not only tells the story of how we encounter beings (and Being) but also how we encounter each other. These interactions become "political" when we order, govern, and relegate beings according to how we think they should be given the way we encounter them – this is how beings become "comported" - and, also, when we order, relegate, and govern populations given the way that we encounter other humans. The former is what I call ontological politics, while the latter is an outward expression of the ontological encounter and understanding and is "ontic." What this points to is my general stance that to be political is to be human Dasein, just as to be human Dasein is to be political. However, it is around the time of the Nietzsche lectures that Heidegger seems to use the term "Dasein" less and less frequently until he apparently drops its use altogether in his later thought and refers, rather, to *Da-Sein*. The shift from "Dasein" to "Da-sein" is explained in the 1947 work "Letter on Humanism" in which Heidegger, seeing Dasein as still too close to the limiting subjectivist Cartesian *animal rationale*, reframes the human as "Da-sein," the "ek-sisting counter-throw [Gegenwurf] of Being" (BW, 245). What this means is that the human exists not in the sense of an existential, but in terms of the disclosure of beings. That is, ek-sistence is how Da-sein "stands out" in Being. This existence is characterized

temporally in terms of thrownness.⁶¹ From the time of birth until death the human finds itself already in a situation, within a social and historical context of Being and beings – or as David Hoy writes, “we find ourselves always already in a situation” (TOL 106). The counter-throw is the defining characteristic of man, the awareness of being thrown and the awe and enquiry that is attached to that awareness. Hence Heidegger’s statement that “the ek-sistence of historical man begins at the moment when the first thinker takes a questioning stand with regard to the unconcealment of beings by asking what are beings” (BW, 126)? To be “Da-sein,” then, is not to merely be a subject as “lord of beings,” but rather that being who attends to the question of Being itself. Hence, man is not merely human subjectivity, but the “shepherd of Being” as Heidegger puts it (BW 245).

The shift from Dasein to Da-sein begins in the 1930s with “On the Essence of Truth” and seems to coincide with Heidegger’s withdrawal from public politics and his resignation as Rector of Freiburg University in 1934. My claim is that as Heidegger confronts (in terms of *Auseinandersetzung*) Nietzsche and he moves closer to his mature thoughts on technology, art, and the gods, that “Dasein” and “politics” are seen in a radically new light as a shift from the ontology of Dasein and the classical politics of the Polis to the politics of technology in which Dasein is no longer distinguishable from the machinations of global technology. One key thing to keep in mind during the course of what follows (and precedes) is that Heidegger, in reading the history of thought, has placed Nietzsche at the conclusion of what he calls

⁶¹ See *BT*, 174.

Platonic metaphysics. Heidegger writes, “Nietzsche’s thought, like all Western thought since Plato, is metaphysics” (HR 224). What is meant here by metaphysics, as Heidegger always means it, is the “truth of beings as such and as a whole” or how it is that things show up for us and what they are (HR 224).⁶²Hence, “truth brings that which beings are (essential, beingness) – that they are and how they are within the whole – into the “unconcealed” of the *ιδέα*, *per-ceptio*, of pre-sentation, of consciousness” (HR, 224). What this indicates is that the truth of beings as such and as a whole is historical, is polymorphous, and, as Heidegger maintains, is identifiable in terms of epochs, hence the different terms used to describe the truth of beings and beings as a whole at different points in Occidental history. This “showing up” as the *truth* or unconcealment of beings is an articulation of Being focused, as it were, through the lens of the beings themselves.

In terms of the end of metaphysics and the post-Nietzschean world of technological essentialism, Heidegger (in 1966) reflects that “During the past thirty years [since 1933-4] it should have meanwhile become more evident that the global movement of modern technology is a force whose scope in determining history can hardly be overestimated. It is a decisive question for me today how any political system can be assigned to the current technological age – and if so, which system” (DS 324)? While the treatment of technology is in the following chapter, it is important to point out that Heidegger is saying two very key things here. In the first part of this statement Heidegger points out that global technology can “hardly be

⁶² See Ch. 2 on *aletheia*

overestimated.” This suggests that Heidegger thinks there is a tendency towards underestimation concerning the role and significance of the technological in the direction and directing of human history. The second part of the statement suggests that politics, as the West has been thinking politics, is no longer tenable given the formless rendering of beings in the face of technology (*Ge-Stell*). This suggests that the “technological” challenges humanity to rethink its position both in respect to the political relation between mankind and the understanding of Being, but also in how we encounter beings and each other. The implication here is that the traditional political systems along with conception of “what is,” i.e. the history of metaphysics up to this Nietzschean age of nihilism, cannot encompass or deal with the ontological monstrosity called technology, which flattens both world and human out into indiscernible materials to be set aside and used. This is important to keep in mind in this following chapter because it gives us an idea of where Heidegger is headed from his 1930s involvement with the Nazi party and his politically charged lectures, through the metaphorical tunnel of confrontation with Nietzsche, to emerge on the other side with a new thought and understanding of the world as having moved into a heretofore unprecedented and also unrecognized political era of post-Nietzschean technological essentialism.

The characterizing theme of this project stems, again, from a statement in Heidegger’s middle period: the assertion that “the understanding of Being belongs to Dasein” (IM 31/EM 22). What this means for me, and what sets the tone for this overall engagement, is that for the human Da-sein to be as such – for Being to be

significant to it – means to be political. And to be political, in turn, means for Dasein to engage with what it is to be.⁶³ So, to establish a new “inception,” a new “history,” or a move away from metaphysics, means not only to begin a new history by re-establishing and redefining the categories of Being, but also to usher in a new politics – both in terms of the political relation between mankind and the understanding of Being, but, in turn, in how we encounter beings and each other.

As established in chapter 1, Heidegger’s engagement with the “truth of Being” informs what is considered “political.” But in the years during the Nietzsche lectures we see Heidegger moving away from the attempts to “reground” the German “spirit” in polis-centered Greek politics. Instead Heidegger begins to lay the ground for what will become the politics of technology. This is motivated by his observations already in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* of contemporary world events and the attendant politics (especially “Americanism,” communism, and, later, he includes Nazism as well) as symptoms of a nihilistic, technologically driven civilization. Dreyfus observes that “Heidegger’s political engagement was predicated upon his interpretation of the situation in the West as technological nihilism. . .”⁶⁴ What is important about this statement, for now, is that it very clearly links Heidegger’s conception of politics with how Being and beings are understood.

⁶³ Although this issue is not yet addressed in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, the distinction between questioning the Being of beings and the event of Being (in the verbal sense, the action of Be-ing) or “enowning” (*ereignis*) is already taking shape for Heidegger. For further discussion see Polt “The Question of nothing” (2001). 58

⁶⁴ Hubert Dreyfus “Nihilism, Technology, Art, and Politics.” *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. CharlseGuignon ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 311

Paralleling Heidegger's career as a thinker, the pivotal section of this work comes in the middle and is concerned with Heidegger's famous and controversial reading of Nietzsche. It is not until Heidegger has confronted Nietzsche that he is able to articulate his thoughts on technology – an interpretation that is problematically entangled with politics. Hence, the statement made by the late (and questionably self-revisionist) Heidegger that “The Nietzsche lectures began in 1936. All of those with ears to hear heard that this was a confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with National Socialism” (DS 321-322). This entanglement is meant to be a statement on the overall dismal state of the Occident in its “ontological palsy.” For Heidegger this period may have also been one of deep personal revelations as the horrors of World War II and the beginning of the Atomic Age become too apparent to miss or ignore. However, Heidegger's infamous silence concerning atrocities carried out in the name of German National Socialism may be a testament to the contrary.

This third chapter is to move from the discussion of *Auseinandersetzung*, as an important term in Heidegger's thought, to its role in the Nietzsche lectures. Specifically, this chapter is to answer the question of how Heidegger's engagements with Nietzsche are a “confrontation” and what this means in terms of a confrontation with National Socialism. Heidegger's claim is that Nietzsche's thought, in describing metaphysics as Eternally Recurring Will to Power, is a completion of Platonic metaphysics and the character of this metaphysics is nihilism. Heidegger, in calling his engagement with Nietzsche an *Auseinandersetzung* with National Socialism, is, ultimately, to describe how he came to see German National Socialism (not to

mention all other global politics) as the ultimate expression or manifestation of Nietzschean nihilism. This nihilism is later articulated by Heidegger in terms of *Ge-Stell* or “enframing” in “The Question Concerning Technology.” The *Ge-Stell* for Heidegger indicates a “truth of Being” or how Being is encountered by technologically minded mankind. This in turn presses Heidegger more than ever before to articulate a new “inception” or to think outside Western metaphysics.

III.I

Heidegger begins his 1936 lecture course by characterizing the engagement with Nietzsche as a confrontation, stating that “confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) is genuine criticism. It is the supreme way, to a true estimation of a thinker. In confrontation we undertake to reflect on his thinking and to trace it in its effective force, not its weakness. To what purpose? In order that through the confrontation we ourselves might become free for the supreme exertion of thinking” (N1 4-5/ N I, 13). With this characterization of the engagement with Nietzsche we get a clue to Heidegger’s later statement (above) about the Nietzsche lectures as a “confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with National Socialism.” Is this to say that National Socialism, like the thought of Nietzsche, is seen by Heidegger as a symptom of Western metaphysics that is characterized by and ultimately manifests itself as technological nihilism? Absolutely. Some might quip that it is one thing to read Nietzsche metaphysically (which is a questionable endeavor in itself), but to go further and characterize the Nazi movement, and hence the atrocities associated with

it, as a manifestation of Heidegger's ontological diagnosis of the West is quite another.⁶⁵ While this relation asserted by Heidegger may seem radical, it is consistent with his overall thought and, if anything, provides insight into his later thought.

For Heidegger, Nietzsche is, at bottom, a metaphysician. This seems odd, since Nietzsche seems to have addressed a myriad of topics over the course of his "productive" years. Along with criticisms of metaphysics, the revered philologist engaged religion (especially Christianity), politics, aesthetics, psychology, biology, physics, and positivism. For his purposes, though, Heidegger saw it necessary to "flush out" these other ruminations from his exegesis, seeing them as aspects of Nietzsche's thought that are "disagreements, contradictions, oversights, and overhasty and often superficial and random (*Zufällige*)" (N1,66/ NI, 79; translation altered). Hans Sluga notes that Heidegger, in setting aside considerations of Nietzsche's biologism – the considerations of metabolism, blood, digestion, and perhaps ancestry – may be distinguishing himself from contemporary, politically charged readings of Nietzsche, stating "There cannot be any doubt that Heidegger's remarks are meant here to critique National Socialist readings of Nietzsche as a biological racist."⁶⁶ Indeed, Heidegger, in addressing Nietzsche's biologism, makes a case for reading the famous philologist metaphysically rather than in other ways, stating, "We must first unlearn this abuse that is supported by current catchwords like *biologism*. We must learn to 'read'" (N3, 47/NI 527). Whether this critique is meant to characterize these

⁶⁵ See Habermas "The Undermining of Western Rationalism through the Critique of Metaphysics: Martin Heidegger" in PDM

⁶⁶Sluga, Hans "Heidegger's Nietzsche" in *A Companion to Heidegger*. Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 107.

aspects of Nietzsche's thought or specifically the contemporary readings of Nietzsche's "biologism" as "hasty and random" is unclear, but it does seem that Heidegger is distancing himself from things like Nietzsche's engagement and fascination with Darwinism or biological evolution and natural selection as evidence of a "Will to Power." In either case, these things are not the focus of Heidegger. What we do get is that Heidegger characterized Nietzsche as one among the "essential" thinkers who, as essential thinkers, think "one single thought, a thought that is always 'about' beings *as a whole*" (N4, 4/ NI, 475). That is, i.e., to have a metaphysical thought. This gives us a clue as to where Nietzsche will consistently look back to and, for that matter, Heidegger as well – the source of Western metaphysics, the Greeks.

Nietzsche, however, famously rejected the concept of being as "the last smoke of evaporating reality,"⁶⁷ vacuous as a concept and indicating nothing. How does Heidegger read Nietzsche and his thoughts on metaphysics, then, as about "beings as a whole?" Indeed, a year before the beginning of the Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger criticizes Nietzsche as having become entangled in a "confusion of the representation of values" that prevents him from reaching the "genuine center of philosophy," i.e. inquiries into Being (IM 213-214/EM 152). However, it is in this critical view of Nietzsche that Heidegger is able to interpret Nietzsche as in-fact diagnosing the state of Being in Western history (IM 38-39/EM 27-28). The overall claim is that in characterizing "being" as the "last smoke of evaporating reality," Nietzsche is giving

⁶⁷ Nietzsche *Twilight of the Idols: Portable Nietzsche*, 481-482.

an indication of the relationship of modern Western mankind to Being and that this relationship is crippled. In communicating this and in having become entangled in value representation, Heidegger sees Nietzsche consummating the history of Occidental metaphysics. It is because of this consummation that Heidegger finds Nietzsche to be central in understanding the modern world.⁶⁸ Heidegger sees the relation between mankind and Being as becoming ever more tenuous in the post-Nietzschean world. That is not to say that Nietzsche did not talk about beings (entities). As a metaphysical thinker, Heidegger sees Nietzsche following the course of Western history in which “metaphysics thinks beings as a whole according to their priority over Being” (N3, 7/N1, 478). It is in his expression of will to power that Heidegger sees Nietzsche as the metaphysical thinker, or the thinker who thinks beings as a whole (N3, 7/N1, 478).

The confrontation with Nietzsche is characterized by Heidegger as the following: 1) Nietzsche interpreted Platonic metaphysics (“Platonism”) as the setting-out of contemporary nihilism. 2) Nietzsche’s method in response to this nihilism is to stand Platonism “on its head.” 3) Nietzsche’s method, while an attempt to “twist free” of Platonism, is in-fact still within the purview of Platonic metaphysics. 4) That Nietzsche is, as a result, a completion or end (as the latest) of Platonic metaphysics (i.e. Occidental nihilism), expressed as “eternally recurring will to power,” the “will

⁶⁸Sluga puts Heidegger’s contentions with Nietzsche very eloquently, “Heidegger argues that we cannot make intrinsically valueless things valuable by an act of human willing” and further down the page “But when we look carefully at his lectures in the 1930s and 1940s we see that he became increasingly more convinced of the importance of Nietzsche for understanding the modern world” “Heidegger’s Nietzsche” 106

to will” or simply as a metaphysics of “will.” 5) This latest and final expression of the multifarious epochs of Platonic metaphysics is the “essence” of technology.

Towards the end of his “productive years,” Nietzsche quipped, “and how many gods are still possible?”⁶⁹ This brings to mind Heidegger’s invocation of savior gods in the face of contemporary technology “only a god can save us,” but also hints at the depth and complexity of these two easily overlooked remarks: they are both uttered with an eye towards an overcoming of what is seen as nihilism. This nihilism is the inevitable outcome and is at the heart of what is considered to be the metaphysics of Plato and Platonism. The primary and most poignant discussion of this by Nietzsche we find in *Twilight of the Idols* under “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable” and in *Will to Power* III 567-568. In these passages Nietzsche discusses the history of the “true” and “apparent” worlds as originally put forth by Plato. On Nietzsche’s reading, the metaphysics of Plato puts forth the world of the senses and the things that one encounters in an everyday sense as the “apparent” world. This is contrasted by the “true” world of Platonic forms of which the sensible things are merely imperfect instances of.⁷⁰ On Nietzsche’s reading this was the first and the beginning of six epochs in which the metaphysics of Plato reveals itself in different and progressively more nuanced ways of which the latest

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich *The Will to Power*. Walter Kaufmann trans. (New York: Random House, 1967).534 [1038].

⁷⁰ This is in reference to the first epoch identified by Nietzsche: “The true world – attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, *he is it*.”

(The oldest form of an idea, relatively sensible, simple, and persuasive. A circumlocution for the sentence, ‘I, Plato, am the truth.’)” From *Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans, and ed. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Penguin, 1976. 485

manifests itself as what he calls nihilism. Nietzsche's ultimate response to this latest of epochs is to "reground" the metaphysics of Plato. He does this by proposing that meaning be revalued and placed in the sensuous realm (the "apparent" world).

Nietzsche's new grounding of the sensuous, rightly pointed out by Marylou Sena in "Nietzsche's New Grounding of the Metaphysical," is Heidegger's point of confrontation (*Aus-einandersetzung*) with Nietzsche's thought "by giving an account of what Heidegger calls the 'feast of Nietzsche's thought' as it 'twists free' from the grounding principles of Plato *and* Platonism."⁷¹ What this means is that Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche is characterized by an analysis of Nietzsche's so-called inversion of Platonism as a regrounding of the metaphysical in the sensuous world in which "the sensuous becomes the true, the suprasensuous the semblant, world" N3, 176/NII, 22). Ultimately, Heidegger will claim that even Nietzsche's attempts to "twist free" are in vain (Instead, Heidegger will effectively add a seventh epoch to the six of Platonism dubbed Nietzschean or "technological" nihilism, in which the West is still entangled). Again, Marylou Sena rightly points this out (p. 141). However, her claim concerning Nietzsche and the calling of new gods is centered on Nietzsche's early work *The Birth of Tragedy*, which, she claims, is evidence that Nietzsche had a developed understanding and reformulation of Platonic metaphysics at this time. This is contrary to Heidegger's claim that Nietzsche had only come to this in his final year of lucidity (1888) (N1 202). While it is arguable that the early

⁷¹ Marylou Sena, "Nietzsche's New Grounding of the Metaphysical: Sensuousness and the Subversion of Plato and Platonism." *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 34, pp. 139-159, 2004. 141

Nietzsche understood Plato and Platonism to be “the one turning point and vortex of so-called world history,”⁷² it is not possible to claim that Nietzsche had developed his thoughts on eternal recurrence and will to power at this early stage.⁷³

Rather, Heidegger interprets the body of Nietzsche’s work in a holistic manner. This means that while Nietzsche’s early work does indeed bring up some of the very issues concerning Platonic metaphysics, that the thoughts were early and not developed enough to serve as an inversion and regrounding. The later thoughts on eternal recurrence, will to power, the overman, and nihilism are all part and parcel of Nietzsche’s confrontation with Platonism and Christianity. While Sena is correct to point out an early engagement with Platonism on the part of Nietzsche, her claim that Heidegger is not right to date this engagement so late in Nietzsche’s productive years

⁷²Sena quotes this passage as “occidental history” from the Kaufmann translation. The phrase translated by Kaufmann reads “so-called history.” Additionally, in this passage Nietzsche is addressing “Socrates” rather than “Platonism.” While it certainly could be argued that Socrates is the voice of Platonism, it is not clear that Nietzsche intended this passage to be read in terms of Platonism or the character of Socrates as apart from Plato. See p. 141 of “Nietzsche’s New Grounding of the Metaphysical.” Also see Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, Walter Kaufmann trans. (Vintage: New York, 1967) 96.

⁷³In her essay, Sena agrees with Heidegger that Nietzsche inverts Platonic metaphysics and then regrounds it. However, her claim is that Nietzsche successfully inverts and regrounds as early as the 1872 work *Birth of Tragedy*, while Heidegger maintains that Nietzsche does not complete this until 1888-89. This discrepancy is important in that it offers two radically divergent ways of reading Nietzsche. On the one hand, if we follow Sena’s claims, it is then not clear what Nietzsche’s subsequent thought encompasses. We are left with questions about what is at stake in the rest of Nietzsche’s thought. That is, what is the eternal recurrence? How do we understand will to power? What are we to do with his late critiques of Platonism as nihilism? Additionally, if Nietzsche had already successfully confronted Platonism, inverted it, regrounded it, and opened the way for new gods (in this case Dionysus), what would he have left to talk about? Platonism and its relative Christianity are central themes for Nietzsche in his later years. Nietzsche paid special attention to both Platonic conceptions of truth and Christian morality in his late works – all themes that motivate and are worked through in *Twilight of the Idols*, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, *Genealogy of Morals*, *Antichrist*. In other words, if Sena’s reading is followed and Nietzsche has already dealt with Plato, then we are left with the majority of the work of Nietzsche as redundant (e.g. *The Antichrist*, *Twilight of the Idols*) and a jumble of non-cohesive doctrines (e.g. eternal recurrence and will to power).

is misdirected. That is, Heidegger is not making the claim that the engagement of 1888-89 in *Twilight of the Idols* and *Will to Power* are Nietzsche's only engagement with Platonic metaphysics, but that it is only after having thought nihilism as Platonism (death of God in *Gay Science*) and thought the eternal recurrence and will to power and having thought the last man of the old era and the overman ushering in the new era, that he can be said to have brought his thought to cohesion.⁷⁴ Hence, Heidegger makes the claim that the later engagements constitute a "final step" in Nietzsche's thought (N1 202). This final step is, for Heidegger, the last step in coming to an understanding and realization of the implications of Platonism on the direction and character of Western history.

In contrast to Sena, Ullrich Haase makes the observation that Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche "serves to elevate his [Nietzsche's] thought until it is understood as the end of metaphysics in the double sense of that word, or even as the fate of European history. For Heidegger, thus, everything is at stake in his interpretation of Nietzsche and only from this perspective does his presumed remark 'Nietzsche has ruined me,' make any sense at all."⁷⁵ The "ruining" also points to Heidegger's realization that in the course of reading of Nietzsche that *any and all* parts of his older project, articulated in *Being and Time* as "fundamental ontology," is still within the purview of the history of Western metaphysics and must be completely abandoned if he is to even point to a possibility of a "new" inception of Western history. The

⁷⁴ See HR 226 "'The will to power,' 'nihilism,' 'the eternal return of the same,' the 'Übermensch,' and 'justice' are the five basic terms of Nietzsche's metaphysics."

⁷⁵ Ullrich Haase "Dike and Justitia, or: Between Heidegger and Nietzsche." *Journal for the British Society of Phenomenology* Vol. 38 no.1 January, 2007. pp. 18-36. 20

attendant consequence of this is that any thought on “regrounding” of German (or even Western) spirit (as Heidegger articulates in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*) must also be abandoned. This means, in terms of the distinction between ontological politics and outward or “ontic” politics, that if the old metaphysics must be abandoned, hence the old ontology, so must the hope that any system of politics devised before establishing a new “history” will be within the purview of what Nietzsche and Heidegger call Platonic nihilism, which gets articulated later as technology or, as I read it, “technological politics.”

III.II

In the exegesis of these passages, Heidegger notes that “Nietzsche divides the history into six parts, which can be readily recognized as the most important epochs of Western thought, and which lead directly to the doorstep of Nietzsche’s philosophy proper” (N 1, 202). This indicates Heidegger’s positioning of Nietzsche at the end of the history of Platonism and the view that all metaphysics (i.e. Western thought) has been under the purview of Plato and Platonism. The first and incipient epoch is Plato proper and is read by Nietzsche as the beginning of the distinction between what is the “apparent” world of everyday phenomena and experience and the “true” world that is beyond the merely physical and everyday. This is the world according to Plato’s forms, the world that is articulated as that which lies outside Plato’s allegorical cave and which is attainable first and foremost by the philosopher.

Heidegger also recognizes a point at which Plato is distinguished from what became “Platonism,” or the radicalization of the concept of the suprasensuous world.

On the second of the six epochs identified by Nietzsche,⁷⁶ Heidegger writes, “the whole of human existence becomes this-worldly to the extent that the suprasensuous is interpreted as the ‘beyond.’ In that way the true world now becomes even truer, by being displaced ever farther beyond and away from this world; it grows ever stronger in being, the more it becomes what is promised and the more zealously it is embraced, i.e. believed in, as what is promised. If we compare the second part of history to the first, we see how Nietzsche in his description of the first part consciously sets Plato apart from all Platonism, protecting him from it” (NI, 205/NI, 234). Why is distinguishing Plato from Platonism important? For Nietzsche it could be to preserve Plato as a philosopher who pioneered a thought as metaphysics that morphed well beyond its original inception.

Nietzsche does not see Plato as problematic in terms of the nihilism he has identified; rather, he sees the appropriation of Plato’s thought, “Platonism,” as the reason for the nihilism he has identified. “Platonism” is meant to denote the concept of “form” and “idea” radicalized and later reformulated in terms of the Christian concept “heaven” - the attainment of which becomes the sole purpose of and goal of earthly existence. Hence, Nietzsche’s famous and insightful quip that Christianity is

⁷⁶ See Nietzsche “The History of an Error” “the true world – unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man (‘for the sinner who repents) (Progress of the idea: it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible – *it becomes female*, it becomes Christian.) *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Penguin, 1976. 485

“Platonism for the people.”⁷⁷ For Heidegger this observation by Nietzsche is important because it is an indication supporting his claims that all world conception (of the West) is metaphysically rooted. That is, the predominant theological position of the West is Platonic in origin. Additionally, this reinforces Heidegger’s conception of metaphysics as historical: “If . . . the metaphysics that belongs to the history of Being itself is labeled with the name of a thinker (*Plato’s* metaphysics, *Kant’s* metaphysics), then this does not mean that in each case metaphysics is the achievement and property, or even the basic distinction, of these thinkers as figures of ‘cultural creation’” (HR 225). Rather, that Kant or Plato articulated what they have as metaphysics is done so only in that the conditions of ontological interpretation as per their articulation are already present; they are the mouthpieces through which an already appearing world conception is articulated.

With this in mind, in the third of six epochs of Platonic metaphysics, Nietzsche identifies Kantian metaphysics (the “Königsbergian”) as a further radicalization of the true world as opposed to the apparent world. The apparent world of phenomena is the best we can hope to encounter whereas the true world of noumena is “unattainable, indemonstrable.”⁷⁸ In Kant’s words, “we neither know nor can know anything at all definite of these pure objects of the understanding, because our pure concepts of the understanding as well as our pure intuitions extend to nothing but objects of possible experience, consequently to mere things of sense, and

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966). 3.

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Portable Nietzsche*, 485.

as soon as we leave this sphere these concepts retain no meaning whatsoever.”⁷⁹ This placement of the “true” world (hence, “*ding-an-sich*”) as not only the “beyond” of Platonism, but also as no longer attainable is the moment identified by Nietzsche’s Madman as the death of God. It is in the subsequent epochs that the true world becomes the “true world,” hence a fable that is no longer taken seriously. The “true world” becomes, in Nietzsche’s words, “abolished.” But in this, the apparent world is also swept away. What remains? A decision remains. Nietzsche, describing the final epoch in his Zarathustrian vernacular of “Noon; moment of the shortest shadow,”⁸⁰ is identifying a time to either perish as the “last man” of the old metaphysics or overcome as the diametrically opposed *Übermensch* who, as Heidegger points out, does not mean “some miraculous, fabulous being, but the man who surpasses former man” (N 1, 208), thus implying what Nietzsche comes to coin as a higher history.

One question immediately arises: if the apparent world of sensuousness is abolished along with the “true world,” then what remains? Positivism? Let us not forget that Nietzsche is an advocate of the sensuous, of affirming life in this world rather than looking to a beyond of Christian heaven or Platonic forms. These epochs are meant to trace a history of nihilism that is *inherent* in the metaphysics of Plato and Platonism. In Heidegger’s estimation, Nietzsche meets this challenge head on by considering a world of sensuousness that is not a manifestation of Platonism, but a

⁷⁹ Kant, Immanuel *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics That Can Qualify as a Science*. Trans. Paul Carus. (Chicago: Open court, 1995). 76.

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Portable Nietzsche*. 486.

“new interpretation of the sensuous on the basis of a new hierarchy. . . To that extent, overturning Platonism must become a twisting free of it” (N 1, 209-210).

The regrounding of the metaphysical in the “sensuous world,” as described by Nietzsche, would take the form of “an ever greater spiritualization and multiplication of the senses. This would need to be the case if mankind is to “twist free” of the vacuum presented by Platonism “for in this way he holds firmly to the great conception of man, that man becomes the transfigurer of his existence when he learns to transfigure himself,”⁸¹ rather than the animal who is relegated to a meaningless physical existence, whose “meaning,” as it were, stands outside the purview of what is most readily accessible, i.e. Earthly existence. For Nietzsche, this is not just a critique of Christian values, but also one of “science.” In section 25 of the Fifth Book of *Gay Science*⁸² Nietzsche characterizes Platonism as the matrix of Western thought. The heart of Nietzsche’s critique maintains that the very concept of “truth,” as presupposed by modern science (hence, “objective truth”), is no different from the suprasensuous God of Christianity – it is something which grounds a worldly conception and seemingly gives meaning to scientific endeavors, but is itself suprasensuous and, hence vacuous. In his own words, Nietzsche writes, “it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests – that even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too from the

⁸¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich *The Will to Power*. Trans Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968) 434 [820].

⁸² Among other places. See all of Book Five of *Gay Science*. Also, Essay Three of *Genealogy of Morals*, esp. section 24. Book Three of *Will to Power*. There are many more, but these are very poignant sections worth looking over.

flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, the truth is divine.”⁸³

Nietzsche’s response to this observation about even our modern “scientific” truth comes in the form of Eternal return of the same. Heidegger designates Nietzsche’s doctrine of the eternal return of the same as the “fundamental doctrine in Nietzsche’s philosophy” (N2 6). Later, in explicating the “ontotheological” nature of metaphysics, Heidegger will identify the eternal recurrence as the theological aspect (the “divine” truth) of Nietzsche’s thought, thus categorizing him as still enmeshed in the Platonic metaphysics that he sought to reverse or escape. On this, Heidegger observes that “metaphysics is the rubric indicative of philosophy proper; it always has to do with a philosophy’s fundamental thought” (N2 185). What this means is that the eternal return of the same is taken by Heidegger to be the fundamental metaphysical position of Nietzsche and is, thus, the thought by which Nietzsche stands Platonism on its head and regrounds metaphysics in what has been designated the “sensuous” in an attempt to overcome what he sees as historical nihilism. In other words, the eternal return is how the world is structured as such for Nietzsche – it is Nietzsche’s “truth.” It is the “how” beings are as opposed to “what” (N3, 212/N1, 287). The nihilism Nietzsche expresses in the famous passage 125 in *The Gay Science* entitled “The Madman” in which the statement “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him,”⁸⁴ expresses the collapse of the believability of the “true world.”⁸⁵ It is a

⁸³ Nietzsche, Friedrich *The Gay Science*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). 283 [342].

⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*. 181 (125)

few aphorisms later in *Gay Science* that Nietzsche offers what he considers his response to Platonic nihilism - it is in the first communication of the eternal recurrence in 341, "The Greatest Weight."

The communication of eternal return seems to suggest that the 'machinery' (world) in which we live, are, say, "a part of," is so large that the loss of "me" or the disappearance of "me" is insignificant. Therefore, my "achievements" are important only to me, not the cosmos, not "God," and not nature. The eternal return is based on natural cycles – it is "in the face of" eternally recurring sunrise and sunset that Nietzsche presents the eternal recurrence as something to accept or deny. For Zarathustra the thought of the eternal return strikes at mid-day or noon, which (discussed above) signifies a time of decision for Western mankind – the decision of affirmation or denial; hence, of remaining as the last man of a nihilistic civilization or the *Übermensch* of a new historical epoch. So, we see in Nietzsche's explication of the eternal return that it is an issue of mankind – where and how mankind is situated in the world – that is, this world, the sensuous world, not the Platonic world of the "beyond." Hence, we have arrived at eternal recurrence as an attempt to "reground" a metaphysics (i.e. the meaning, significance, "reality" of world as such) – hence aphorism 341 is entitled "*The Greatest Weight*."

⁸⁵ See N3 203, "Insofar as metaphysics received a particular theological stamp through Christianity, the devaluation of the highest values hitherto must also be expressed theologically through the statement 'God is dead.' Here 'God' means the suprasensuous realm in general, which as the 'true' and eternal world 'beyond,' proclaims itself in opposition to this 'earthly' world the only visible goal."

The term “world” is important for Nietzsche, because it is through world that Nietzsche signifies that which mankind occupies - the world of the Platonic “last man” as opposed to the world of the “overman” and higher history. It is not that Nietzsche means “world” solely in terms of individual human experience or as a physical entity distinct from and apart from humans. Instead, “world” is constituted as an entanglement between human kind and the surroundings he finds himself in, i.e. how mankind is situated. Nietzsche writes, “the world, apart from our condition of living in it, the world that we have not reduced to our being, our logic and psychological prejudices, does not exist as a world ‘in-itself.’”⁸⁶ Here Nietzsche is taking an obvious stab at Kant, but also addressing anthropomorphism – “world,” then, is only world insofar as it is interpreted by humans. There is no “world” apart from the one mankind finds itself in, hence no world “in-itself.” This is not to say that things would not exist as such without humankind, but that “world” would be inapplicable. That world is not as such without humans, hence “questions, what things ‘in-themselves’ may be like, apart from our sense receptivity and the activity of our understanding, must be rebutted with the question: how could we know that things exist? ‘Thingness’ was first created by us.”⁸⁷ Nietzsche rejects the distinction between “true” and “apparent” worlds, or the apparentness of the senses as distinguished from the “true” world, which is inaccessible to the senses, e.g. the

⁸⁶Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Will to Power*. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale trans. Kaufmann Ed. (Vintage Books: New York, NY, 1967) p. 306 [568]

⁸⁷ Ibid. 307 [569]

thing-in-itself or the notion of a world beyond that in which we live in an everyday sense.⁸⁸

In this discussion concerning worlds Nietzsche is not abolishing appearance, but addresses it to remind us that appearance is a uniquely human capacity, a way that something appears is the way we interpret the world, hence “The question is whether there could not be many other ways of creating such an apparent world – and whether this creating, logicizing, adapting, falsifying is not itself the best-guaranteed reality.”⁸⁹ It is this interpretation that creates what we call world, thus “What we *make of* their [the senses] testimony, that alone introduces lies; for example, the lie of unity, the lie of thinghood, of substance, of permanence.”⁹⁰ Here, Nietzsche is addressing two aspects of what he calls appearance 1) That the way things appear is a (uniquely human) interpretation and 2) in that interpretation, “creating,” we must consider that there may be more than one way to form “world.” It appears, then, that what is put forth as world is an interpretation among alternative possible interpretations. This discussion is meant to emphasize our interpretation and metaphysical entanglement with the world as something we *take as such and such* or something that we *posit value upon*. It is the Platonic world, the world in which truth hovers beyond reach and becomes inaccessible and eventually more of a fiction than a reality, which has lost value – hence Nietzsche’s statement on the meaning of

⁸⁸ See Nietzsche *Twilight of the Idols* “‘Reason in Philosophy.’” And *Will to Power* sections 568-569

⁸⁹ Ibid. 307 [569]

⁹⁰ From *Twilight of the Idols* “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” 2. Nietzsche, Friedrich *The Portable Nietzsche*, Walter Kaufmann trans., ed. (Penguin Books: NY, NY, 1982) p.480

nihilism “*That the highest values devalue themselves.*”⁹¹ Nietzsche sees that a new world must be posited, that a new truth that springs forth from the challenge of the “Greatest Weight” of eternal return must be affirmed. For Nietzsche it is the overman who is to establish this higher history through positing new values, i.e. new *truth* that is not of the Platonic variety.

III.III

As suggested above, positing of value is central to Nietzsche. If the eternal return of the same is the doctrine by which Nietzsche calls for the existential locus of meaning to be relocated in *this* world, it is the thought of the Will to Power that is the “Principle of a New Valuation,” as the subtitle of Nietzsche’s posthumously published collection *Will to Power* indicates. What does Nietzsche mean by value? On Heidegger’s reading, value for Nietzsche means “a condition of life, a condition of life’s being ‘alive.’ In Nietzsche’s thinking *life* is usually the term for what is and for beings as a whole insofar as they are. Occasionally, however, it also means *our* life in a special sense, which is to say, the Being of man” (N3, 15/NI, 488). What this does for the discussion is that it gives a way to determine what beings are – they are will to power. That is to say, beings as a whole are valued in terms of that which “enhances” life whereas those conditions which “hinder” life are seen as “*unvalues*” (*Unwerte*). Given this, we are also to understand that conditions merely aimed at life-

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*. Walter Kaufmann trans. (New York: Vintage, 1967) 9

preservation are seen as hindrances in that they do not serve to enhance (N3, 16-17/NI, 489-490).

In a certain light it seems very easy to interpret the will to power as anthropocentric, but it is not. Nietzsche is not speaking of will in terms of strictly human will, although the human animal may be the highest expression of will to power. Will to power is essentially the striving of all things (not just “living”) to grow in strength for the sake of growing in strength. The will to power is, then, a process of continual and unceasing “Becoming” (N3, 193-200/NII 263-272). Nietzsche’s mankind is the highest expression of the will to power because mankind has the ability to think the eternal recurrence and affirm it or deny it, hence the overman who sees and affirms that “Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being. Everything dies, everything blossoms again; eternally runs the year of being. . . . eternally the same house of being is built.”⁹²

It is uniquely Heidegger’s reading that conjoins the eternal return and the will to power as the doctrine and the thought that belong in unity. For Heidegger,

“Will to power” says *what* a being as such is, namely, what it is in its constitution. “Eternal return of the same” says *how* being is as a whole when it is so constituted. The “how” of the Being of all beings is determined in tandem with the “what.” The “how” affirms from the outset *that* every being at every moment receives the character of its “that” (its “factuality”) from its “how” (N3, 212/NII,

⁹² Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra III “The Convalescent”*. Walter Kaufmann trans. Ed. *The Portable Nietzsche*. (Penguin Books: New York, NY, 1982) 329

Heidegger has here effectively brought to fruition his contention that Nietzsche is at bottom a metaphysical thinker. On this reading, the eternal return and will to power provide the horizon with which beings show what they are. That is to say that Heidegger has provided Nietzsche's thesis on Being. Within this horizon, Heidegger claims, beings show themselves as they are, as "Becoming." Heidegger asserts this in the face of his earlier claim that Nietzsche never asked the question of Being and was therefore unable to reach the "center" of philosophy. How are we to understand this? Nietzsche both missed the center, but somehow did not miss it? Again we must remember that in making this statement Heidegger also claims that Nietzsche is diagnosing modern mankind's relation to Being – Being is, hence, left unasked and therefore passed over. It is in considering Heidegger's reading in this light that seems to present problems. That is, Heidegger is arranging Nietzsche's thought in the way he thinks Nietzsche *should* have thought. Heidegger has arranged Nietzsche's thought in such a way that we do get a picture of Being and that picture is as eternally recurring will to power.

III.IV

Is Heidegger making a mistake in reading Nietzsche the way he is? Is it possible to claim that Heidegger, in reading Nietzsche's thesis on Being, is missing Nietzsche for his own project? This must be seriously considered. However, is it really possible to read any thinker as they "intended?" Can we read Nietzsche and make an objective claim to the accuracy and faithfulness of the reading? If this was something that was

possible, it wouldn't help very much, because it would undermine the entire point of thinking and nullify the importance of any thinker for whatever age in which we engage. In other words, whether the reading of Nietzsche by Heidegger is "true" is to miss the entire point of Heidegger's reading. Sluga reminds us that "neither Nietzsche, nor Heidegger is, in fact, committed to the idea that there can only be one correct reading of a text."⁹³ It is arguable that this sort of position allows for any sort of reading. However, this is the purpose of treating *Auseinandersetzung* as a central aspect of Heidegger's overall thought. That is, Heidegger is *confronting* Nietzsche in terms of his own thought and in his own historical position. The character of the confrontation is political in two ways: 1) *Auseinandersetzung* at bottom is always a confrontation, debate, or engagement that always involves a totality of the complex of human relations. 2) That it is an approach that allows Heidegger to explain the history of metaphysics in a way that attempts to give an account of contemporary events as arising from the ontological problems he has identified in the old metaphysics. The reading of Nietzsche as the last metaphysician is not a claim that elucidates Nietzsche's thought as *he* "originally" intended. It is, rather, how Nietzsche shows up under the light of Heidegger's thought. It is the Nietzsche we get from the *Auseinandersetzung* that is at issue and reveals what is at stake for Heidegger and his time. The Nietzsche that shows up in the confrontation is the Nietzsche who, despite his attempts to "twist free" of the metaphysical history identified as Platonism, is still entangled.

⁹³Sluga, "Heidegger's Nietzsche," 118.

For Heidegger, that which ensnares Nietzsche is precisely the thing that Nietzsche proposes as a means of overcoming Platonism and regrounding it – reevaluation. That is to say, values. We have two very key statements made by Heidegger that illuminate what is meant by this. The first reads, “Being itself necessarily remains unthought in metaphysics. Metaphysics is a history in which there is essentially nothing to Being itself: metaphysics as such is *nihilism* proper” (N4, 211/NII, 350). The second passage reads, “The nothing of Being itself is sealed in the interpretation of Being as value” (N4, 219/NII, 360). The first statement informs the second statement and gives us a sense of the history of metaphysics of which Heidegger understands Nietzsche to be the latest and culminating figure. What does it mean to say that Being remains unthought in metaphysics? Isn’t metaphysics the very study and articulation of Being? To say that Being remains unthought in Western metaphysics is to say that Being is not engaged as Being. As Heidegger famously quipped in 1935, “Everywhere we are underway with beings, and yet we no longer know how it stands with Being” (IM, 217/EM, 155). It is with this in mind that Heidegger reads Nietzsche’s statement about the last wisps of Being. Being is not addressed. There has been no inquiry about Being, while metaphysics in its epochal transformations incessantly discusses the constitution of beings. This is why Nietzsche never made the connection between will to power and eternal return. It was there, but remained hidden for him. This is to say that Being as such has not been handled as “Being” but rather as many other things, e.g. “substance,” “form,” “the transcendent,” “existentia,” “causa prima.” ”Hence,” Heidegger states, “Does

metaphysics state Being itself? No, it never does. It thinks *the being* with a view to Being” (N4, 207/NII, 345). What this indicates is that the Being of beings is only ever engaged indirectly through the engagement with beings and so is never recognized as fundamental.

This discussion is within the realm of what Heidegger infamously coined as “ontotheology.” That is, Heidegger gives to Western metaphysics two aspects to the question “What is the being?” to which the response is that “the truly existing is thought at the same time with respect to *essential* and *existentia*. In that way, the being is determined *as such*; that is, determined as to *what it is* and to the fact *that it is*” (N4, 207/NII, 345). In asking the question “what is a being” we are in fact asking two very specific questions. The first is the ontological and answers what that being is as such (*essentia* or what its essence is). The second question is theological and responds to the fundamental or grounding question. That is to say, in engaging the question of the being, the question of Being is inherently asked – the question of *existential* or that which allows it to fundamentally be as such. The *existential* responds to the question “what is the highest and therefore the grounding Being of all beings?”⁹⁴ This has been characterized as a metaphysical double grounding so-to-speak. As Iain Thomson points out, there are many ontotheological pairings in the history of metaphysics.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ For a detailed discussion on ontotheology see Iain Thomson *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Ch.1 pp 7-43.

⁹⁵ Thomson, 2005. 16.

Onto-	Theological
Entities as such	Entities as a whole
Most basic entity	Highest entity
Whatness	Thatness
<i>Kainotaton</i>	<i>Kathalon</i>
<i>Essentia</i>	<i>Existentia</i>
<i>Idea</i> as universal	<i>Idea</i> as paradigm
<i>Deuteraousia</i>	<i>Prôtêousia</i>
<i>Ultima ratio</i>	<i>Causa Prima</i>
<i>Ens commune</i>	<i>Summunens</i>
<i>Quidditas</i> (essentiality)	<i>Quomodo</i> (modality)
Reality	The real
Subjectivity	The subject
The transcendental	The transcendent
Content	Form
Action	Organization

On Heidegger's reading this historical double grounding reaches its final configuration with Nietzsche for whom, as we have now established, has configured the Onto-with will to power and theological with eternal return. That is, "Nietzsche's fundamental experience says that being *is* a being as will to power in the mode of eternal recurrence of the same" (N3, 201/NII, 336). It is in light of this reading that Heidegger makes sense of Nietzsche's fragment 617 in *Will to Power* "To impose

upon becoming the character of being – that is the supreme will to power. . . That *everything recurs* is the closest *approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being. . .*”⁹⁶ Insofar as will to power is the continual affirmation of “life” in terms of growing in strength for the sake of growing in strength, it is connected with “becoming,” which becomes Nietzsche’s description of will to power as the essence of all things (beings). In both parts of the aphorism quoted we see Nietzsche grappling with being and becoming. In this case will to power is becoming and eternal return is the “closest approximation” of Being to becoming. That is to say that as continual becoming, all things (beings) eternally return - that the Being of will to power is eternal return. Hence, Being (*existentia*, eternal return) is only seen through consideration of the being (*essentia*, will to power). In this light, it becomes apparent why Heidegger states, “The recurrence, arrival, and departure of beings, defined as eternal return, everywhere has the character of will to power” (N3 212/NII, 287).

As for the second of the statements we began this section with, we must consider two things. First, as the last words of the first passage indicates, we must address how metaphysics is nihilistic. Second, as for the Nietzschean conception of Being as value, we must address how Being as value is the last of these historical metaphysical conceptions. Looking to the discussion on metaphysics’ historical double grounding, we find that in each “epoch” the conception of both the being and, consequently, Being, have shifted. This could be due, Heidegger questions, to historical conceptions of Being having been superficially grounded; that any given

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*. [617] 330.

historical conception “merely offers the perhaps necessary illusion of a foundation and is thus an unground (*Un-Grund*)” (IM, 3/EM, 2). Iain Thomson recognizes from this that metaphysics is historically and epistemically suspended between “foundation and abyss.”⁹⁷ This abyss is manifested by the selfsame overlooking of the question of Being addressed above. And so, put a bit differently than above, we see that the traditional “double grounding” of Western metaphysics is itself grounded on nothing. That is to say, it is nihilistic.

To further this discussion, Heidegger, in looking towards the question of Being and nihilism, recognizes that he must also tackle the parallel but necessary question of nothing, of non-Being. That is, if we inquire into Being we are automatically also characterizing non-Being. On this, we find Heidegger considering the possibility that the movement of metaphysics towards nihilism “would be that history of metaphysics which is heading toward a fundamental metaphysical position in which the essence of nothing not only cannot be understood but also *will* no longer be understood - nihilism would then be the essential nonthinking of the essence of the nothing” (N4, 22/NII, 54). Here Heidegger suggests that the nihilism inhered in Nietzsche’s thought, the thinker who sought to overcome nihilism, has precisely to do not only with not formulating the question of Being as such, but, simultaneously, not formulating the necessary and opposite question of the *nihil*, (of nothing) which, if posed, may reveal that “the Nothing were in truth not a being but also were simply not void (*Nichtige*)” (translation altered, N4, 22/NII, 54).

⁹⁷Thomson, 2005. 19.

Perhaps this unarticulated question of the nothing is itself the “abyss” of epistemic suspension put forth by Iain Thomson. In this sense the unarticulated question of the nothing as neither “a being” (i.e. saying that “nothing is...” or “this is nothing”) and also not simply lack, or “void” (*Nichtige*) constitutes the nihilism of Nietzsche’s overall thought. That is, the monstrous abyss that famously looks back into Nietzsche⁹⁸ was the abyss left by the unarticulated question of Being and non-Being, the *Un-Grund* that looks back into every great thinker who thinks the “one thought” and so it makes sense when Heidegger concludes that “Nietzsche’s conception of nihilism is itself a nihilistic conception” (translation altered. N4, 22/NII, 54).

But what does this say about Nietzsche’s valuative thought as the conclusion of Western metaphysics? Nietzsche provocatively asserts that “there is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power – assuming that life itself is the will to power.”⁹⁹ That is, the degree to which power overcomes itself for the sake of self-overcoming, for the sake of always *becoming* itself. Or, as Heidegger puts it, “Valuation is the fundamental occurrence of life itself; it’s the way that life brings its essence to fruition and fulfills it” (N3, 61/NI, 544). However, the human animal is unique in seeing the burgeoning of life itself as will to power, thus as value.¹⁰⁰ The human animal posits or chooses certain values over others. On this, Dreyfus notes

⁹⁸Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*aph. 146.

⁹⁹Nietzsche, *Will to Power*. 37 [55].

¹⁰⁰ See Heidegger N2, 223 “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” [*Wer ist Nietzsches Zarathustra?* Vorträge und Aufsätze (Pfulingen: G. Neske, 1954)] “Man is man insofar as he comports himself to beings by way of thought. In this way he is held in Being. Man’s thinking must also correspond in its essence to that toward which it comports itself, to wit, the Being of beings as will.”

that once it is recognized that values can be posited, it is also recognized that they can be equally unposited, “thus they lose all authority for us.”¹⁰¹ In light of this it appears that Nietzsche’s combating of the highest values that “devalue” themselves (Platonism) has placed the positing of values back down in the sensuous realm with the human animal whose job it is now to oversee their assertion, to be the ultimate positor of values, the *Übermensch*. In this sense the positing of values becomes empty and arbitrary, hence, Heidegger states in a late lecture on Nietzsche, “No one dies for mere values” (QCT, 142).

This thought, the essence of beings as will to power and thus as values, expresses the final configuration of the history of metaphysics in that it articulates the most basic and accessible interpretation of beings that threatens to permanently cover over any inquiry into Being itself.¹⁰² Hence, in the later lectures on Nietzsche, Heidegger anticipates his later work on technology, “In the midst of beings, man freely posits his own essence as certainty for and against the being. He seeks to accomplish this surety in the being through a complete ordering of all beings, in the sense of a systematic securing of stockpiles, by means of which his establishment in the stability of certainty is to be completed” (N4, 234/NII, 378). Given this it becomes apparent that Nietzsche’s metaphysics is the ultimate expression of

¹⁰¹Dreyfus, 1993. 293.

¹⁰²See N4, 220/ NII, 361 “The omission of the default of Being as such appears in the shape of an explanation of beings as value. Reduced to a value, Being is derived from the being as a condition for it as such. Nihilism – that there is nothing to Being itself – always means precisely this for metaphysical thought: there is nothing to the being as such.”

subjectivism - that the human who can affirm life as eternally recurring will to power is the supreme subjectum, i.e. *Übermensch*.

Conclusion

It is now apparent that Heidegger had to consider Nietzsche's mature thought as a whole in order to understand not only the overturning of Platonism by Nietzsche, but that this overturning is itself still entangled in what Nietzsche originally articulated as nihilism. It would not have been possible to understand Nietzsche in this way had Heidegger only looked to Nietzsche's early thought to understand Nietzsche's engagement with Platonism, as suggested by Marylou Sena. Of course, her claim is based on a very specific claim by Heidegger that Nietzsche could not complete his overturning, as it were, until late in his "productive thought." While I can concede that Nietzsche had already articulated a need to confront Platonism early on, it seems apparent that he could in no way complete his project without the conceptions of will to power, eternal recurrence, and the *Übermensch*.

Heidegger's polemical engagement with Nietzsche is itself an articulation of how Heidegger sees the state of Being in terms of the West's engagement with it as such. This engagement, as polemical is political in nature as it is an *Auseinandersetzung* both with Nietzsche as thinker and with the history of Western ontology. In this sense we can see that the revealing of all beings as eternally recurring will to power resounds with National Socialism in a very penetrating and shocking way. That is to say that if there is anything to Heidegger's statement that

the Nietzsche lectures were an *Auseinandersetzung* with National Socialism is to say that in polemically engaging Nietzsche, Heidegger has articulated the final metaphysical position of the West and this final position is revealed in the political machinery manifested in National Socialism.

This is not to say that he thought the Capitalist system of the US or the Soviet Communism (for that matter, any political administration in the West that falls somewhere within the vicinity of these major and seemingly opposing systems) as superior. Rather, Heidegger maintains that these systems all articulate eternally recurring will to power in their striving towards increasing mechanization and mobilization for the sake of itself. It is only after the positioning of Nietzsche as the last metaphysician that Heidegger can finally articulate his thought on technology and the political state of mankind as he sees it. The totalizing nature of “technology,” as Heidegger sees it, displaces or flattens out whatever might be considered “culture,” or the traditions and practices that express the “spirit” of a people. This means that the ontic politics that serve to maintain and articulate the culture (see introduction) shift towards a politics of technology.

IV: Technology and We Late-Moderns

IV.I

The *Auseinandersetzung* with Nietzsche ushers in a new era of Heidegger's thought. It is through the engagement with Nietzsche that Heidegger is able to come to and finally fully articulate his thoughts on technology and the "fleeing" of Being as eternally recurring will to power. In the following I will discuss ontic and ontological politics in terms of Heidegger's explication of technology as the latest and final configuration of the Western metaphysical history of Being. In the course of this discussion I will outline the connections between Heidegger's conception of "spirit" in the 1930s and his own ontic political involvements as a confusion of his own system. Additionally, I will examine Habermas' eloquent and deep critique of Heidegger as hiding behind his ontology with the purpose of developing not only a critical stance concerning the connections between Heidegger the man and his philosophy, but that this understanding also helps to develop a clearer and more concise understanding of Heidegger's later thought. That is to say, I will show how "The Question Concerning Technology" best articulates Heidegger's position concerning politics and the "spirit" of the West.

As stated in the previous chapters, the movement of political systems, for Heidegger, is founded on how Being (thus beings themselves) is conceived. In terms of how Heidegger understands 20th century politics, they are founded on the understanding of beings as a "securing of stockpiles." This means that beings only have Being insofar as they are useful, or that the value posited on beings in terms of their use covers over any possibility of seeing a being in any other way. In light of this it appears that Western mankind stands on the precipice of not only seeing beings

only in terms of use, but, consequently, the human being and human self as well. The subjectivism of Western mankind as “measure of all things” turns back to enfold the Nietzschean overman who asserts the subjective will by positing a value, a calculation, of the same sort on mankind, thus revealing mankind in terms of overall use.

In his later thought (especially when discussing technology), Heidegger often refers to the “abandonment” or “oblivion” of Being, meaning that Being has “fled” or has left mankind in the face of beings. It is in this “abandonment” of Being for beings and their optimization that Heidegger implicitly outlines a political structure of the 20th century West. This political structure, once two-tiered as “ontological” and “ontic,” has now collapsed into a “technological” system characterized by efficiency and optimization. The collapse is expressed in the calculability and usefulness of all things in terms of the modern technological world, which indicates a breakdown of the ontological distinction between beings and Being, which gives rise to the formlessness of technology. Bernhard Radloff articulates this very nicely, stating “In-differentiation is understood as a loss of being— beings are abandoned by being to the indifference of their uniform functionality.”¹⁰³

The formlessness that characterizes Heidegger’s account of technology manifests itself in two main ways as the “supreme” danger. On the one hand, mankind, having reduced all entities to the status of standing reserve (*Bestand*) - that

¹⁰³ Radloff Bernhard, “Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Globalisation: A Response to Nicholson and Rockmore.” *Symposium* (2009) Vol. 13, issue 2, pp. 146-162. 150

which is to be relegated to stockpiles for later use - comes to seeing himself as also that which is to be optimized and used. On the other hand, mankind, while not seeing that he himself has become standing reserve, exonerates himself as imposing his will on the Earth and, hence, comes to the conclusion that in the world there are no further or deeper relations than himself (QCT, 26-27). That is to say that any relation with anything other than the human will is only in terms of use and optimization while at the same time the human will is itself a function of this optimization.

What makes itself evident in the course of Heidegger's thought from the 1930s to his articulation of technology in 1953 is that, while Heidegger has ceased to talk explicitly about ontic politics (as in the pro-Nazi rhetoric in "The Self Assertion of the University" or the "inner truth and greatness" of the National Socialist movement in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*), the view that any ontic politics are based on a deeper encounter with "world" as Being-conception ("ontological politics") remains - though weak and almost completely obscured. In his articulation of technology as *Gestell*, Heidegger has implicitly presented a new kind of politics that I have termed "technological politics." That is to say that mankind's encounter with the entities on Earth has become characterized by a drive to stockpile and order. Indeed, even humankind is seen in terms of overall resourcefulness also blurring the distinction between ontic and ontological politics - or, more accurately, that the ontological (the encounter with Being) has been abandoned for usefulness of entities. This means that "ontic politics" is understood solely in terms of overall resources and their efficient mobilization. The totalizing nature of "technology," as Heidegger sees

it, also displaces or flattens out whatever might be considered “culture,” or the traditions and practices that express the “spirit” of a people. This means that the ontic politics that serve to maintain and articulate the culture (see introduction) shift towards a politics of technology – cultures become technological and, as a result, undifferentiated.

In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger discusses the ontological palsy of the West and contemporary politics as interrelated. He does this by relating his concept of “darkening of the world” (*Weltverdüsterung* - an appropriation of the Nietzschean term) with the political situation of Germany and the German people (*Volk*) in 1935 as between the “pincers” of America and the Soviet Union (IM 47-48/EM 34). Germany and the Germans, Heidegger maintains, are in danger of succumbing to the metaphysical states of the above mentioned bracketing political entities, thus becoming part of the technological mobilization that Heidegger sees as a symptom of Nietzschean nihilism. He writes, “The darkening of the world contains within itself a *disempowering of the spirit*” (IM 47/EM 34). In this discussion he appeals to the “spirit” of the German people. The term “spirit” (*Geist, geistigkeit, Geistlichkeit*) is important as it expresses the relation and inseparability of the ontological state of humankind¹⁰⁴ as manifested by an overall Being-conception of a people and the outward or “ontic” movements of politics in terms of national and international tendencies, attitudes, and comportments – or i.e. a “culture.”

¹⁰⁴ During the early 1940s Heidegger was specifically concerned with the spirit of the German people. However, his critique, whether in favor of specifically German “spirit,” still encompasses Western nations and the Soviets.

However, in terms of ontic political leanings, “propagandas,” etc., Heidegger seems to scoff, condemning appeals to spirit for political purposes as a misrepresentation (IM51-52/EM 37). Derrida is right to pause at this and ask “what about his own tactics – and these tactics are also political – when they change from a deconstruction to a celebration of spirit” (OS, 65)? What Derrida is getting at here is twofold. First, Derrida’s *On Spirit* is a “deconstruction” of Heidegger’s use of the term “spirit.” Derrida notes that the earlier Heidegger’s “destruktion” of modern “Cartesian” ontology in *Being and Time* also involved the “destruction” of “spirit” as it became known most notably through German Idealism (especially Hegel). However, through 1929’s “What is Metaphysics?” and 1933’s “Rectoral Address” and most concretely in 1935’s *An Introduction to Metaphysics* we find Heidegger using the term “spirit” as something to foster and resurrect – and this concurrently with the rise of the Nazis and Heidegger’s own move into ontic politics as Rector of Freiburg University. The question is: how can Heidegger condemn the use of spirit in terms of propaganda when his overt use of the term in the Rectoral Address seems to be an appeal to the German masses to follow him as a spiritual “Führer” of the university?¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately this seems like a conundrum that Heidegger can’t really get out of, unless we are to take it as applicable strictly in terms of his critique of Russian communism.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Thomson argues that Heidegger’s foray in politics is to be understood in terms of the reformation of the university and is, therefore, not open to the attacks put forth by Habermas (discussed below).

¹⁰⁶ See *An Introduction to Metaphysics* on the four misinterpretations of spirit, “The spirit as intelligence in the service of goals and the spirit as culture finally become showpieces and spectacle that one takes into account along with many others, that one publicly trots out and exhibits as proof

Heidegger defends his stance with the claim that the proper appeal to spirit can only be in terms of questioning Being, that “asking about beings as such and as a whole, asking the question of Being, is then one of the essential fundamental conditions for awakening the spirit, and thus for an originary world of historical Dasein” (IM 52/EM 38). Only in a return to questioning of Being can the darkening of the world be countered, which, he states, is “the historical mission of our people” (IM 52/EM 38). The “darkening of the world” is important here: it is an earlier expression of what Heidegger will sharpen and discuss in 1953 as the “dangers” of technology. In 1935 the darkening of the world means “the flight of the gods, the destruction of the Earth, the reduction of human beings to a mass, the preeminence of the mediocre” (IM 47/EM 34). So, the awakening of the spirit, in Heidegger’s view, will serve to counter the darkening he has identified and related to technology and technologically driven nations (i.e. America and the USSR). Here I must pause and point out that if ontic politics are always grounded in the ontological, then any appeal to resurrect the “spirit” of the German people via ontic politics rather than in some sort of ontological way seems backwards.

However, this is precisely the tactic of Nazi fascist propaganda: to foster a sentiment of atavistic belonging to a group through an appeal to the spirit, greatness, and pride of the German people.¹⁰⁷ While it is acceptable that Heidegger perhaps meant spirit in a much different way than the Nazi propagandists, the appeal to the

that one does *not* want to deny culture in favor of barbarism. Russian Communism, after an initially purely negative attitude, went directly over to such propagandistic views” (IM 52/EM 37). *Of Spirit*
¹⁰⁷ See Ch. 1 and Fried’s “Heidegger’s Polemos” p.190 for a discussion on fascism.

“historical mission of our people” sounds dangerously close to this sort of tactic. It is this sort of confusion of the ontic and ontological that prevents Heidegger from seeing that Nazism does not (or at least probably should not) share anything whatsoever in common with his philosophy.

Had Heidegger’s theoretical approach in the early 1930s been sharpened to the degree that first: it was able to understand, articulate, and thus disentangle the differences between “ontological” and “ontic” politics and second: been able to understand his own views on technology (which were already being developed at this time) as a collapsing of this two-tiered system, perhaps his views on and collaboration with the Nazis might have been different. In other words, had Heidegger’s thought been more developed in terms of these nuances in the early 1930s, he could have possibly seen how Nazism distorted and confused the ontological “spirit” of the German people with the “ontic” production, efficiency, and mobilization of people and resources. At least this could have addressed the issues of Nazism on Heidegger’s own level – that is, in philosophical terms that avoid any purely “moral” considerations.¹⁰⁸

IV.II

In the years following the Nietzsche lectures Heidegger moved toward what became “The Question concerning Technology” and a more bleak and disturbing articulation

¹⁰⁸ Even if I am right, the question remains as to whether or not Heidegger would have recognized the bigotry and moral monstrosity that Nazism was – especially in light of his refusal to acknowledge the holocaust even in his later, more developed period. History seems to have decided this. However, for an interesting discussion on this, see Richard Rorty “Another Possible World.” *Martin Heidegger: Politics, art, and Technology*. Karsten Harries and Christoph Jamme Ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994)

of what is meant by “darkening of the world” (enframing) and what was once termed “spirit.” This is foreshadowed in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* in which Heidegger is already formulating politico-technological critiques of the West. In the early 1930s Heidegger is reading Ernst Jünger and is influenced both rhetorically and conceptually by his militant and technologically centered works (especially *Der Arbeiter*). However, while Heidegger seems to agree with and incorporate some of Jünger’s basic thoughts on what technology is and its historical orientation, Heidegger does not seem to think that embracing the technologically bound and destined West in terms of a contest for world domination, for which the German’s are preparing for and must win, is the right path. Hence, Heidegger condemns what he considers technologically centered societies as the “rootless” (IM 40/EM 29). This is interesting insofar as Heidegger still adopts some of Jünger’s martial language (most evident in the “Rectoral Address” and *An Introduction to Metaphysics*). Zimmerman sees this as a way of Heidegger expressing his support for a new German Reich that will allow for a renewal of the German “spirit” in terms of solidity and a “return to the Earth.”¹⁰⁹ However, it is the adoption of rhetorical styles such as the martial language of Jünger that is part of what gets Heidegger in trouble following the Second World War: both with denazification committees and with the intellectual world at large. It is hard, it seems, to claim to have given up on the Nazi Party early on in 1934 when his 1935 lectures so clearly utilize the same martial language of the

¹⁰⁹ See Zimmerman, Michael *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). pp. 66-76.

“Rectoral Address” along with statements as to the “inner truth and greatness of this [National Socialist] movement” (IM 213/EM 152).

Heidegger’s conception of “spirit” is not only central to his thought at the time, but is entangled in the ontic politics of the time and the tendencies of the rhetorical expressions that were en vogue. The spirit of a people is, in this sense, expressed in the rhetoric and Heidegger is no exception to this expression.

Heidegger writes, “Precisely if the great decision regarding Europe is not to go down the path of annihilation – precisely then can this decision come about only through the development of new, historical *spiritual* forces from the center” (IM 41/EM 29). By “path of annihilation” Heidegger refers to the technological monstrosities he has identified as Americanism and its counterpart in Soviet Russia (Ch. 1 and 2). So, again it is evident that Heidegger sees politics in two ways, though he never states it explicitly: he characterizes ontic politics as symptomatic of a deeper, ontological political crisis.

It is this abstraction of politics into the ontological that has been the point of criticism for thinkers such as Habermas who sees that Heidegger is able to avoid or even dismiss any discussion concerning his politics or affiliations with the Nazi Party and acknowledgment of the horrors of the Shoah with this dissemination of the political as ontologically determined. Essentially, the charge is, that the later Heidegger hides behind his explanation of ontic politics as a consequence of deeper ontological current, thus detaching “his actions and statements altogether from himself as an empirical person and attributes them to a fate for which one cannot be

held responsible” (PDM 156). Similarly, in “Another Possible World,” Rorty holds that Heidegger “refuses to think of himself as one more finite and contingent bit of *Dasein* assembling tools for the accomplishment of various finite projects. Rather, he wants to see himself as projectless, will-less, a mere open ear, a conduit for the voice of Being” (PAT 35). This is a damning critique, which essentially accuses Heidegger of hiding his overt or ontic political affiliations and stances with his explanation of ontological currents, thus pulling the rug out of any credibility given to his later thought as genuine and without the ulterior motive of concealing and voiding his political affiliations and views.

Thomson briefly addresses the “Habermasian view” in *Heidegger on Ontotheology* stating this view “which would dismiss the later Heidegger’s philosophy as politically tainted, rests on a basic misunderstanding of the connection between Heidegger’s philosophy and politics” (HO 10). This response to Habermas is advanced from Thomson’s reading of Heidegger as the thinker of Being as historicized. Instead, Thomson argues that Heidegger’s foray into National socialism was not due to any actual belief in the *Führer* or the Nazi Party as such, but that “Heidegger seized on the National Socialist ‘revolution’ as an opportunity to enact the philosophical vision for a radical reformation of the university that he had in fact been developing since 1911” (HO 84). Even if this were the case, it still does not clear up the issue about *why* Heidegger identifies the spiritual resurrection of “our

people” (which means a nationalistic identification¹¹⁰ as “grounded” in Being) with the National Socialist “revolution” occurring in Germany at that time. However, Thomson’s account does highlight the misguided Platonic notion of the Philosopher King that Heidegger seems to have been ascribing to.

What makes the conversation on the Nazis most difficult is not only the overall repulsiveness of the systematic extermination of and experimentation on millions of people, but that the actual workings of National Socialism remain unclear and, therefore, undefined. However, Heidegger, in the 1930’s, involved much of his thought with National Socialism. On Lacoue-Labarthe’s reading, Heidegger’s project in the 1930s, insofar as it “explicitly consists in ‘overcoming’ aesthetics,¹¹¹ gives a privileged access – and perhaps the only possible access – to the essence of the political that is simultaneously veiled and unveiled by National Socialism” (HAP 77). This appears to indicate that while the Nazi movement based itself on the precepts of a reorganization of the populace in terms of the socialist-laborer (a literal or “empirical” facet of these politics), it did so specifically with reference to nationalistic appeals to Earth and heritage (which is closer to an ontological facet).

¹¹⁰ See Chapter 1 on German identity. Also, Lacoue-Labarthe makes an interesting statement regarding the aftermath of Nazism and the subsequent division of Germany into East and West: “As for the political sphere – at least the modern political sphere – this fate [of having been divided following World War II] reveals that for Germany the crucial process was – and still is – that of national identification” (HAP, 80).

¹¹¹ Lacoue-Labarthe’s discussion engages Heidegger’s thought in terms of the mimetic aspects of the Nazis in their fascination with the Greeks. Heidegger’s engagement with art (e.g. “The Origin of the Work of Art”) explores the historical connections between the work of art and the attendant political (“religious”) structures “practically all of which have their origins in Platonism.” See HAP 77-91.

This latter aspect appeals very much to the Heidegger of the early 1930's who saw the autochthonic aspects appealing in terms of "spirit." This facet of National Socialism simultaneously served to conceal the inhuman technological monstrosity that it also was. However, given the later (retrospective) Heidegger's ontologization of the political and his identification of the essence of technology also as ontological, it would then make sense to understand the later essay "The Question Concerning Technology" (which is a large part of Habermas' critique) as, at bottom, a political critique that understands technology as a socio-historical phenomenon. So let us see what kind of light might be shed on these issues.

"The Question Concerning Technology" famously ends with the enigmatic statement "For questioning is the piety of thought" (QCT, 35). At first glance this statement seems to be merely a nice way to conclude a well formed and well thought out treatise. However, it is in this one sentence that the entirety of the essay is wrapped up and expressed. But more than just the essay is wrapped up in this sentence – it also expresses where Heidegger's thought is as a whole. As Heidegger enters his later period he comes to think that philosophy has run its course, much like Nietzsche's final conclusions about philosophy and the opening of a "higher history."¹¹² What remains now is "thought" itself, which is something we are at best only "on our way" to. The attendant question is: how does one begin to be on the way to thought? This question is answered quite baldly with the answer: questioning.

¹¹² See Nietzsche's parable "The Madman" in *The Gay Science*. Walter Kaufmann trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) p. 181 [125]

Only in formulating the question does mankind begin to be on the way to thinking. Questioning is the way to conduct a confrontation or *Auseinandersetzung*. So, in questioning technology, Heidegger is confronting it. What also becomes apparent is (as discussed in Ch. 3) that Heidegger no longer emphasizes “Dasein” as the locus of discourse. This is an indication of Heidegger’s so-called “turning” in which he comes to think that the question of Being is less pressing and less interesting than the “event” (*Ereignis*) of Being or the “truth of Being.” That is to say that the shift in Heidegger’s vocabulary from “Dasein” to “Da-Sein” and, correlatively, from “Sein” to “Seyn” is to differentiate the emphasis in the question from what Being is to what the unfolding (“truth”) of Being is. “Being” becomes an event of unfolding and “Da-Sein” is the locus of this unfolding.¹¹³ Hence, in the essay “The History of Being” Charles Guignon states, “What was forgotten [by Heidegger] in the first understanding of the being of beings is what Heidegger now calls be-ing (*Seyn*). Be-ing is the event of appropriation or “enownment” in which (a) beings are encountered as such and such in a particular understanding of being, and (b) the humans who do the encountering come to be appropriated in such a way that they can play their proper role in the essential unfolding of truth” (CTH 401).

The move to *Seyn* is correlative with his move from philosophy to thought. In fact, Heidegger distinguishes thinking from philosophy, stating “preoccupation with

¹¹³ Heidegger articulates this in “Letter on Humanism” in which Heidegger reiterates the ontological distinction and argues that while metaphysics inquires about the Being of Beings it does not inquire into the truth of Being itself (BW, 226-228). For a lengthy discussion concerning the truth of Being as Be-ing as *Ereignis* see Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning*. Also helpful is Charles Guignon’s essay “The History of Being” in *A Companion to Heidegger*, 2005.

philosophy more than anything else may give us the stubborn illusion that we are thinking just because we are incessantly ‘philosophizing’” (WCT, 5). The point here is that studying and writing about philosophy does not guarantee thinking. That is, Heidegger is making the point that what he means by being “thoughtful” has nothing to do with empirical academic studies. What does seem to guarantee thinking, and thus have the human “underway,” is to find a question of importance.

The question of importance, Heidegger points out, is implicit in Parmenides’ statement “For it is the same thing to think and to be” (WCT, 240). In a very brief interpretation, then, that which is the “call” for thinking is the question of the truth of Being. But it is precisely his exegesis on thinking that reveals an overall criticism of mid-twentieth century mankind (and, by extrapolation, early twenty first century mankind as well) precisely as *unthinking*, which, at bottom, is the entire point of the essay on technology. What we can gather, then, from questioning as the “piety of thought” is that perhaps the question is not merely about technology, but how technology is an event or unfolding of Being and the danger that this represents. Heidegger recognized this much earlier in the late 1930’s in his discussions on what he called “machination” (*Technik*) before he formulated *Gestell*. Heidegger writes “Machination itself. . .is the essential swaying of be-ing” (CP 89).

While the discussion of the “supreme danger” will be addressed below, for now it seems thought provoking enough to say that the technology essay intrinsically takes up the issue of National Socialism. Habermas points out that in the 1930s

Heidegger “maneuvered himself philosophically into a difficult position” by reading National Socialism into the question of Being. This occurs, of course, when “the true character of the National Socialist regime” could no longer be ignored (PDM, 158-159). On his reading, Heidegger relegated the individuality (subjectivity) of Dasein from *Sein und Zeit* to that of the *Volk* by the time of the “Rectoral Address” and *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. That is, the identification of “Dasein” with the *Volk*, on Habermas’ reading, leaves Heidegger only one choice following the fall of the Nazi Party,

Heidegger works up his historical experience with National Socialism in a manner that does not call into question the elitist claim to a privileged access to truth on the part of philosophers. He interprets the untruth of the movement by which he had let himself be dragged along not in terms of an existential fallenness into the “they” for which one is subjectively responsible, but as an objective withholding of the truth. That the eyes of the most resolute philosopher were only gradually opened up to the nature of the regime – for this astoundingly delayed reading of world history – the world itself is supposed to assume authorship, not concrete history, indeed, but a sublimated history promoted to the lofty heights of ontology. Thus was born the concept of the history of Being (PDM 159).

This scathing critique clearly dismisses Heidegger’s concept of the “history of Being” as a method by which to avoid taking responsibility for his ontic political choices. And this to the point of even contradicting the existential categories of Dasein as established in *Sein und Zeit*. To extrapolate, this means that Heidegger’s reading of technology as the present epoch of Being is tainted by Nazi affiliation and is itself an epoch for which “the world itself is to assume authorship.”

But this is exactly why we must start at the concluding sentence of the essay “For questioning is the piety of thought.” This final sentence seems to stand in contrast to the reading of Heidegger as moving away from subjectivism and the traditions of modernity – including the phenomenology of Dasein as temporal “being-towards-death.” This sentence, in its eloquent, if mysterious finality, is not only a judgment of Western mankind as *unthinking* in its endeavors as the dance partner of technology, but identifies the question as that which makes thinking profound, that which brings mankind back to his “essence” – that which is, in-fact, his “essence.”

In the discussion on technology it is originally the “essence” of technology that Heidegger is questioning, but by the middle of the essay it becomes quite apparent that it is not only the essence of technology that is in question, but that the essence of “mankind” is also being questioned “for there is no such thing as a man who, solely of himself, is only man” (QCT 31). This statement is somewhat reminiscent of the earlier Heidegger of *Being and Time* for whom Dasein is defined as the totality of its involvements. In this case Heidegger is saying that mankind, as wrapped up in the engagements with Earth and world, is never of himself only himself, but is the totality of involvements with Earth, world, and others insofar as they enact a revealing. What this means for my reading of Heidegger is that the question of technology is inextricably tied up with what Heidegger calls the “essence” of mankind and is as such political ontology.

However, Heidegger is very careful in his use of the term “essence.” He differentiates the “academic” use of the word in terms of “what something *is*” or its “whatness” in the (Platonic) sense that all trees share or have “treeness” but no one tree is itself “treeness” (QCT, 29). What he means by “essence” (*Wesen*) is in a verbal sense as that which essences, that which makes itself present or “presences.” Here Heidegger makes the important point that *Wesen* (essence) as a verb and *währen* (to endure or last) are the same in terms of meaning (QCT 30). Likewise, he notes, Plato and Socrates “already think the essence of something as what essences, what comes to presence, in the sense of what endures” (QCT 30). However, he points out that this ancient conception conceives essencing as that which “endures permanently” as “idea” or “*eidōs*” (QCT, 30). Similarly, Aristotle thinks “idea” as *to ti ēn enai* or “that which any particular thing has always been,” and this is what “metaphysics in its most varied interpretations thinks as *essential*” (QCT, 30). In contrast to this, Heidegger argues that “essencing” does not mean permanent endurance. For Heidegger, as discussed above, Being becomes an *event* rather than an objective fact. This has two implications: 1) Being is always in the process of unconcealment or revealing and 2) this means that Being is never the same, but is revealed in different ways to reveal different “truths.” So, this means that “truth” as *alētheia* is always in the process of “truthing” and never is, as such, a static or objective “fact.” This view is derived from the confrontation with Nietzsche (Ch. 3) and the final metaphysical statement that the Being of beings is eternally recurring will to power, i.e. eternal becoming. It is during these lectures (1936 – 1941) that Heidegger articulates

metaphysics as epochal, i.e. as historicized. This is expressed by Heidegger in the historical accounts of ontotheological epochs dating back to Plato. For Heidegger, Western metaphysics reaches its final configuration with Nietzsche and it is precisely this age of technology that most succinctly expresses this. This is consistent with Habermas' view of Heidegger's formulation of the so-called "history of Being" as Heidegger himself characterized his Nietzsche lectures as a "confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with National Socialism." That is, if Heidegger was in-fact finding a way to think around his own involvement with National Socialism during this time, that the conception of the history of Being as brought forth in these lectures is definitely one way of accounting for the movement without having to consider ethical issues, which makes Habermas' critique compelling.

IV.III

That something "essences" or comes to presence is how the world shows up for humans (see Ch. 2 on *Physis*). When Heidegger inquires as to what the "essence" of technology is, he is asking "what is the truth of technology?" This is also to ask "how does technology reveal itself to us?" Or in Heidegger's terms, "how does technology become unconcealed?" Thus, essence (*Wesen*), truth (*Warheit*), and unconcealment (*unverborgenheit*), or the Greek *alētheia*, are all ways of saying that truth is always itself a "truthing." In fact, Mark Wrathall succinctly points out that "the word that is generally translated as 'unconcealment' or 'unconcealedness' is *Unverborgenheit*. This, in turn, is Heidegger's preferred, and rather literal, translation for the Greek

word *alētheia*, itself ordinarily translated ‘truth.’”¹¹⁴ This ancient conception of truth is central to the reading of technology and it should be noted that this conception of truth is in no way a designation of correlation or correctness in the sense of “objective” truth states or logical content, but is, even for the earlier Heidegger, a matter of how things come to presence for humankind (see Ch. 2).

Heidegger’s discussion of truth as *alētheia* in “The Question Concerning Technology” articulates and solidifies his overall conception of truth and essence that he had been developing since *Being and Time*. The most important point to take home is that truth and unconcealment come to be as such only in terms of how “world” shows up for humankind. Again, as discussed in Ch. 2, in this sense “truth” as unconcealment or revealing is, then, political ontology. That is, beginning with the articulation of the categories of Being in the ancient, *Polis*-centered, metaphysics to the final configuration of this Western metaphysics as technicity, the truth of beings (how entities show up to mankind as significant) has largely been a matter of communal assent.

The truth of beings as communal assent is illustrated quite effectively by Heidegger in his discussion of Aristotle’s four ways of “occasioning” (the four causes) and the example of the chalice. While all four aspects of the causes - *materialis, formalis, finalis, efficiens* - are intertwined, it is *causa finalis* and *causa efficiens* that have caught my attention. While the form of the chalice and the

¹¹⁴ See Mark Wrathall “Unconcealment” in *a Companion to Heidegger*. Mark Wrathall and Hubert Dreyfus ed. (Malden, MA.: Blackwell, 2005).

material from which it is made (in this case silver) are obviously part and parcel to its significance in its presencing to humans, it is the final cause, the *telos* of the chalice that defines it and secures its significance as a “sacrificial vessel.” This is to say that the *telos* of the chalice is itself how it appears to humans for whom it is significant – it is the significance itself. The sacrificial vessel is thereby recognized as holding a unique and special significance within the community. It is not merely a drinking glass or a plastic cup to be filled with whatever contents, emptied, and then discarded. Rather, the sacrificial chalice is an instrument that is ritualistic and maintains the relations between the gods and the community. This relation is vital because it is in and through the myths, the spiritualism of a people, that the community articulates its place in and its relationship to the cosmos. Hence, Heidegger’s resurrection of the term “spirit,” the *Geistlichkeit* of a people, which is to be articulated in the myths that are retold and brought into the realm of immediacy through the ritual.¹¹⁵ Though, as discussed above, in the 1930s Heidegger confuses what is meant by “spirit” (as articulated here) with the ontic politics of National Socialism.

It is more than just the chalice that presences or is “occasioned,” it is the ontological grounding of a people symbolized by the chalice and the ritual. The ritual is what the chalice is *for*, its *telos*, its significance is circumscribed by the myths that are retold through the chalice in the ritual. The “truth” of the chalice is rooted in the story of the place of the community in the cosmos, hence Heidegger writes “The *telos* is responsible for what as matter and for what as aspect are together co-responsible

¹¹⁵ Though, as discussed above, in the 1930s Heidegger confuses this kind of “spiritualism.”

for the sacrificial vessel” (QCT 8). In this context, to be “responsible” does not connote any sort of moralistic “indebtedness” (as Heidegger puts it), but rather means something very close to “cause” or that significance within which something is rooted or comes from. This significance only comes forth in the assent of the community for whom the ritual holds meaning. The *telos* is, then, political in nature – political in its ontological significance for the community and in its outward, ontic sense in its place within what may be termed ritualistic “policy,” or the laws surrounding its “use.”

The *causa efficiens* or “efficient cause,” is perhaps the most misunderstood, but the most important of the four causes. Heidegger points out that “The Aristotelian doctrine neither knows the cause that is named by this term nor uses a Greek term that would correspond to it” (QCT 8). Here, Heidegger is clearly taking liberties with Aristotle and going “beyond” what is entailed by the ancient thinker. Heidegger points out that it is not simply the silversmith that is the efficient cause, but that the other three causes are themselves “gathered” in the efficient cause. This is clarified by Heidegger’s discussion of the German word *überlegen* - to reason, consider, or reflect upon. This very word, Heidegger rightly points out, is *Logos* or *Legein* in Greek – to be rational, but also to “gather” in thought, hence the expression “gather my thoughts,” which means to consider something carefully.

Heidegger points out that *Legein* is “rooted in *apophainesthai*, to bring forward into appearance” (QCT 8). What this means is that the silversmith is not merely the crafting hand of the chalice as efficient cause, but that the efficient cause

is indicative of a relationship – the silversmith gathers the other three causes in his pondering and, bringing them together, harmonizes them in his contemplation and crafts the sacrificial chalice. This relationship of the silversmith and the chalice is specific and intended – he is not a factory mass producing large numbers of indistinguishable chalices. In a similar discussion, Hubert Dreyfus articulates the significance of the craftsman and his relationship to his work, “The task of the craftsman is not to *generate* the meaning, but rather to *cultivate* in himself the skill for *discerning* the meanings that are already there” (ATS 209). For the silversmith this means to “cultivate,” to work with material, form, and purpose to bring forth the communal significance of the myths of his people through the chalice that is to take part in the ritual. It is within the context of the myths and the ritual that the chalice is unconcealed as the sacrificial vessel and takes on significance as such from out of the myths. It is in this sense that the silversmith cultivates and discerns meaning. In terms of the discussion on spirit, the silversmith is cultivating the meaning of the spirit of the community as rooted in and represented by traditions and myth. This is the “truth” of the chalice – the way in which the chalice shows itself.

This is what is meant by *alētheia* and Heidegger’s appropriation of the term in German “*Unverborgenheit*.” The uncovering of an entity means to encounter it as something that presences in a specific way among many possible ways. It is this diversity of possible presencing that is at issue in Heidegger’s discussion on technology and its essence. For Heidegger, the modern industrial age is characterized by mass production and the “forcing” of nature, which constitutes a fundamental

disconnect from the cultivation and discerning of meaning that Dreyfus discusses. That is to say that the industrialization of nations has allowed for entities to become “products” to be manufactured in large numbers and distributed among the population. In the conveyor belts of a mass production factory, the sacrificial vessel loses its meaning within the machinery of replication that makes it indiscernible from the vessel that follows it or precedes it on the production line. There is no need any more for the blacksmith, who has been replaced by unskilled labor, and whatever store the product lands in. What this indicates is a shift in the way entities presence themselves to the human - from the ancient “cultivation” via the causes articulated by Aristotle to that of the modern technological age. The “vessel” is now stacked in a pile as paper or Styrofoam products, packaged, priced, and stored for future use and to be discarded. On the other hand, when a contemporary member of industrialized society (now the global market) encounters the ancient hand-made vessel, it is as an artifact to be committed to a museum and viewed from behind a glass pane. That is to say, the original significance of the sacrificial vessel has also been shifted from a symbolic and ritualized significance to “an order of history, science, and museums, our order.”¹¹⁶

But this is another instance of unconcealment – the modern vessel reveals itself as a one-time use product. The truth of its being is in terms of its use and ease of discarding. For Heidegger this shift in the presencing of entities is not only in

¹¹⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Sheila Faria Glaser trans. (Ann arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). 10

terms of simple household items, but on a much grander scale. The age of technology, which for Heidegger is the consummation of the ancient metaphysics of Being, is characterized by the relegation of all beings to a stock pile to be set aside and stored for future use – the standing reserve (*Bestand*). Our entire economy as “globalized market” is fueled on the trade of resources. For example, the petroleum market is a mammoth industry including wells and offshore rigs all over the world, refineries, and consumer demand. Not only is this a market of its own based on the extrication and storing of fuel for machines that allow us to become commuters and air travelers, but the selfsame industry is at the center of political adversity for all industrialized nations. It is this overall view of beings as standing reserve that Heidegger names *Gestell* or “enframing.” For Heidegger, it is this relegation of beings to a stockpile that represents the “supreme danger.” That is, the ordering of all beings in terms of calculable use is the symptom of what Heidegger calls the fleeing of Being from beings. What this means is that beings (entities) are only encountered as significant solely in terms of use rather than in any of the other possible ways of presencing. Heidegger writes, “This [supreme] danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall: that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve” (QCT 26-27). The fleeing of Being in the face of technicity is a

way to describe the “darkening of the world” and the absence of *spirit* in the everyday dealings of contemporary Western mankind.

“Darkening of the world,” in this context, refers to the totalizing character of technological societies which, as stated above, not only threatens that the truth (revealing) of all entities will be in terms of utility, but that the truth and place of mankind in the world will also be in terms of utility – and only utility (the “supreme danger”). When Heidegger writes in 1935, “The darkening of the world contains within itself a *disempowering of the spirit*, its dissolution, suppression, and misinterpretation” he means precisely this: that the manifestation of what he will later articulate as the supreme danger pushes out any other understanding of beings and Being, meaning that any other ritual or “culturally” significant practices that express the relation between mankind and world is also pushed out (IM 47/EM 34). Heidegger specifies that “world” is “always *spiritual* world” (IM 47/EM 34). In “The Origin of the work of Art” this is elaborated on: “The world is the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people” (PLT 48). World is distinguished from earth in the sense that earth is the totality of entities (the “elements”) that humankind can encounter, e.g. rocks, trees, wind, ocean, storms, rainfall, etc. World, on the other hand, is the totality of involvements between humankind and the elements. Heidegger outlines this totality of involvements in his discussion of the ancient temple, which “first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline

acquire the shape of destiny for human being” (PLT 42). The temple is erected as an articulation of the relationship between a society and the earth – i.e. an articulation of how beings “presence” themselves or are “unconcealed.” The ancient Greek temple is, in this case, a testament to how the Greeks saw themselves in their relation to earth and each other. The gods and spirits are symbolic of the categories of understanding of the world for the ancients. This is one epoch of Being in Heidegger’s historicized conception of Being.

So, if the world is always “spiritual” and it is so in terms of the relations between mankind and earth (ontological politics), then to say that “the darkening of the world contains within itself a *disempowering of the spirit*” is to say that in the age of technology *Gestell* disconnects humankind from any relationship with earth. Here, “darkening” means something very specific. Heidegger often talks about unconcealment, truth, and lighting as interconnected. He writes, for example, “Truth is present only as the conflict between lighting and concealing in the opposition of world and earth” (PLT 62). In this passage “lighting” and “unconcealing” are equivalent. If this is the case, then it would follow that to “conceal” means also to “darken.” So the “darkening” of the world means that our understanding of Being in the encountering beings is slipping into concealment. This does not mean that we do not encounter beings anymore, but that the world is no longer spiritual because it is no longer based on a need to unconceal – it has already been done for us and it is always in terms of the standing reserve. Another way to articulate this is in terms of truth – that for Heidegger truth is the “truthing” of Being and that if every entity,

down to humanity itself, is to be undifferentiated as standing-reserve, then truth itself is undifferentiated and, therefore, unencountered. Truth is, then, concealed; the truth of Being is no longer accessible, having been covered over by the politics of circulation and stockpiling.

IV.IV

How does the discussion of spirit and *alētheia* address the viewpoint of Habermas and Rorty? That is, can we take Heidegger's conception of technology and the history of Being as a way of shirking individual responsibility regarding his ontic political involvement with the Nazis and the holocaust? Well in some sense, yes. But if we are going to embrace this critique wholeheartedly, then it seems we run the risk of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. That is, if we accept this critique, then we have to accept that the entirety of Heidegger's later work is geared towards this end – that his late and posthumously published statement “only a god can save us now” holds no higher significance than as a catch phrase. On the other hand, it seems almost criminal to dismiss the large body of work that is the later Heidegger's, despite the fact that he was almost completely silent concerning the holocaust. I say “almost” because I have found at least one instance in which Heidegger makes direct reference to the holocaust, though not in any way that seems to serve as a vindication. Lacoue-Labarthe quotes Heidegger from an “unpublished” lecture circa 1949, “Agriculture is now a motorized food industry, the same thing in its essence as the production of corpses in the gas chambers in the extermination camps, the same thing

as blockades and the reduction of countries to famine, the same thing as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs” (HAP, 43).¹¹⁷ Lacoue-Labarthe characterizes this statement as “scandalously inadequate” not because it relates the holocaust to technology (which he actually considers as “absolutely correct”), but because the German extermination mainly targeted the Jews, which is “incommensurably different from the economico-military practice of blockades or even the use of nuclear arms” (HAP, 34-35). Lacoue-Labarthe, Lyotard, and Arendt all seem to agree that the greatest downfall that this indicates is that the event of the holocaust remains conspicuously *unthought* by the champion of thought itself.

Given that the above statement is one of the few acknowledgements of the Holocaust by Heidegger and that the statement itself is conspicuously icy in its reference to the death camps, it is not hard to come to the conclusion that Heidegger knew very well what was at stake and that he purposefully chose a position of indifference. But did Heidegger articulate the history of Being the way he did in order to explain the individual as insignificant in terms of choice and action? To begin to address this, it must be restated that Heidegger’s political conception of Dasein as a people who share a historicized “destiny” (*Geschick*) is already articulated in *Being and Time*, well before the questions of the “inner truth and greatness” of the National Socialist “movement.” Habermas, referencing *Being and Time*, points out that Heidegger does not address his political “blunder” as a case of

¹¹⁷ Lacoue-Labarthe credits Schirmacher for quoting this statement in *Technik and Gelassenheit*. Lyotard also discusses this passage in sections 23-24 of *Heidegger and “the Jews.”* See also Thomson (HO, 83-84) esp. footnote 15. See Lacoue-Labarthe’s discussion on Arendt (HAP, 32-35).

irresolute inauthenticity or even *verfallenheit* – that Heidegger, had he wanted to, could have explained his participation in Nazi politics as having been swept up in “*das Man.*”

This consideration makes me want to pursue this line of thought and consider Heidegger’s discussion concerning fate and destiny, which, though it is from Heidegger’s earlier corpus, may inform this discussion. Heidegger differentiates between “fate” as the eventual death of an individual and the “destiny” of a people as co-historized (BT 436/SZ 384). He writes, “Dasein’s fateful destiny in and with its ‘generation’ goes to make up the full historizing of Dasein” (BT 436/SZ 385). It is good to remember that the temporal comportment of Dasein for Heidegger is always futural and that from the beginning of life Dasein finds itself “thrown” in such a way that “Our fates have already been guided in advance, in our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities” (BT 436/SZ 384). Heidegger points out that the destiny of a people is not to be conceived of as the sum total of individual “fates,” but as its own current within which a people find themselves carried. Given this it is not inconceivable or even surprising that Heidegger later characterizes the World Wars of the twentieth century as inevitable events within the Nietzschean era of technological nihilism. Heidegger’s overall position, then, seems to say that if we understand the history of Being as he has articulated it as culminating in technological nihilism, then it is very easy to fall into the sort of quagmire that he has in the case of the Nazis and the holocaust, which is

precisely why Habermas has articulated his criticism in the terms he has. In other words, this sort of explanation on Heidegger's part seems much too easy and escapist.

To come to an understanding about these events, Radloff states, "what is required, in Heidegger's terms, is a philosophical interrogation of our time in light of founding tenets of Modernity."¹¹⁸ For Habermas this is the very point of contention, that Heidegger essentially lays the historical "responsibility" of the World Wars and the Nazi Holocaust on modernity. On this reading, Heidegger is said to have been unable to understand National Socialism as a symptom of technology until, following understanding of Nietzschean nihilism as the last of the Western metaphysical epochs, he was able to understand technology as *Gestell*. It is only after articulating *Gestell* as the essence of technology that the later Heidegger can talk about "letting be" and "readiness to listen." For Habermas this pathos is said to take the place of self-assertive subjectivity that characterizes modernity (PDM, 160). This seems accurate enough and provides an effective critique. However, it is precisely the self-assertive subjectivity that characterized Heidegger's involvement with ontic Nazi politics (some say in hopes of re-ontologizing higher education in Germany¹¹⁹) in the first place. For the later Heidegger the modernist pathos of "human as subject over and against the objects in an objective world" is the root of Western mankind's "technological" conception of all beings as calculable and valuable in terms of use. This drive to dominate and control as subject, Heidegger claims, is exactly what

¹¹⁸ Radloff "Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Globalisation." 161.

¹¹⁹ See Thomson *Heidegger on Ontotheology*. Ch. 4 especially pp. 150-155.

produces and perpetuates the *Gestell*. After having articulated this as the “danger” the pressing question becomes: how do we counter the *Gestell*? To this Heidegger responds that the very will to counter the *Gestell* still fits within the modernist drive to dominate all things.

It is with respect to the totalizing aspects of *Gestell* that contemporary mankind is said to approach all beings with a predetermined and accepted calculation that pushes out any other way for them to be disclosed to us. It is in this sense that we are said to be characterized by “total thoughtlessness” (DT, 56). What this means is that in recognizing the thoughtlessness that accompanies *Gestell* we come to contemplation, to “meditate” on the totalizing of entities as *Bestand*. In *Discourse on Thinking* Heidegger distinguishes between meditative thought and calculative thought. He specifically identifies calculative thought with technology – it is the kind of thinking that sees all things in terms of use and efficiency. Calculative thought is what characterizes modern science, which “pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces” (QCT, 21). “Meditative” thinking, by contrast, is “true” thinking that has been lost to calculative thought – it “contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is” (DT, 46). It is in this meditative thought that contemplates meanings rather than computes the use and efficiency of entities that manifests itself as the first of three forms in which the “saving power” presents itself; each form seems to be equivalent and so is equally important. This sheds some light on Heidegger’s final sentence in the technology essay, that “questioning is the piety of thought.” That is, this statement invites the question: what is pious in thought?

The answer seems to be the thinking that thinks the intrinsic meaning in “everything that is” when we find the question that illuminates this meaning.

But how does this work? When Heidegger states that questioning is “the piety of thought” and quotes Hölderlin “*But where danger is, grows the saving power also,*” he is pointing us toward a possible “free” relationship with technology that is not totalizing (QCT 28). Let us remember that according to Heidegger we, as late moderns, have not yet begun to think. As that entity for which Being is an issue we have, through technologicization, forgotten Being – that beings (even ourselves) are encountered as beings only insofar as they can be optimized. In this sense late modern humankind, in our subjective drive to dominate all objects to the extreme of rendering humans as resources as well (hence, as objects), has blurred the very lines that define modernity – the line between subject and object itself.¹²⁰ But the question then is: how should we think and what does this do to free us from the totalization of all entities as resources? Heidegger does not believe that we can just “stop” technology, which would be absurd and admittedly impossible. Heidegger instead seeks to find a way to live “freely” with our gadgets and industries and geopolitics while at the same time moving away from the will to dominate all entities. Heidegger, without stating it explicitly, is still in the business of *spirit*. What this means is that Heidegger, in recognizing that in a technological frenzy mankind has

¹²⁰ See Heidegger N3 p.250 “the struggle for unrestrained exploitation of the earth as a source of raw materials or the cynical utilization of ‘human resources’ in service to the absolute empowering of will to power.” Iain Thomson also discusses the dissolution of the subject/object distinction in *Heidegger, art, and Postmodernity* pp. 200-205.

lost touch with his “essence,”¹²¹ is trying to figure out how to reach this “essence.” Indeed, Heidegger is trying to find a way to usher in a new era of Being-conception that is not dominated by the Nietzschean ontotheology of *Gestell*, an era that is truly fit to carry the title of “postmodern.”

Given that we have already established Heidegger’s engagement with “spirit” as political – ontological politics in his conception of what it is and ontically political in the comportment of a “people” (*Volk*) and the manifestation of this movement as policy - “The Question Concerning Technology” becomes, at bottom, a political criticism. This discussion might be informed by considering that the late Heidegger became a harsh critic of what he called “Americanism:” a euphemism he adopts in the 1940s when he recognized that it was the U.S. rather than Germany that was going to win the industrial race for “total mobilization.” For Heidegger America comes to represent the manifest danger of complete *Gestell*, though he never visited the country itself.¹²² In a lecture given in 1969 Heidegger discusses America and the connection between burgeoning technological society, politics, and the waning of what he once called spirit,

. . . More disturbing than the conquest of space, there appears the transformation of biology into *biophysics*. This means that the human can be produced according to a definite plan just like any other technological object. . . In this regard, the emergence of a new nationalism must be thought through, one which is

¹²¹ See Heidegger (QCT, 28) “The actual threat has already affected man in his essence. The rule of enframing (*Gestell*) threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth.”

¹²² See Thomson’s discussion of “Americanism” in *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernism* pp. 200-207

grounded upon technological power and no longer (in order to give an example) on the characteristics of a people. . . . As to the interest of America for the “question of being,” the [technology based] reality of that country is veiled from the view of those interested: the collusion between industry and the military (the economic development and the armament that it requires) (FS 55-56).

This clearly connects *Gestell* with the pushing out of what Heidegger once called “spirit,” which is here described as the “characteristics of a people.” The “new nationalism” solidifies Heidegger’s critique of technology as a political phenomenon. In fact, the preceding sentence in this lecture explicitly states this, “The reason for this event is far rather the modern relation to *power*, a political relation” (FS 55). However, by the time that Heidegger coins this term he has moved away from the Germany centered criticisms of spirit that characterized his lectures in the 1930s and is once again addressing the Occident, the late modern peoples of the West. His use of the term “spirit” is less frequent, but the discussion of returning man to his “essence” is at the heart of Heidegger’s thought (which is why I say Heidegger is still in the “business” of spirit).¹²³ In fact, Heidegger makes this explicit in his “Memorial Address” for Conradin Kreutzer delivered in 1955 (the same year that the final version of “The Question Concerning Technology” is published). He asks, “can man’s work in the future still be expected to thrive in the fertile ground of a homeland and mount into the ether, into the far reaches of the heavens and the spirit” (DT, 49)? Heidegger asks this in the face of the technological age he recognizes as the “atomic

¹²³ See, for example, “The Turning,” “. . . his essence is to be the one who waits, the one who attends upon the coming to presence of Being, in that in thinking, he guards it.” (QCT, 41).

age” that is characterized by *Gestell*. This question is at the heart of Heidegger’s concern for us late moderns for whom “the loss of autochthony (*Bodenständigkeit*)¹²⁴ springs from the spirit of the age into which all of us were born” (DT, 49). In other words, the loss of grounding or rootedness in the traditions and history of a people (hence varying and unique ways of “revealing” the nature of reality between different peoples) comes from the very comportment we, as late moderns, have in terms of the technological age we were already born into. This statement is very telling as it speaks to what has been termed a “double forgetting.”¹²⁵ That is to say that what is at the heart of *Gestell*, that which is not merely the danger, but what Heidegger calls the “supreme danger,” is that the autochthonic roots that Heidegger refers to are not only forgotten, but that in being already born into an era that is characterized by comportment towards such “spiritual” forgetting in the form of technological self-optimization, that this forgetting is itself forgotten. In other words, not only does the danger present itself in the totalizing character of *Gestell* as the ordering of all things for optimization, but that the *Gestell* itself is forgotten and, hence, never encountered as such. Hence, the effect of *Gestell* is totalizing. This “double-forgetting” disallows any other forms of revealing beyond the optimization of entities (including humans) as resources.

Habermas relates Heidegger’s position on National Socialism that even the most “resolute philosopher” could not have initially grasped the true nature of

¹²⁴ Also translated as “rootedness.”

¹²⁵ This is a term used by Iain Thomson. See *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*. 199-200.

German National Socialism at its outset (PDM, 159). This could be understood as saying that even the most resolute philosopher cannot foresee or understand historical events without having a historical understanding of Being – hence, the epochal ontotheological understanding of the history of Western metaphysics that Heidegger formulated in his later years. This does not explain Heidegger’s later silence or indifference concerning the Holocaust. Heidegger sees the understanding of technology and *Gestell* as difficult because it is not only totalizing, but is also concealed in the “double forgetting” by its proximity to humankind. What this means is that *Gestell* has become integrated into everyday life that it does not obtrude or make itself conspicuous. Rather, the individual of the contemporary technologically driven world market does not see that the technology we use everyday (computers, cell phones, cars, airplanes) is not merely “used” by us, but that it is formative. What this means is that the workings of *Gestell* are so deeply ingrained that they seem to be almost instinctual or biological – that the world defined in terms of calculative use is synonymous with what it is to be human.

In fact, it is not even a question of proximity as that implies that there is a space within which to differentiate *Gestell* from the individual. Rather, as discussed above, the individual dissolves in *Gestell*, and is no longer the Anaxagorean “measure of all things.” In other words, being political as Dasein dissolves into a state of “pure circulation”¹²⁶ – the ontological-political-ness that makes Dasein what it is dissolves

¹²⁶ See Baudrillard *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. 4 See also Thomson (HO, 22).

into *Bestand*, hence the pervasiveness of what Heidegger calls “calculative thought.” This transition from ontological politics to technological politics is precisely what Heidegger is addressing with his discussion of a “new nationalism” (see above quote from *Four Seminars*). So, the Heidegger of the mid 1930s and earlier who, while struggling to escape the Cartesian subjectivism that characterizes modernity, still subscribes to the individual and cannot himself see the nature of National Socialism due to the proximity of what he later understands as *Gestell* – as the culmination of modernity as nihilism.¹²⁷ It is not until Heidegger formulates his thoughts on *Gestell* that he is able to, as Habermas rightly puts it, “view fascism itself as a symptom and to classify it, alongside Americanism and communism, as an expression of the metaphysical domination of technology” (PDM 159-160).

As quoted above, Habermas holds that Heidegger replaces the individual self-assertion that characterizes modernity with the “pathos of letting be and readiness to listen.” While this is true, I think it has become clear that Heidegger does not see the individualism of Modernity as feasible any longer – not when the subject/object distinction has been blurred in the face of *Gestell*. In this sense, while perhaps Heidegger is not the one to throw open the doors for whatever is to follow modernity, he is able to articulate its death throes – that is, he articulates the “supreme danger” in

¹²⁷ See Heidegger on the Law of Proximity, “To experience the closest is the most difficult. In the course of our dealings and occupations it is passed over precisely as the easiest. Because the closest is the most familiar, it needs no special appropriation. We do not think about it. So it remains what is least worthy of thought. The closest appears therefore as if it were nothing. We see first, strictly speaking, never the closest but always what is next closest. The obtrusiveness and imperativeness of the next closest drives the closest and its closeness out of the domain of experience. This follows from the law of proximity” (PAR 134-136). Also, Thomson “This ‘law of proximity’ (or ‘distance of the near’) states that the closer we are to something, the harder it is to bring it clearly into view” (HAP 199).

which mankind cannot distinguish self from all other objects of optimization. If the subject/object distinction can be taken as a token feature of modernity, then, on Heidegger's reading, this very thing that characterizes Modernity leads to its own dissolution. We cannot just dismiss this later thought for fear that it might be a way for Heidegger to rationalize his Nazism. On the contrary, Heidegger seems to be suggesting that Nazism and the world wars are the most blaring and grotesque indications that perhaps late-modern mankind may be unavoidably self-destructive.

IV.V

While I have touched on Heidegger's critique of the contemporary Occidental human as generally "unthinking" as a characteristic of the age of technicity, I have not addressed "releasement" and "readiness to listen." Needless to say, these two things are Heidegger's seeming answer to the question "what is to be done in order to develop the 'free' relationship with technology and to disarm the supreme 'danger?'" As explained above, the "supreme danger" is *Gestell* (usually translated as "enframing"). The "supreme danger" turns on what Heidegger differentiates as the "danger." In discussing the way in which unconcealment works, Heidegger articulates "destining" (*Geschick* – see Ch. 1) as constitutive of the epochal history of Being. As Okrent points out, "the various periods of metaphysical history correspond to the 'destinings' of being" (HPR 246). Destining is, then, a specific appearance or manifestation of the Being of beings that constitutes an "epoch" of Being. The destining is always already under way. What this means is that for any one human

born at any point in history there is already an understanding of Being underway in the making of history itself.

At the same time any one determination of the Being of beings means that any other possible determination has been ‘held back.’¹²⁸ Destining becomes the danger when on the one hand mankind approaches the possibility that only that which is already revealed in a certain epoch is what is to be handled and thus ‘get stuck’ and no longer engage the Being of beings in the relationship of revealing ever anew. Within the “destining of revealing,” Heidegger writes, lies *Gestell*, which, as the realization of the “danger” in that the Being of beings is revealed *only* as standing reserve. This becomes supremely dangerous in the double-forgetting (discussed above).

But within *Gestell* Heidegger identifies the “saving power” that is to allow mankind to become free of the supreme danger. The key to this saving power is in the following statement by Heidegger, “The way in which technology unfolds [or “essences”] lets itself be seen only on the basis of that permanent enduring in which enframing [*Gestell*] appropriates [*ereignis*] as a destining of revealing” (BW 336). This means that *Gestell*, as an “event” (*ereignis*) of Being, essences or ‘presents itself to us’ it also presents itself for examination. “Everything,” Heidegger writes, “depends upon this: that we ponder this rising [of the essence of technology] and that, recollecting, we watch over it” (BW 337). This means, in turn, that to try and battle *Gestell* by further dominating it and viewing it as merely instrumental or to become

¹²⁸ See HPR 246.

philistines is not the way to handle this, but to utilize the thing that Heidegger sees as humankind's greatest ability – to think, “instead of merely gaping at the technological” (BW 337).

But how do we think on the technological and simultaneously remain surrounded on all sides by it? The answer comes as “releasement.” It is in the *Discourse on Thinking* and “The Turning” that Heidegger formulates his thoughts on “releasement” (*Gelassenheit*). On releasement, Heidegger again gets heavily criticized on all sides. By the later years, as I have tried to show, Heidegger cannot formulate his thought in terms of subjective Dasein anymore and so it seems that authentic resoluteness is not something the late Heidegger is concerned with. *Gelassenheit* is, in-fact, precisely the opposite of the will to “mastery” that Heidegger claims is the pervasive and dangerous comportment that is the “thoughtlessness” of the age. David Hoy has characterized Heidegger's “releasement” as “ontological passivism” noting that resolute Dasein disappears in Heidegger's later thought, so “criticism is possible only through poetry and philosophy done more as ‘meditative thinking’ than as social and political engagement” (TOL 201). In other words it becomes apparent that if anyone is to be “saved” from the totalization of *Gestell*, then it is not going to be in terms of affecting spiritual change via ontic political action, but that a fundamental shift in mankind's comportment toward Being, hence a shift initiated from the “inside,” must happen before the literal politics of technological states can shift.

Gelassenheit as a “letting be” is meant as a letting go of the comportment towards the technological as a game of mastery, as an attempt to change from the outside going in. This passive comportment that allows for meditative thought is yet a second manifestation of what Heidegger sees as the “saving power.” This “letting be” is also another aspect of the Habermasian critique as it “releases” anyone from taking responsibility for historical events that, on Heidegger’s reading, are inevitable irruptions of the completion of Western metaphysics. But again, Heidegger seems to think that the individuals involved in any aspect of late modernity are inconsequential – that the tragedy unfolding on the world stage would take place regardless. In other words, it does not matter who the actors are, the play will go on and the characters will fulfill their parts. This does not mean, for example, that Hitler, Himmler, etc., should not be seen as necessary proponents of the Holocaust, but that if it was not Hitler and the Nazi holocaust, then it would have been some other horrific event perpetrated by someone else, but still as a symptom of Nietzschean nihilistic ontotheology.

Seen in another light, the “releasement” could be the ultimate manner in which mankind can take “responsibility.” That is, Heidegger, in his discussion on meditative and calculative thought, is clearly attempting to resurrect “thoughtfulness.” He claims that only in being open to encounter entities and ourselves in a manner other than as *Bestand* are we able to “reground” ourselves and step away from the totalization of *Gestell*. In this sense Heidegger is actually voicing what might be the ultimate responsibility for ourselves and history – that to be

thoughtful is to let go of the shackling relationship of control with technology, to be meditative rather than purely calculative.¹²⁹ As Thomson puts it, “If we can learn to practice that phenomenological comportment he calls ‘dwelling,’ then we can become attuned to the phenomenological ‘presencing’ (*Anwesen*) whereby ‘being as such’ manifests itself.”¹³⁰ As it stands, us late moderns, in our obsession with optimization of all things, do not encounter “being as such.” Rather, as Heidegger points out, we encounter being as nothing – we only encounter beings. This is what Heidegger commonly refers to as the “oblivion” of Being or the “nihilation” or “forgottenness” of Being.

Heidegger first discusses “oblivion” and “nihilation” in the 1929 essay “What is Metaphysics?” and continues the discussion of the oblivion of Being in “The Turning” and even later in *Four Seminars*. The central thesis here is that beings, in their being uncovered or revealed as what they are must also have the character of the “nothing” from which they can be revealed.¹³¹ This is what Heidegger intends in his enigmatic statement that “The nothing does not merely serve as the counterconcept of beings; rather, it originally belongs to their essential unfolding as such. In the Being of beings the nihilation of the nothing occurs” (BW, 104). What Heidegger seems to be suggesting here is that what Being *does* as Being is couched in the “nothing” –

¹²⁹ Heidegger writes “So long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain held fast in the will to master it” (QCT, 32).

¹³⁰ Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernism*, 211.

¹³¹ The “nothing” or “nihilitating” is also “oblivion” (*Vergessenheit*) which is meant to indicate the opposite of *alētheia* or is, simply *lēthē*. See Heidegger “The Turning” note 2 (QCT, 36).

Being unfolds in the nothing and so the nothing is the action of Being. In this early account the nothing is encountered by Dasein in anxiety (*Angst*).

Heidegger first holds the discussion on anxiety and the nothing in *Being and Time*. The character of the nothing is not in the sense of something non-existent. Rather, the nothing is the insignificance of the world; when the world as such is insignificant, this means that all beings (entities) are also insignificant and, therefore, do not become unconcealed. The moment of experiencing this insignificance is the moment of anxiety, while the insignificance itself is the nothing. This is what Heidegger means when he states “In that in the face of which one has anxiety, the ‘It is nothing and nowhere’ becomes manifest. . . [this] does not signify that the world is absent, but tells us that entities within-the-world are of so little importance in themselves that on the basis of this *insignificance* of what is within-the-world, the world in its worldhood is all that still obtrudes itself” (BT 231/SZ 186-87). In light of this, it becomes clear what Heidegger means by “in the Being of beings nihilation of the nothing occurs” – that when something is uncovered as what it is the undifferentiated insignificance of the nothing is overcome, is “nihilated,” forgotten, or hidden (see fn. 29).

This indicates that in this essential action of Being the “ontological difference” between Being and beings breaks down.¹³² Given that *Gestell* is a way of

¹³² See Thomson “I would thus go so far as to suggest that Heidegger’s recognition of the ‘nihilating’ of the nothing as the action of being as such, an activity that exceeds and so cannot be explained in terms of the ontological difference between being and entities, is the defining experience at the heart of his so-called turn and the *sin qua non* of his “later” thought. *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*. 209.

revealing beings, it is also an action of Being and so it is also a “nihilating” or, as Heidegger comes to use the term (*Vergessenheit*) “oblivion” or “forgetting” of Being. This is what is meant when Heidegger states that Being is now “the coming to presence of *Gestell*” (QCT, 38). This nihilating, as has been discussed, is so totalizing that within this very revealing the subject/object distinction also breaks down. This is what Heidegger is getting at when he writes, “The coming to presence of Enframing is the danger. As the danger, Being turns about into the oblivion of its coming to presence, turns away from this coming to presence, and in that way simultaneously turns counter to the truth of its coming to presence” (QCT, 41). That totalizing nature of the *Gestell* means that beings are only significant or meaningful in terms of their use. Once this becomes total, any other way for an entity to be is lost (e.g. the forest is merely a resource for lumber – the significance of the trees as trees and as forest has been forgotten), hence Being has “turned” to oblivion (*Vergessenheit*, or literally the state of having forgotten). The totalization is negative in the sense that Heidegger sees the highest and essential function of man as the being that is historical and is so on the basis of shifts in the way beings are uncovered. If mankind gets to a point where there is only one possible way to understand beings and the Being of beings, then the relationship between Being and mankind disappears because there is nothing left to unconceal – it already appears as such. In a sense, Heidegger is advocating a kind of “ontological diversity” in that the essential relationship between mankind and being rests on there being more than one possible way in which beings presence.

This dual nature of Being as also oblivion is similar to, and indicates yet a third manifestation of the saving power growing from the danger. That is to say that just in the way that the revealing or illuminating of beings as what they are (i.e. their “Being”) also involves the oblivion or concealing, so also the danger is simultaneously the saving. This dual nature concerning Being/oblivion is at the heart of what Heidegger attempts to articulate in Hölderlin’s passage. In this sense, then, we must understand that Heidegger, in his discussion on calculative and meditative thought, is not championing meditative over calculative thought. His stance, rather, is based on the view that meditative thought is being pushed out for exclusive calculative thought. Both, it seems, are needed, just as both concealment/unconcealment and Being/nothing are also needed.

But Heidegger’s articulation of the history of Being, the danger, and the “saving power” in its multifarious manifestations still seems murky. In fact, Vattimo relates that the late Heidegger felt that one of his deepest failings may have been that his articulation of the danger and saving power may not have ever been made sufficiently and that this could be an even greater failing than “the wretched business of his involvement with (alas!) Nazism” (NE 14).¹³³ Just how is this statement supposed to be understood? As suggested above, had Heidegger in the 1930s been able articulate the two-tiered politics that I have discussed, he might have recognized that Nazi appeals to spirit and, thus, to something positive for the German people (or

¹³³ Gianni Vattimo cites Gadamer as the source of this statement. See also Thomson’s discussion of this passage in *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, 210.

the entire Western world for that matter) as confused and ill-fated. In light of this, is Heidegger saying the same thing here? Is he saying “Had I been able to articulate this, perhaps I could have avoided the Nazi ‘blunder’?” This seems unlikely. On the other hand, Heidegger seems to see his articulation of the saving power and his “wretched business” with the Nazis as two separate failings. This does not mean, however, that we cannot help to make these things clear (as my attempts should be evidence of).

The saving power presents itself in *Gestell* and as long as we are concentrated solely on optimization and never see the “saving power,” we are in limbo as late moderns with the weight of the possibility of another of Heidegger’s “wretched business” tethered to our very humanity. It is not the gadgets themselves; it is not our cell phones, our laptops, and the internet that are the danger. It is us. It is our unthinking and un-meditative involvement with our tools that is the danger. Heidegger is calling on us to *be* thinking and meditative – to contemplate outside our involvement with our gadgets that have become so integrated with everyday life that we do not see that we ourselves have become a series of zeros and ones, caught up in the destining that is the *Gestell* of today’s state of “pure circulation” known as the world market – that we have become a statistic in a bipartisan democracy in which the statistics let us know when no child has been “left behind.” Simultaneously it is in seeing *Gestell* as it is that we can first start to meditatively think on the meaning and significance of ourselves and the things in our world. This is, hence, what Heidegger means by living “poietically.” Not that we should become philistinian

poets, but to engage our world in a thoughtful and creative manner. The alternative, as Dreyfus and Kelly point out, is to “aspire to a life that requires no skill to live it well” (ATS, 214). And it is this that speaks most deeply about Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazis – that he too was caught in the trappings and upsurging of the movement that eventually revealed itself as the technological monstrosity he had ascribed to communist Russia and consumerist America. And when he states, as Habermas credits him, that even the most resolute philosopher could not initially see Nazism for what it was, he seems to be making a statement not about other thinkers, but about himself - that Heidegger, the thinker of Being, who called mankind the shepherd of Being, lost his way.

The “*Auseinandersetzung*” with technology, then, is not just an articulation of modern industry or a final chapter in modernity, but it is a personal engagement for Heidegger with his overall politics and his spirit. In the end, it is disappointing that his only utterances concerning the horrors of the Holocaust fall so very short of the degree of humanity implied in being meditative.

Conclusions: Heidegger’s Relevance in the Contemporary World.

Introduction.

In 1966 Martin Heidegger alludes to the collapse of the distinction between ontic and ontological politics, stating “It is a decisive question for me today how any political system can be assigned to the current technological age – and if so, which system? I do not have an answer to this question. I am not convinced that it is

democracy. . . there still stands the presupposition that humans have control over the essence of technology” (HR 324). Here Heidegger is questioning the dominant politics in the West because he sees the brand of democracy (American) that has come to prevail as a perpetuation of technological politics. To be more precise, it is the capitalist market he sees as a proliferation of *Gestell* in which the people serve as a means for the self perpetuation of an economy that has no other aim than to continually reaffirm itself – something he has dubbed “Americanism.” This technological mindset he sees permeating even interpersonal relationships and removing people from an organic self-understanding rooted in historical tradition. He states, “technology increasingly tears humans away from the earth and uproots them. . . the uprooting of humans has already taken place. We only have purely technological relationships anymore” (HR 325). The “saving power” for Heidegger (discussed in chapter 4) comes in the form of *Gelassenheit* or “releasement” and in meditatively examining our relationship with technology.

This is Heidegger’s take on the culmination of modernity. The question at the end of this study on Heidegger’s politics is a very pressing one: how does Heidegger’s take on technology (a perspective that addresses more of the industrial technology of the twentieth century than the technology of information and communications of the twenty-first century) inform pressing global issues today? In what follows I will put the late Heidegger’s views on technology and what must be done to “save” us from a totalizing and flattened out politics of technology and circulation into a brief dialogue with Gianni Vattimo’s ruminations on the

“postmodern condition” in his penetrating essay “Liberty and Peace in the Postmodern Condition.” Vattimo’s basic theme is whether the postmodern condition of pluralism will ultimately exacerbate the problems facing liberty and peace. In my opinion, this cannot be fully explored without considering technology as an integral and inseparable part of the contemporary pluralized world. Additionally, I will include some contemporary issues in an attempt to apply the thought of both authors to a “real world” situation. Ultimately, the question about Heidegger and thinking the “unthought” is answered in terms of his “god.”

V.I

Recently, I was shown an alarming documentary on a young individual from Austin, Texas named Cody Wilson. Mr. Wilson has found a way to demonstrate precisely how contemporary technology can produce potentially dangerous situations from the very fact that the internet provides unprecedented ease of access and anonymity. This danger also forces a consideration of humankind’s responsibility when it comes to the role we play in our relationship with technology. In the past five years a company called Makerbot has developed what they call a “3D printer.”¹³⁴ Essentially, it is a computer printer that produces three-dimensional objects out of a growing variety of plastics from a computer generated blueprint. This works just like the typical home printer: connect a laptop to it, choose whatever schematic you are working with and

¹³⁴ For a variety of official news stories on Cody Wilson and 3D printing, see <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/cody-wilson>.

press “print.” In a matter of hours a material object that was not previously in existence is now ready for “use.”

Wilson has taken it upon himself to address the ongoing controversy over gun control in the US in the wake of dozens of mass shootings during the past decade by working out schematics of the components of firearms and producing them in a 3D printer.¹³⁵ As a self described “crypto-anarchist” and founder of the company “Defense Distributed,” Wilson has announced that it is his goal to release the schematics freely over the internet for anyone to access. I cannot imagine a better real life example of the “mass circulation” of information as immediately forcing questions as to whether or not to paternalistically ban firearms or as to who (and the question “who?” obviously leads to suspicions of Muslims or fundamentalist pockets that have “terrorist” tendencies) will have access and whether or not this will lead to an overall increase in violence not only in the US or towards the US, but globally.

Cody Wilson’s take on this, as I understand it, is merely to demonstrate that the problem surrounding firearms and violence is not going to go away and, in fact, is going to make itself more and more obtrusive as technology advances. In this sense, perhaps Wilson has done the US government and global citizens a favor by forcing a confrontation with the deeper issues of violence in a globalized and pluralistic world – with each culture putting forth their values as justified. The question is forced

¹³⁵ In 2012 there were over a dozen mass shootings in the US in which more than one person died. See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/nation/us-mass-shootings-2012/>. For the total over the past seven years see <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/02/21/mass-shootings-domestic-violence-nra/1937041/>.

precisely because it brings up an uneasiness that is prevalent today, a feeling of precisely the type of “ungroundedness” or “uprootedness” that both Heidegger and Vattimo recognize today and that Nietzsche recognized as forthcoming in the last part of the 19th century. It is so much easier to blame our gadgets, in this case our guns and gun laws, than it is to confront a feeling not unlike Heidegger’s *unheimlichkeit* when it comes to existential issues like the pluralism and technical relationships among people.

With this real world example in mind, I would like to open the dialogue I have proposed with the following questions: If the nihilistic politics of technology is the culmination of modernity, then how do we move past this “nihilism” and into a new and richer time? According to Heidegger “only a god can still save us” (HR 326). What does this mean in light of technological totalization? What kind of god is it and what exactly does “save” (*retten*) mean here? And where are we going, us late moderns, into a new age? Do we call it “postmodern?”

Perhaps what needs to be examined is what “posmodernity” itself is supposed to mean. “Postmodern” is situated, just in looking at the word itself, in reference to modernity, so that any understanding of what it is supposed to be depends on an understanding of what modernity is. “Modernity,” then, is thought to have begun with Descartes and the scientific revolution. This is usually referred to as the “Enlightenment” which champions rational processes and a single “objective” truth that is accessible to any society that is willing to adopt the means and methods of the

newly scientific West. Vattimo sums up the “logic of modernity” as “the logic of linear time, a continuous and unitary process that moves toward betterment” (NE 49-51). This linearity that Vattimo identifies manifests itself as modernity insofar as it means that whoever is at the “forefront” of the temporal movement is “closer to betterment, to the light of reason” (NE 50).

This would mean that postmodern “logic” must be something other than linear and unitary. It must be, then, nonlinear and non-unitary - fragmented.

Demonstrating an uncanny ability to pinpoint a location for the event of the unfolding of historical processes, Vattimo observes that the “real passage into postmodernity is the event that Nietzsche called the ‘death of God’” (NE 51). What this indicates, on Vattimo’s reading, is the beginning of the disappearance of a unitary sense of history that grounded the West. This means that the unifying force that defined and grounded the West, in the form of Christianity, was already crumbling. Nietzsche saw that through the processes of modernity - that is, the transformation of the categories of truth in the form of a Christian (thus, a Eurocentric) understanding of the universe to one that is based on experimental science and rationality – that any unifying understanding of the place of mankind in the West becomes untenable. Nietzsche’s Madman recognized that this was not apparent to anyone at the time, but knew that it would manifest itself in the future. Today’s postmodern societies are faced with a shattered sense of unity that is recognized as “pluralism.” This pluralism can be found, for example, in the recognition of a multiplicity of societies and cultures – all with differing traditions and values. It is also recognized, in a cultural

anthropological sense, that this multiplicity cannot be reduced to what Vattimo calls a “common core” (NE 53).

Additionally, an understanding has developed that there is no one single objective “truth” either to human nature or culture, that there is a sense in which we must comport ourselves as part of a pluralism in the face of a diversity of cultures and values. This is nowhere more apparent than in the burgeoning field of ethical studies in which no one normative “system” seems to be satisfying for all possible situations for all humankind. And there is no longer merely “ethics.” Now there is a multiplicity of bioethics, biomedical ethics, animal ethics, business ethics, punitive ethics, political ethics, etc. It is in more contemporary ethics, with a flavor of “political correctness” and a sensitivity for cultural anthropological approaches, that relativism has shown itself to work in a way as to, on the one hand account for a plurality of cultures, but on the other hand to lose the sense of culpability that is the entire point of ethical studies to begin with. At an earlier point in Western history, ethics came in the form of commandments from God, and those who were outside this ethics were “uncivilized” and were to be “converted.” The point is, as Vattimo recognizes, that the belief in God was crucial in the formation of a unitary society and “a rationalization of existence” (NE 51).

While it is apparent that the unification that has been lost is due to the processes of modernity, it is not apparent how Heidegger’s diagnosis of technology informs this discussion. Are Vattimo and Heidegger saying opposing things? On the

one hand Vattimo sees a world of undetermined or ungrounded plurality while Heidegger's technological politics reduces humanity to "standing reserve," which, at least superficially, seems to be the opposite of plurality. In this sense Heidegger's "saving power" is one that seems to need to move in the direction of a pluralism, which Vattimo sees as already there. Perhaps these are both the case: the "ungrounded" plurality that informs relativistic attitudes of people towards each other is enabled or accommodated by the uniform effects of *Gestell*. In other words the multiplicity of cultures and values becomes more and more of a superficial sort of style that is tacked on to decorate the "other" who, at bottom, *is* reduced to a common core, one of "standing reserve" in the *Gestell* of informational circulation. This is perfectly embodied by the problem that Cody Wilson has forced upon the US government and global citizens.

V.II

From this we get a sense of exactly what kind of "god" Heidegger meant in the statement quoted above and it is plain that Vattimo also has a version of Heidegger's god in mind. For Heidegger, the relationship with our more and more advanced gadgets is not something he sees (and Mr. Wilson has demonstrated) as reversible, nor should we want to reverse the course of history. So, this god is not going to be one that resembles any past god. That is to say that the place in the contemporary West (that is not even really the "West" anymore as the global market is, truly, "global") for a unifying god that maintains one truth objectively as a father figure

watching over his children is not what he has in mind. And this also applies to Vattimo, who recognizes that, like the situation with technological proliferation, the shattered unity of the postmodern world is not something that can be reunified by some all encompassing force, that Eurocentrism has come to an end and that “other” cultures are finding their voice and asserting themselves as autonomous visions of reality, with which “Europeans have to start a dialogue” (NE 52). In fact, this new “god” may not even be a god in the sense that we are accustomed to and in this sense “god” is a metaphor for a “grounding” or “rooting” or “truth” without which the *unheimlich* will reign.

For Heidegger this god will not merely appear and “save” us. Rather, “at most we can prepare the readiness of awaiting” (HR 326). But, how does one prepare for this god? For Heidegger this is done in two ways.¹³⁶ One way is in the thoughtful contemplation of our relationship with technology through questioning, which, as noted above, is something that the actions of people like Cody Wilson is making more and more pressing. The other way is “releasement” (*Gelassenheit*) or “letting be,” which calls on us to release ourselves from the struggle to dominate and determine what technology is and what it will do. We also cannot reverse the course of history or just get rid of the technological. So, we must let it go on in its course and find ourselves somewhere in this movement.

Vattimo also has a way of addressing the contemporary situation and that is precisely to question the nature and status of peace and liberty in the twenty-first

¹³⁶ See the discussion on the “saving power” in Chapter 4.

century. Again, he points to Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God and the warning that the death of God had to be seen through until every notion of truth has also died. Otherwise, the mechanisms that make the all encompassing supreme "truth" of God oppressive and dominating would live on. The only thing that might be different is the name (NE 54). Similarly, Heidegger recognizes the mechanisms of oppressive supreme "truth" in the exaltation of science and technology. Vattimo sees the supreme and oppressive in the postmodern pluralism today "where each one of the many cultures that have now found a voice (through liberation from colonialism or through the 'discovery' of the inescapable multiplicity of the 'play of language') continues to live as if it were the sole and supreme human culture possible" (NE 54). Here it would be good to note that the "relativism" I addressed above as negative is only negative because it is a way of avoiding any thoughtful or responsible engagement with other cultures. Instead one might just as easily look at humanitarian issues such as female genital mutilation as an issue for particular cultures and adopt a stance of "to each their own." This disconnected and unthoughtful sort of stance is itself a product of shattered modernism. In contrast I see Vattimo talking about a deeper recognition that perhaps a looming possibility for future violence between people is a kind of cultural egotism in which any concrete recognition of the other is not occurring.

Rather, Vattimo recognizes that "If we do not want – and indeed we cannot, except at the risk of terrible new wars of extinction – to give way to the temptation of resurgent fundamentalisms grounded in race, religion, or even the defense of

individual national cultures against invasion by ‘foreigners’ we will have to imagine a humanity with at least some of the characteristics of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*” (NE 55). The characteristics he is pointing to, as he explains, are not the strongman brawniness typically brought to mind by “overman,” but an ability to look upon a multiplicity of cultures with a more “esthetic” eye than one searching for an objective truth (NE 54). The “esthetic” here refers to an attitude toward “others” that are “different” in one aspect or other as if in a gallery with a variety of artistic styles on display. This proves interesting because on the one hand he is right about Nietzsche and his estheticism – the work of art as a source of overcoming. But this is also something that Heidegger deeply criticized and rejected on the grounds that it, along with science, technology, culture, and the loss of the gods, leads to a greater emphasis on the modern subject and the subjective view of dominance over the world (QCT 116-117). In other words, on Heidegger’s reading, *subjectivism* is the human drive to control every aspect of objective reality, the drive of mankind to position itself in such a way that “he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is” (QCT 134).

Both Heidegger and Vattimo have similar opinions about absolutist subjectivism – for Vattimo the “real enemy of liberty is the person who thinks she can and should preach the final and definitive truth” (NE 54). So, it is surprising, then, that Vattimo goes on to include Heidegger’s famous expression “Only a god can still save us” in the esthetic “salvation” (NE 54). While Vattimo acknowledges that this claim seems to be a “blasphemous parody,” he maintains that the only possible means

of bringing about a reconciliation of peace and liberty in the postmodern world must be an esthetic process. To specifically address Heidegger, he makes two points, 1) that if we are to take Heidegger's statement seriously at all, we must acknowledge that Heidegger could not have meant a dogmatic God and 2) that in recognizing the West as the place of the "going down of Being," Heidegger is acknowledging a history of individual secularizations that have consistently and consecutively undermined the absolute principles on which the West was established (NE 57). In articulating this reframing of Heidegger's God statement, Vattimo has implicitly identified the inner paradox of the "postmodern condition" – that the subject is at once the danger and the salvation, a paradox Heidegger pointed to in quoting Hölderlin's famous line from "Patmos," "*where the danger is, grows / The saving power also.*"

How is it possible to be both the dangerous subject and the saving one? Through some sense of irony in personal reflection. This is recognized by Vattimo in a note Nietzsche writes about the possible violence between peoples once the belief in objective order (God) has vanished. Here Nietzsche is credited with quipping that when this happens it will not be the violent who prevail but the moderate who have a certain sense irony towards themselves (NE 53-54).¹³⁷ In putting Heidegger and Vattimo in dialogue, this irony becomes at the same time the saving power. What this means is that the "moderate" ones embody most what the *Übermensch* is: the

¹³⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, "European Nihilism," in *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, Rüdiger Bittner ed. Kate Sturge trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 116-21.

individual who can live as an individual with integrity and conviction, but who can also have a sense of humor enough (not take oneself so seriously) to understand that personal truth cannot and should not preach the final truth – that there more than likely is not one. At the same time this is not an invitation to indiscriminate and unthinking relativism, as noted above, but just enough self reflection to avoid being caught in any *Gestell* or totalitarian attitude – two things we see in National Socialism, for example. Given this, it is acceptable, even if it does violence to Heidegger, to consider an esthetic irony as a possible ally to peace and liberty.

Conclusion

Is it possible that Cody Wilson has the sense of irony in discussion here? At first glance he seems mad and even sensationalist, which he very well could be. Whether or not he does have this sense, the real life demonstration of the Heideggerian point that we cannot stop the proliferation of technology or the circulation of information is perhaps what counts more. Wilson has forced upon many people the very situation Heidegger has identified and is demonstrating that government imposition (much like the need for a dogmatic truth or God) is not only not the answer, but is also irresponsible. Perhaps some catastrophic event will result from Wilson's synthetic firearms and some might say that this event is exactly what is needed to motivate the sort of reconciliation of peace and liberty with the "postmodern condition." Possibly, but this could also go the other way.

At this point it is safe to say that Heidegger definitely does have something to contribute concerning contemporary world issues. While the usual criticisms of him, particularly the Levinasian critique, remain as reminders and warnings of the pitfalls of certain essentialist tendencies, Heidegger's late work on technology and the future of thought is informative and relevant. Even if he must be interpreted esthetically, it seems that if Heidegger is not read this way, then whatever he means by "God" will remain obscure and unreachable – which he arguably actually thought himself. In this sense, Heidegger admits that he cannot himself think the unthought, but merely has an idea of how to prepare for it.

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