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The Tragedy of the Political:
Heidegger and the German Conservative Revolution

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The Tragedy of the Political:
Heidegger and the German Conservative Revolution

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M.A., Boston College, 2017

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Philosophy
2023

Abstract

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This project investigates Martin Heidegger's account of the political by staging a confrontation between his thought and the German Conservative Revolution, represented by Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, and Oswald Spengler. I demonstrate that Heidegger's political orientation is in line with conservative revolutionary thought and this accounts for both his affirmation and subsequent disillusionment with National Socialism. While he initially viewed the party as vehicle for both German renewal and another philosophical beginning, Heidegger's disillusionment would lead him to reject not only the concept of the political, but also the practice of politics, which he renders synonymous with metaphysical will to power and the exercise of violence. This transition is explained by Heidegger's confrontation with Schmitt and G.W.F. Hegel in the early 1930s and his later confrontation with Friedrich Nietzsche and Jünger. Through the first two, Heidegger tries to determine a concept of the political consistent with the spirit of National Socialism. Through the second two, he uncovers the nihilistic will to power at the very heart of the political. Nevertheless, Heidegger continues to engage in political thought by critically distinguishing the modern concept of the political from the ancient Greek *πόλις*, presented in Sophoclean tragedy. Characterized as question-worthy, open, abyssal, and submergent, I argue that the *πόλις* is an-archic, i.e., foundationless, and is for this reason opposed to the foundational exercise of political power. However, I problematize this binary. From his confrontation with Spengler, Heidegger constructs a tragic historical narrative – the history of *beyng* – which affirms the *Untergang* (submergence) of *beyng* so that it might bring about another beginning. Insofar as the political is a symptom of submergence, then Heidegger would have to render it as a historically necessary condition for renewal. For this reason, I demonstrate that Heidegger leaves the *πόλις* and the political tragically entangled. The tragedy of the political explains how Heidegger's thought is both revolutionary and conservative; provides a foundation for addressing the current use of Heidegger's thought by the contemporary identitarian right; and, lastly, problematizes Heidegger's break with National Socialism, by demonstrating that he cannot provide a normative critique of political violence.

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Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the culmination of not only eight years of graduate work, but of twelve years of engagement with the thought of Martin Heidegger, who I first encountered as an impressionable freshman in a class on existentialism. Much of this engagement been for the better, enriching my life by intensifying my intimacy with time and death. However, choosing to invest myself in critically confronting the most unsympathetic aspects of his thought has not been an easy task. For this reason, I am immensely grateful to my mentors, colleagues, friends, and loved ones who have given me the courage and strength to carry this project out.

This project would not have been possible without the support and guidance of my dissertation committee. Above all, I want to thank my director, Andrew J. Mitchell, who not only pushed me to be a better scholar, writer, and translator, but who also taught me how to truly be a philosopher, to pursue questions both thoughtfully and fearlessly. Without his encouragement and support, I would have never had the courage to take on such an intellectually and emotionally challenging project. As I enter into the larger philosophical community, I hope that I can be even half the mentor that Andrew has been to me. I also want to thank my other committee members: Noëlle McAfee, John Lysaker, Philippe Schwab, and Peter Trawny. Noëlle's McAfee's political acuity has been instrumental for my development as a political philosopher. Furthermore, her patient and thorough mentorship regarding psychoanalysis has helped me to be a more sensitive and nuanced reader of texts and persons, a skill that I could not thank her enough for providing. John Lysaker's incisive questions have always challenged me to reflect on my personal epistemic and ethical commitments as a philosopher. In this way, he has helped me think outside of the immediacy of the project itself, situating it into my development as thinker. Moreover, I want to acknowledge his frequent pedagogical guidance, helping me to become a more responsive and compassionate educator. I first met Philipp Schwab while applying for a Fulbright scholarship to do research in Germany. His letter of recommendation for the program was not only supportive and thorough, it helped me to better see the merits of my project and provided me insights into the trajectory of my research. Since then, I have been grateful for his ever-enthusiastic support and guidance in my research. Lastly, this project would have not been possible without Peter Trawny's exacting and immanently critical research. His work helped me to faithfully navigate the complicated twists and turns of Heidegger's oeuvre, while always encouraging me to challenge this body of work on its own terms. He unconcealed for me the essential tragedy of the history of being, and for this I am thankful.

As an undergraduate and graduate student, there have been so many professors who have influenced this project, both directly and indirectly, and have helped me along the often-difficult path of philosophy. To those at Emory, I want to acknowledge, John Stuhr, Thomas Flynn, Cynthia Willett, and George Yancy. I also want to acknowledge the German Department at Emory who welcomed me with open arms into their classes, especially Peter Höyng, Hiram Maxim, Caroline Schaumann, and Didem Uca. I also want to thank Bracht Branham in the classics department, who taught me ancient Greek and, although I have not kept up with it as well as I should have, it has been crucial for helping me navigate Heidegger's complex relationship to the Greek philosophical tradition. At Boston College, Gary Michael Gurtler, Arthur R. Madigan, John Sallis, and Eileen Carroll Sweeney. At UNCA, Melissa Burchard, Brian Butler, Keya Maitra, Dwight Mullen, Dolly Jenkins-Mullen, and Gordon Wilson. I want to

especially acknowledge Duane Davis, who first inspired my love for philosophy in his course on Modern Philosophy. Since then, he has always been a source of intellectual and moral support and guidance not only as I have grown as a philosopher, but also as a person. Upon my graduation from UNCA, he wrote to me that “once in a great while a very special student flourishes so wonderfully and unpredictably,” but I would add that such flourishing requires a very special teacher to nourish them.

While at Emory, I have had the great fortune to have studied with some fantastic colleagues, who would become treasured friends. This project has benefited not only from their intellectual comments and contributions, but from their ability to get me out of my head and to enjoy moments of joyful forgetting. I want to thank Rachel Bath, Molly Kelly, Yuchen Liang, Teelin Lucero, and Andrea Warmack. I especially want to thank and acknowledge Christopher Merwin, who has always been both an intellectual guide and philosophical friend in the truest sense. With his encyclopedic knowledge of Heidegger’s work, I have always been able to find my way. Lastly, I want to acknowledge Shelley Feller, who, as my closest friend and roommate during the bulk of my graduate career at Emory, has seen me at my best and at my worst without ever failing to be a source of comfort and goofery. Whatever philosophical value might be found in this work, it would not be possible without Shelley’s theoretical and poetic insight. Much of this dissertation was written while watching *Selling Sunset* and *Below Deck* with them, and that thought will always give me joy.

I also want to acknowledge my friends outside of academia, especially those who I met at UNCA when I was 19. They knew me when I first fell in love with philosophy, and they have been in my life throughout this whole process. In many ways, they were the first people to experience this project. Transitioning from talking about Heidegger while smoking cigarettes outside of Pinnacle Ridge to a doctorate from Emory University, I am forever grateful for their love and support. Thank you, Zack Carson, Will Dawson, Sam Goodson, Alyssa Horrocks, Taylor Keenan, and Kipling Sayles.

I want to thank my siblings and their families: Cory and Matt Hassey, Penelope, Amelia, and Mathew, and Christian and Christine Johnson, Sully and William. I could not ask for more loving and supportive siblings, and I am so blessed to be an aunt to five amazing nieces and nephews. I also want to acknowledge my aunt, Rosemond Kacsur, and her family. Rosemond has always been a second mother to me, and this project would not have been possible without her ever present warmth and ecstatic joy in my life. She may have been a bit late for my christening, but she has always had time for me.

I especially want to acknowledge my mother and father, Amy and Bill Johnson. My mother has always nurtured my spiritual side, and do not think that I would have ever been interested in philosophy without that support. I was not the easiest child to raise, but she did so with love and patient understanding. I would not be here without her; “here” in every sense of the word. Thank you for always picking up the phone and talking to me about every topic under the sun: love, family, God, politics, and so and so forth. It is those moments of simple conversation that I treasure the most. Unfortunately, my father passed away when I was twenty-four, before I had started my dissertation or had been accepted to Emory University. Nevertheless, his presence is felt in every word of this project. While my mother fostered spirituality and metaphysical

questioning, my father fostered my love of argument and debate, often to my mother's annoyance. My father and I would constantly argue with each other, often taking a side we did not agree with just to be contrarian. This intellectual openness and love of competition made philosophy such a compelling subject for me. My greatest wish would have been for him to have seen me graduate and to know that I pushed myself to the limit as an academic and a philosopher, as well as for him to have met my fiancée, Sara White. This dissertation is dedicated to him and every argument we have ever had with each other.

Lastly, I want to thank my fiancée, Sara White, and all of the animals that make my life so joyful: Bijoux, Blue, Ceb, Venkman, and, our baby kitten, Maxie. I met Sara on a dating app two and half years ago. From a chance virtual encounter, and even a virtual first date, our relationship has blossomed into an incipient marriage. Before meeting Sara, I did not realize that I was missing the better half of my soul. With her, my life is filled with joy, meaning, wonder, and even the colors themselves are brighter. Often fearful of the world, her graceful presence gives me courage, security, and hope. This project owes its existence to her. I am excited for a future filled with kitties, veggies, reality TV, and piles of blankets. Thank you, Sara, for that future.

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Introduction

The Heideggerian Century and its Shadow

It is unobjectionable that Martin Heidegger is one of most influential philosophers of the last century. This only becomes clearer as we approach the centennial anniversary of the publication of *Being and Time* (1927). Following that publication, Heidegger exhibited an unprecedented influence in philosophical discourse, becoming a key voice in a multitude of methods, disciplines, and subjects, including phenomenology, hermeneutics, metaphysics, ontology, existentialism, deconstruction, and post-structuralism. Furthermore, the name “Heidegger” is frequently cited when confronting philosophically meaningful objects and themes, e.g., being, time, history, art, death, freedom, technology, and so on and so forth. Perhaps the most definitive statement of Heidegger’s influence is expressed by one of his prominent critics. Alain Badiou opens his book *Being and Event* with the claim that an “analysis of the current global state of philosophy” requires the assumption that “Heidegger is the last universally recognizable philosopher.”¹ Any engagement with philosophy today presupposes the acknowledgment that Heidegger is a philosopher, whose work reflects not simply a local influence, but one that is global.

This point is reflected even in Heidegger’s harshest critics. For example, in a 1989 article in response to the publication of Victor Fariás book, *Heidegger and Nazism* (1988),² Jürgen Habermas would write: “Questionable political conduct on the part of a thinker certainly throws a shadow on his work. But the Heideggerian *oeuvre*, especially the thought in *Being and Time*,

¹ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, Trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 1.

² Victor Faris, *Heidegger and Nazism*, Ed. Joseph Margolis and Tom Rockmore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

has attained a position of such eminence among the philosophical ideas of our century that it is simply foolish to think that the subject of the work could be discredited, more than five decades later, by political assessments of Heidegger's fascist commitments."³ It is with this quotation that I invoke the idea of a Heideggerian century: a century of philosophical thought that is in part oriented around the various problematics posed by Heidegger's work. Yet this invocation is already fraught. As indicated by Habermas, the Heideggerian century is shadowed by the political specter of fascism.

It will be noted that among the philosophical objects and themes named above I did not include politics and ethics, upon which, relative to other thinkers, Heidegger had a marginal influence. This is largely due to Heidegger's decision to join the National Socialist party in 1933, a decision that he neither publicly apologized for nor denounced after the collapse of the regime. Notoriously, even though he would express private misgivings about the party apparatus after withdrawing from the rectorship of Freiburg University in 1934, Heidegger continued to endorse the spirit of the movement. Hence, in his 1935 lecture course on metaphysics, he would continue to speak of the "inner truth and greatness of this movement" (GA 40: 213). If Heidegger has had influence in political philosophy, it is more or less in order to point to his failure. Hannah Arendt would conclude that Heidegger's decision stemmed from political naivety.⁴ Ernst Jünger would echo this reading as well, claiming that Heidegger had done "those stupid things" because he, as a philosopher, did not have "clear political thinking."⁵ Still others, like Emmanuel Faye, argue

³ Jürgen Habermas and John McCumber, "Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 15, No. 2 (1989): 435.

⁴ Hannah Arendt, "Heidegger at Eighty," *Thinking Without a Banister: Essays in Understanding, 1953-1975* (New York: Schocken Books, 2018), 430.

⁵ Ernst Jünger and Julien Hervier, *The Details of Time: Conversations with Ernst Jünger*, Trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1995), 55

that Heidegger's political decision is evidence of philosophical vacuity. Heidegger's philosophy is entirely reducible to "Nazism and Hitlerism" and therefore it is "dangerous" to further the "acceptance or legitimization" of his work.⁶

Obviously, Heidegger's involvement in the regime also curtailed his appeal as an ethical thinker. But Heidegger himself questions this possibility; he does not advocate for a theory of ethics, because these are secondary to a determination of the truth of being. However, in his essay "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger does posit an "originary ethics," which would understand that the truth of being is a "primordial element of the human being" (GA 9: 271).⁷ In any case, by critically distancing himself from the conventional categories of moral thought, e.g., right and wrong, just and unjust, Heidegger is left open to the charge of being unable to judge the relative immorality of any action or event; hence, Heidegger's inability to morally condemn National Socialism, his own membership in the party, or historical events like the Holocaust.

Heidegger's personal political decisions and his apparent lack of a moral doctrine accounts for the shadow looming over the Heideggerian century. On the one hand, Heidegger supplies some of the most salient philosophical criticisms of the modern world. On the other hand, those same criticisms corresponded with an early embrace of National Socialism, which he later refused to apologize for or even condemn. This produces a unique problem for Heideggerian scholarship; it is impossible to reflect on Heidegger's social, political, and ethical critiques, without having to account for his personal failings. Heidegger's biography is inextricable from his work, and therefore from scholarship as well. Of course, one can object that

⁶ Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933-1935*, Trans. Michael B. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 7.

⁷ For an extended account of Heideggerian ethics: William McNeill, *The Time of Life: Heidegger and Ethos* (Albany: State University of New York, 2006).

Heidegger's contributions to phenomenology, hermeneutics and ontology are not reduced to politics or ethics. For example, the concept of the ontological difference, i.e., that being as such is not a being, is irrelevant to politics. This position presupposes that philosophy can, and perhaps should, be separated from practice. However, if we believe, as Heidegger does, that the practice of philosophy is essential to human existence and that this existence is always already tethered to a concrete world, then this objection does not stand. While not entirely reducible to his political and ethical decisions, Heidegger's philosophy reflects these decisions. Hence, Heideggerian scholarship requires critically confronting the facts of his life and the philosophical ideas that emerged from that life. This is the problem of the Heideggerian century: if we admit that Heidegger's thought is crucial to understand the world today, then we are also condemned to account for his life, and the philosophical-political problems that this life produced. This problem is perhaps best reflected by Leo Strauss: "Only a great thinker could help us in our intellectual plight. But here is the great trouble, the only great thinker in our time is Heidegger."⁸

Identitarianism and the Spector of the German Conservative Revolution

The question concerning Heidegger's politics has become only more pressing with the contemporary use of his thought by far-right writers and organizations across Europe and the United States. Specifically, the name "Heidegger" appears in the discourse of Identitarianism. As discussed in José Pedro Zúquete's 2018 book *The Identitarians: The Movement Against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, Identitarianism refers to the far-right ideological movement that believes that a people always exists as an exclusive identity and that traditional identities are

⁸ Leo Strauss, "Existentialism," *Interpretation* 22, No. 3 (1995), 305.

threatened by liberal universalism, cultural homogenization, and individual materialism.⁹ The threat of liberalism is accompanied by the influx of non-European immigrants, who are charged with allegedly “replacing” traditional European identities.¹⁰ Unlike other groups, which are supposedly encouraged to claim and affirm their cultural and racial identities, identitarians believe that Europeans (and white Americans) are unequally threatened because they are “prohibited from having an identity, at least an identity that is anything other than a museum piece.”¹¹ The task of combating replacement is to reify and publicly affirm the value of traditional identity groups, which is of course accompanied by the eliminationist activity of removing non-European peoples from the continent.

While appealing to a multitude of intellectuals to theoretically ground and legitimate their movement, identitarians are particularly attracted to Heidegger, doubtless due in part to his standing within the history of philosophy. For example, in 2015, at the national congress of the AFD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) in Hanover, Björn Höcke, the leader of Thuringia branch of the political party, said in a prepared speech: “As Germans we have to ask who we are. We need a ‘Yes’ to the ‘Us.’ The German people has to step out of its ‘forgetfulness of being’ and return to its ‘order of being’... Yes, this is Heidegger.”¹² Likewise, in a 2015 interview, Martin Sellner, the leader the Identitarian Movement of Austria, called Heidegger a “spiritual king,” and argued

⁹ José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 2.

¹⁰ Identitarian organizations frequently deploy the rhetorical notion of the “Great Replacement,” the belief that global elites are gradually “replacing” European people with non-European people, especially those who practice Islam. *Ibid.*, 146-147.

¹¹ Guillaume Faye, *Why We Fight: European Visions of the Post-Catastrophic Age*, Trans. Michael O’Mara (London: Arktos Media Ltd., 2011), 171.

¹² Julian Göppfarth, “Rethinking the German nation as German Dasein: intellectuals and Heidegger’s philosophy in contemporary German New Right Nationalism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* (June 2020), 263.

that the concept of *Dasein* is the “only, true and last enemy” of the “project of the planetary human state,” “imperialist rationality,” and “totalitarian enlightenment.”¹³ Outside of Germany, in an interview with *Compact*, Alain de Benoist, the figurehead of the New Right in France, criticized globalization for its spread of “individualism, the religion of human rights, the pre-eminence of self-interest, the regression of all values for the profit of the market society and thus the permanent spread of the capitalist *Gestell* (a Heideggerian term for the essence of technology).”¹⁴ As a whole, these quotes should make it clear that Heidegger’s thought contains a political saliency for the right, which encourages them to appropriate it for their distinct political aims. In place of the necessity of global homogenization, Heidegger provides the intellectual foundation for an existential determination of identity, one that is not taken for granted, but rather radically decided upon and affirmed in the face of death, i.e., replacement.

However, it is perhaps dishonest to say that identitarians *appropriate* Heidegger’s thought in order to legitimize their movement, as if this were a cynical act that is inappropriate to the intellectual merits of the philosopher’s work. That is to say, as if Heidegger himself were not a far-right thinker. Although it would be certainly reductive to identify his body of work with far-right ideology, given that his primary concern for re-raising the question of being is not political as such, it would also be generous to call Heidegger apolitical and outrageous to call him a leftist or liberal. Obviously, Heidegger’s early commitment to National Socialism points to

¹³ Göppfarth, “Rethinking the German nation as German Dasein,” 258; Martin Sellner, “Heidegger, Revolution and Querfront,” *Sezession Online*, Sezession, May 16, 2015, <https://sezession.de/49665/heidegger-revolution-querfront>

¹⁴ Göppfarth, “Rethinking the German nation as German Dasein,” 261; Alain de Benoist, “Populismus ist keine Ideologie, sondern ein Stil,” *Compact*, 4 February 2018: <https://www.compact-online.de/populismus-ist-keine-ideologie-sondern-ein-stil/?cookie-state-change=1676057637928>

his politics being further right than merely conservative. This image is only reified when we note Heidegger's skepticism toward Marxism, liberalism, and democracy. But what is often overlooked is his relationships, both direct and indirect, with figures associated with the far-right. Specifically, Heidegger intellectually and personally associated with members of the German Conservative Revolution, who were early influences on the Identitarian movement.

The idea of the German Conservative Revolution was first formulated in a 1949 doctoral dissertation by Armin Mohler, entitled *The Conservative Revolution in Germany (1918-1932)*.¹⁵ Although composed of a diversity of thinkers, organizations, and viewpoints, Mohler presented the Conservative Revolution as a relatively unified movement, one distinct from traditional conservatism. Mohler explains: "The adherents of the Conservative Revolution differed from the older conservatism on the assumption that the bonds, in which the conservative man wanted to live, were yet to be created."¹⁶ Rather than simply conserving existing values, conservative revolutionaries sought to implement "traditional" values through revolutionary action. Furthermore, Conservative Revolutionaries were distinguished from National Socialists, given that they tended to reject the latter's parliamentary aspirations and appeals to biological racism. In general, the German Conservative Revolution was oriented around four aspects: (1) conservation through revolution; (2) rejection of parliamentary politics; (3) the embrace of socialism, albeit one structured around nationalist aims; (4) the constitution of a "national community" that would overcome the conventional left-right divide and would reflect the militarized, "front-line socialism" developed during World War One.¹⁷ This dual commitment to

¹⁵ Armin Mohler and Karlheinz Weissmann, *The Conservative Revolution in Germany (1918-1932)*, Trans. F. Roger Devlin (Whitefish: Washington Summit Publishers, 2018).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁷ Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996), 2.

both conservatism and nationalist revolution, as well as its criticisms of National Socialism, cemented the movement as a preeminent influence on Identitarianism.¹⁸

The most well-known figures of the German Conservative Revolution include Gottfried Benn, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Hans Freyer, Edgar Julius Jung, Ernst Jünger, Ernst Niekisch, Carl Schmitt, and Oswald Spengler. To this list we may add Heidegger's name. Mohler himself, for example, includes Heidegger as a part of this intellectual tradition and claims that he "perpetuated" it after the war.¹⁹ Those intellectuals associated with Identitarianism and the French New Right, such as Alain de Benoist, also unambiguously identify Heidegger as a conservative revolutionary. Furthermore, one of key influences on the contemporary far-right, the Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin, has attempted to construct a new form of political thinking entirely rooted in Heidegger's critique of metaphysics: a "Fourth Political Theory," distinct from liberalism, communism, or fascism.²⁰ Dugin unambiguously grounds his political reading of Heidegger by rendering the latter's membership in the German Conservative Revolution into an "historical fact."²¹ Despite this being a "fact" for far-right writers, the status

¹⁸ More specifically, the Conservative Revolution influenced Identitarianism through the mediation of the French New Right. Spearheaded by Alain de Benoist, a close friend of Mohler, the New Right incorporated Conservative Revolutionary thought into its criticisms of liberalism and globalization. Members of the New Right, such as Guillaume Faye, would later split off into their own identitarian intellectual camp in the late 1980s. Thus, there is a direct historical link between the German Conservative Revolution and Identitarianism. See: Zúquete, *The Identitarians*, 7-12.

¹⁹ We should note, however, that Mohler also identifies Heidegger as a "neophyte" and therefore not as prominent a figure as Jünger or Niekisch, for example. See: Mohler, *The Conservative Revolution in Germany (1918-1932)*, 214; 227.

²⁰ Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory* (London: Arktos, 2012).

²¹ Alexander Dugin, *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning*, Trans. Nina Kouprianova (Whitefish: Washington Summit Publishers, 2014), 23

of Heidegger's relationship to the German Conservative Revolution remains relatively scant in academic scholarship.²²

The broad contention of this dissertation is that Heidegger's engagement with the German Conservative Revolution provides an important context for understanding the trajectory of both his philosophical thought and political decisions. If we wish to confront the contemporary political use of Heidegger's thought by the identitarian right, then this requires unflinchingly addressing Heidegger's revolutionary conservatism and how this informed both his early decision to affirm and later critically break with National Socialism. In order to properly frame this thesis, I would like to note two moments in the reception of Heidegger's thought that should have served as an entry way into this project but were not sufficiently carried out.

First, in a 1988 public debate between himself, Jacques Derrida, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, regarding the publication of Faris' book, Hans-Georg Gadamer, who was a student of Heidegger's, bluntly identifies him as a conservative revolutionary. Attempting to defend Heidegger from the charge of being an orthodox National Socialist, Gadamer postulates: "I would propose calling Heidegger, in truth, a National-Bolshevik."²³ By National-Bolshevik,

²² Some important exceptions: Ronald Beiner, *Dangerous Minds: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Göran Dahl, *Radical Conservatism and the Future of Politics* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1999); Mathew Feldman, "Between Geist and Zeitgeist: Martin Heidegger as Ideologue of 'Metapolitical Fascism,'" *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2005), 175-198; Christian Graf von Krockow, *Die Entscheidung: Eine Untersuchung über Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger* (Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1958); Daniel Morat, *Von der Tat zur Gelassenheit: Konservatives Denken bei Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger and Friedrich Georg Jünger (1920-1960)* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007); Bernhard Radloff, *Heidegger and the Question of National Socialism: Disclosure and Gestalt* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Thomas Rohkrämer, *A Single Communal Faith? The German Right from Conservatism and to National Socialism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

²³ Jacques Derrida, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Philosophy and Politics: The Heidelberg Conference*. Trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 73.

Gadamer is referring to conservative revolutionary position formulated by Niekisch, which sought combine the revolutionary praxis of Bolshevism with nationalist aims. According to Gadamer, Heidegger's national bolshevism would have made him a "heretic" relative to "dogmatic party members."²⁴ Thus, in an act of curious ambiguity, Gadamer defends Heidegger from Nazism by rendering him into conservative revolutionary, the same movement that inspired many elements of National Socialism in the first place.

Second, that same year, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu published a book entitled, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*. In it, Bourdieu identifies Heidegger with the German Conservative Revolution but extends this claim beyond the domain of the strictly political, calling him a "conservative revolutionary *in philosophy*."²⁵ Through a philosophical turn to everyday language and his intellectual engagement with figures like Jünger and Spengler, Bourdieu maintains that Heidegger had performed a conservative revolution in the philosophical academy. He writes:

Basing his authority on the philosophical tradition which invites one to exploit the infinite potential of thought which is contained in everyday language and popular proverbs, Heidegger introduces into academic philosophy (along the lines suggested by the parable of Heraclitus' stove, which he glosses indulgently) words and things which had previously been banished. Heidegger is close to the spokesmen of the "conservative revolution," many of whose words and theses he consecrates philosophically, but he distances himself from it by imposing a form which sublimates the "crudest" borrowings

²⁴ Ibid., 74.

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, Trans. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 2.

by inserting them in the network of phonetic and semantic resonance which characterizes the Hölderlin-style *Begriffsdichtung* of the academic prophet.²⁶

Heidegger's rhetoric renders the terms of the German Conservative Revolution philosophical.²⁷ It is not simply the case that Heidegger had political affinities with these figures and ideas, but rather he provided a philosophical basis for them, one that has been subsequently adopted by those who pursue Heidegger's project, consciously or not.

This project will carry out the line of thought approached in 1988. In responding to the charge of Heidegger's Nazism, a charge that has shadowed his thought for the past 34 years, Heidegger scholarship ended up addressing the shadow itself, rather than what the shadow left shrouded in darkness. That is to say, by explaining Heidegger's relationship to National Socialism, scholarship tended to leave unaddressed the political and historical ground from which Heidegger's decision was made. Rather than being a mere form of career opportunism or an example of political naivety, Heidegger's investment in National Socialism stemmed from his revolutionary conservative tendencies, which remained even after he became disillusioned with the party itself. As Gadamer had expressed, Heidegger's later criticisms of National Socialism came not from a liberal or leftist perspective, but a radical conservative perspective (i.e., "National Bolshevik"). Thus, in this dissertation I will argue that Heidegger's embrace and later rejection of National Socialism is properly framed by his intellectual confrontations (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Conservative Revolutionary thinkers, in particular, Spengler, Schmitt,

²⁶ Ibid., 54.

²⁷ To this linguistic charge, Bourdieu adds a more damning philosophical criticism. He argues that by "inscribing history and temporality within Being," i.e., the eternal, Heidegger had indeed revolted against the tradition of philosophy (metaphysics), but he did so by re-appropriating its most basic concepts, e.g., by temporalizing eternity, he also eternalized temporality. Thus, through an apparent revolution, Heidegger actually conserved the tradition of philosophy. Ibid., 62-63.

and Jünger.²⁸ It is my further contention that this framework will provide a better ground for addressing the presence of Heidegger's thought in the contemporary identitarian right.

Heidegger and the Political

The central claim of this dissertation is that Heidegger is indeed a political philosopher and that his political philosophy reflects German conservative revolutionary thought. However, I want to make it clear that Heidegger is not a political philosopher in the conventional sense of being interested in the questions concerning the meaning of justice, what serves as the most legitimate form of government, or whether rights are natural or social in origin, for example. Heidegger consistently engages in critiques of the central terms of political philosophy, especially those associated with modernity, e.g., "rights," "legitimacy," "nation," "socialism," "the state," in order to demonstrate their metaphysical basis. Hence, Heidegger's critical use of these terms becomes important for his broad project of overcoming metaphysics. Mirroring his method of deconstructing metaphysical concepts by returning, repeating, and recollecting their ancient Greek origins, Heidegger performs a similar gesture by rooting modern political theory and practices in the Greek *πόλις*. Thus, by turning to the *πόλις*, Heidegger seeks to recover and re-raise the question of the meaning of the political as such. In other words, he is invested in understanding what constitutes a political community prior to the implementation of policies,

²⁸ This notion of confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) is a technical term for Heidegger's approach to reading and interpreting other philosophers. Breaking down the term, it means exposing (*aussetzen*) two parties to each other (*einander*). Rather than attempting to establish a theoretical resolution between himself and another, Heidegger understands a confrontation as letting the opposition be, revealing what is essential to each thinker. Heidegger presents a succinct definition of the concept in a letter to Jünger: "In place of simple understandings that only escape into the sameness of a compromise [*ins Gleiche eines Ausgleiches*] and that mask the fecundity of oppositions, it is necessary to enter into the confrontation, through which each is brought into its proper character [*Eigenes*] and is recognized therein" (C: 17).

institutions, and practices. Regarding the above assertion that Heidegger is not a conventional political philosopher, what I mean is that he undercuts these questions by addressing the more fundamental question concerning the very being of the πόλις.

In terms of the history of political philosophy, it is appropriate to place Heidegger's thought in the 20th century concern for distinguishing the political from politics. This distinction primarily comes from Schmitt and Arendt, both of whom had personal relationships with Heidegger: the former as an interlocuter, and the latter as a student, correspondent, and even lover. Both were critical of depoliticization that had accompanied the rise of the liberal administrative state, which was more focused on the allocation of resources, i.e., politics, than on the formation and maintenance of a given political community, the political. Believing that liberal parliamentarism was unable to deal with fact of societal antagonisms, Schmitt renders the political into the determination of friends and enemies by the state: "In its entirety the state as an organized political entity decides for itself the friend-enemy distinction."²⁹ It is the task of the state to form a people by positing external enemies.³⁰ In contrast to Schmitt's antagonistic conception of the political, Arendt proposes that the political consists in the words and deeds of citizens, which take place in a public setting. She derives this determination from the Greek πόλις: "The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be."³¹ For

²⁹ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, Trans. George Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 29-30.

³⁰ Indeed, this determination is so essential to the state that, in the absence of an external entity, it will find a "domestic enemy." Schmitt writes: "Every state provides, therefore, some kind of formula for the declaration of an internal enemy." *Ibid.*, 46.

³¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 198.

Arendt, totalitarianism emerges from the gradual disappearance of public spaces, leaving citizens impotent before the state. Hence, she calls for a return to some of the conditions associated with the ancient *πόλις*. From these two determinations of the political follows a philosophical debate that has played a prominent role in political theory for the past few decades, reflected in the writings of Jacques Derrida, Roberto Esposito, Claude Lefort, Chantal Mouffe, Paul Ricouer, and Sheldon Wolin.

Heidegger is conspicuously absent from this list. Although directly engaging with and being an influence upon both Schmitt and Arendt, Heidegger is not generally treated as a theorist of the political. This dismissal is becoming increasingly hard to ignore, given the publication of manuscripts and notebooks that demonstrate Heidegger's explicit interest in the concept of the political, positively and critically. For example, as will be discussed in chapter three, after his initial disillusionment with the Nazi party, Heidegger will become invested in redeeming the spirit of National Socialism through an account of the political that is consistent with Hegelianism and opposed to Schmitt. For Heidegger, the political will be defined as the self-assertion and care of a historical people in and through the state (GA 86: 174, 655). Continuing to oppose himself to Schmitt, Heidegger will later reject the modern concept of the political through an appeal to the "pre-political *πόλις*," which will be rendered into the condition of "everything political in the originary and in the derivative sense" (GA 53: 102/82). In place of the political, which Heidegger will view as necessarily bound up with the metaphysical will to power, the *πόλις* (the political in the originary sense) will be an open site through which human will have a free relationship to beings as a whole and will thereby intimate the truth of being itself. Thus, as will be demonstrated throughout the dissertation, Heidegger is a thinker of the political and this interest is neither a secondary nor tertiary matter for him, given that the *πόλις*

will be rendered into the site for both a deconstruction of metaphysics and an originary engagement with the question concerning the meaning or truth of being/beyng.

This account of the πόλις undermines any attempt to bifurcate Heidegger's thought into his personal, political decision and his philosophy proper. As the site for intimation of the truth of beyng, the πόλις becomes a central structure in his ontological reflections. As such, Heidegger needs to be read as a political philosopher, or rather a philosopher of the political. But if we admit that Heidegger is such a philosopher, and that his political thoughts reflect those of the German Conservative Revolution, then do we consign his entire *oeuvre* to such an orientation? As Bourdieu had claimed, does Heidegger indeed perform a conservative revolution in philosophy? While not reducing Heidegger's thought entirely to this orientation, I maintain throughout this dissertation that the basic thrust of his beyng-historical project can only be properly understood through his confrontation with German conservative revolution, and insofar as such a confrontation serves to reveal something essential about both the confronter and confronted, then the essence of the history of beyng is revealed to have both a conservative and revolutionary character. These characteristics come to light within Heidegger's turn to ancient Greek tragedy.

Beyng-Historical Tragedy

According to Heidegger, nothing occurs in Greek tragedy, since it “commences [*fängt*] with the *Untergang*,” the decline or downfall (GA 53: 128/103). For example, at the moment of his birth, Oedipus is already fated to murder his father and marry his mother; his final downfall is just the realization of this fate. For Heidegger, this tragic logic of errancy that Oedipus carries out is reflected in the history of beyng. In the first beginning of philosophy, i.e., the history of metaphysics, human beings are brought before beings as a whole. This moment of “wonder” is

predicated on the forgetting or concealment of beyng (GA 45: 170/147). Such forgetting ultimately results in nihilism, whereby human beings find themselves without a foundation or reason for existing. The upside, however, is that nihilism provides the very conditions for another beginning, because it tacitly reveals that beyng is not an entity, but rather something self-concealing (GA 65: 122/88). This other beginning of philosophy consists in experiencing and grasping what was forgotten in the first beginning. He writes in 1941-1942, “The first beginning and the inceptuality [*die Anfängnis*] itself are experienced for the first time in the other beginning” (GA 71: 27/20) But in this way, it is clear that nothing happens in this other beginning; the truth that beyng is self-concealing had already occurred and the other beginning makes this occurrence apparent. Thus, Heidegger’s history of beyng consists in the tragic realization that other beginning has virtually already occurred. But why exactly is this tragic? It is tragic because this realization required working through the complex historical developments of the first beginning, e.g., the nihilistic reduction of human being to a technological instrument. These apparently negative consequences of metaphysics are historically necessary and therefore belong to the errant destiny of human beings. Thus, while the other beginning might seem revolutionary, it in fact conserves what was essential about the first.

The tragedy reflected in the history of beyng is also essential to the πόλις. For Heidegger, the πόλις is tragic because it is the site where human beings first encountered beings as a whole and where beyng was concealed. Hence, the first and other beginning are fundamentally tethered to the fate of the πόλις. In accord with this historical account, Heidegger will come to argue that the distinction between the political and the πόλις rests on the view that the former is a metaphysical concept. In order to exist in a political community, human beings lost sight of beyng itself. This moment resulted in the formulation of the concept of the political,

which served as a way of relating to beings as a whole according to a metaphysical logic of calculation and ordering (GA 53: 117/94; GA 54: 135/91). To be political means to be invested in determining the proper order and distribution of beings, i.e., resources, which are used to further secure and empower a given community. By investigating the being of the πόλις, Heidegger sought to understand the concealed condition of such political life. Insofar as the πόλις preserves the truth of beyng, then this would serve as the site for another beginning. I argue that the tragedy of the political is that Heidegger could only envision a fundamental transformation in our relationship towards being, and by extension a transformation in political life, by affirming the necessity of the political. Although distinguished and treated as antithetical, the πόλις and the political are fundamentally inseparable. Consequently, although the political will be negatively identified with the will to power and violence reflected in the modern state, which will be expressed in the writings of Jünger (work-state), Spengler (Caesarism), and Schmitt (the state as sovereign), Heidegger's tragic account of the history of beyng and the πόλις will require accepting these forces as the necessary conditions for another beginning.

Ultimately, I argue that the tragedy of the political explains both Heidegger's initial embrace of National Socialism, his subsequent disillusionment with the party, and his continued affirmation of the spirit of National Socialism in place of his earlier enthusiasm. That he viewed National Socialism as a possible vehicle for the inauguration of another beginning reflects his reactionary political views, indicated by his engagement with conservative revolutionary figures. Like other members of the German Conservative Revolution, Heidegger became increasingly pessimistic regarding the Nazi party, but differentiated himself by seeking to preserve the spirit of National Socialism. Following this logic, Heidegger continued to affirm the historical necessity of National Socialism, which, by acting as the culmination of modern nihilism, still

makes possible the event of another beginning. Thus, even while Heidegger will seek out a sense of the political life, the πόλις, that is counter to state power and violence, he will have to argue that these forces are historically necessary. In accord with this tragic vision of world, Heidegger is unable to provide moral critique for any of the examples of political violence that have haunted the 20th century.

This problem is only exacerbated by the identitarian interest in Heidegger's philosophy. Wishing to make political use of his philosophy, with the explicitly eliminationist aim of reifying historically specious identities at the expense of others, one might argue that identitarians are not faithful readers of Heidegger, especially since they do not heed his call for an open and question-worthy πόλις. But insofar as Identitarianism can be viewed as a symptom of nihilism, then they are just another example beyng-historical concealing that intimates another beginning. Even if Heidegger can account for the historical root of Identitarianism, he provides no basis for normative critique. As such, the tragedy of the political reveals the omnipresence of violence and power within political projects, but no ethic to counter it. Against Heidegger's own judgement, he reveals the fundamental danger of positing historical narratives, which can serve to legitimize the exercise of violence and power.

Chapter Outline

This project will be broken up into three parts. Part one, entitled "Tragedy and Decision," will encompass chapters one and two. Broadly speaking, this part will carry out Heidegger's beyng-historical confrontation with Spengler. Part two, entitled "The Political and Power," will encompass chapters three and four, and will present Heidegger's confrontations with Schmitt and Hegel, and Jünger and Nietzsche, respectively. Part three, entitled "The Πόλις and Identity," will cover chapter five and the conclusion. This part will detail Heidegger's tragic engagement with

the distinction between the political and the *πόλις* and will stage a confrontation with Identitarianism.

In chapter one, I stage a confrontation between Heidegger's early thought and Spengler. I argue that Heidegger's method of hermeneutical phenomenology was partially developed to counter the crisis of historicism, which was politically and culturally reflected in Spengler's narrative of the decline of the West. Despite being critical of Spengler, unlike other scholars, Heidegger accepts his basic characterization of modern cultural and historical relativism. In light of this confrontation, Heidegger articulates a form of historical decisionism, which I identify with his description of authentic historicity. This decisionism will provide the backdrop for Heidegger's later turn to National Socialism in the early 1930s.

Chapter two continues to address Heidegger's confrontation with Spengler but transforms the debate from a matter regarding authentic and inauthentic historicity to one regarding the history of *beyng*. By critically redeploing Spengler's notion of "decline" (*Untergang*), which I retranslate into "submergence," I argue that Heidegger's affirms Spengler's tragic account of history, whereby the West inevitably declines into violent Caesarism. But, unlike Spengler, Heidegger views the *submergence* of the history of the West, i.e., the history of *beyng*, as the opportunity for a decision in favor of another beginning. Insofar as the West submerges, it preserves and protects the fact that the *beyng* itself is submergent, i.e., self-concealing. This chapter will explain how and why Heidegger affirms a tragic historical narrative.

In chapter three, I stage a confrontation between Heidegger, Hegel and Schmitt. Arguing that Heidegger viewed National Socialism as a political vehicle for realizing another beginning, I will demonstrate his early account of the political and how it is explicitly differentiated from Schmitt. Through such differentiation, Heidegger will appeal to Hegel's theory of the state, a

move that is contrary to orthodox National Socialism. Hence, I show that Heidegger was not a conventional member of the party, since he was actively interested in presenting a theory of the political consistent with the spirit of movement. However, ultimately coming to view that the party as irredeemably tethered to power and violence, Heidegger will also come to reject both the concept of the political and the very practice of politics.

Chapter four provides the theoretical framework for Heidegger's rejection of the political, which I show to be a consequence of his confrontation with Jünger and Nietzsche. Through Nietzsche, Heidegger will come to the conclusion that the determination of beingness as will to power and beings as a whole as eternal recurrence will consummate the history of the first beginning of philosophy. This will be ontically reflected in the writings of Jünger, who will revealed that the will to power appears as the total mobilization of society, the formation of the work-state, and the determination of the worker as the proper historical subject. Insofar as the worker is given the task of technologically mobilizing the world, I argue that Heidegger's confrontation with Jünger provided the intellectual foundations for his later concepts of *Ge-Stell* and *Gelassenheit*. At the level of politics, I will show that Heidegger's critique of the will to power accounts for his rejection of politics in the late 1930s and early 1940s, since the political is reduced to the exercise of the power.

In chapter five, showing that he separates the political from the Greek πόλις, I argue that Heidegger attempts to construct an an-archic account of the πόλις, which, by being sensitive to the self-concealment of beyng, is characterized as open, question-worthy, and abyssal, and, for these reasons, opposed to the will to power. And yet, I will also show that Heidegger's description of the πόλις continues to reflect the presence of violence. I will explain this presence by means of the tragic narrative of the history of beyng. Insofar as another beginning can only

occur in light of the culmination of the first, then this means that Heidegger has to admit the historical necessity of those ontic symptoms that accompany culmination. This includes accepting the necessity of the political. Thus, I conclude that the political and the πόλις are tragically entangled.

The conclusion stages a confrontation between Heidegger and the use of his thought by identitarians. While the latter maintain that they are attempting to open up another beginning through the reification of cultural and historical identity against the liberal forces of globalization, I argue that they are just as inscribed in modern political thinking and are therefore another symptom of nihilism. However, I also argue that because Heidegger's tragedy of being requires such symptoms, then he cannot actually provide a normative critique of identitarian violence. Hence, in order to adequately confront Identitarianism we must go beyond Heidegger's fatalism.

Part One

Tragedy and Decision

I argue that Heidegger's political decision to affirm National Socialism is grounded in his account of historicity (*Geschichlichkeit*). Even after he had become disillusioned by the party apparatus, Heidegger continues to affirm the spirit of National Socialism as a historical destiny, which he demonstrates through the construction of a tragic historical narrative, the history of being. In chapter one, it is argued that Heidegger's account of historicity is presented as a means to overcome the crisis of historicism and its broader symptoms of nihilism, which is specifically articulated in Spengler's *Decline of The West*. The result is a form of historical decisionism, which claims that historical meaning must be decided upon by a people; politically, this dovetails with the project of nationalism. In chapter two, I argue that the history of being serves to supply content to his decisionism; the decision is now whether another beginning for philosophy is possible. This shift has important consequences for Heidegger's philosophy: the truth of being is rendered into an event; truth into unconcealment; and history into tragedy. Critically redeploing Spengler's notion of decline (*Untergang*), which I translate as "submergence," Heidegger argues that the history of metaphysics is predicated on the submergence of the truth of being; the submerged truth is tragically unconcealed only at the end of history. This seemingly abstract characterization of history has important political ramifications for Heidegger. In the early 1930s, Heidegger joins the Nazi party, which he views as a source for another beginning; in the late 1930s, he rejects this prospect, but continues to affirm the regime as necessary moment of history, i.e., a necessary tragedy to unconceal the truth of being as such.

Chapter One

Heidegger's Historical Anxiety: Spengler and The Crisis of Historicism

Recounting a 1936 conversation with Heidegger, Karl Löwith claimed that the former's concept of "historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*] was the basis for his political 'engagement.'"³² By engagement, Löwith means Heidegger's membership and active involvement with the Nazi party. This claim is affirmed by Heidegger himself in his recently published *Black Notebooks*. In this case, his later notion of the history of being resulted in the belief that National Socialism could inaugurate a new phase of history, a belief that he would later come to reject (GA 95: 408/318). Nevertheless, to the extent that the concept of historicity anticipates his history of being, then we have further evidence of the relationship between Heidegger's political decisions and his account of history.³³ But to exclusively focus on the relationship between Heideggerian historicity and National Socialism would be misleading. It obfuscates the political and social world in which his concept of historicity was first formulated, resulting in the impression that Heidegger's political decision was the causal result of his intellectual work (e.g. *Being and Time*). Conversely, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that Heidegger's account of history was formulated from out of a radical, right-wing political orientation, reflected in his critical confrontation with the crisis of historicism and Oswald Spengler's *Decline of The West* in the 1920s.³⁴

³² Karl Löwith, "My Last Meeting with Heidegger in Rome," *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 142.

³³ This should also not be surprising given that Heidegger identifies politics – the creation and existence of the polis – with the occurrence of history: "The *polis* is the site of history, the Here, in which, out of which and for which history happens" (GA 40: 117/162).

³⁴ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte (Vol.1): Gestalt und Wirklichkeit* (München: C. H. Beck, 1920), 136.

This chapter is structured around the demonstration of two claims: (1) Heidegger's method of hermeneutical phenomenology is his response to the crisis of historicism, which results in a form of historical decisionism; (2) this decisionism also informs Heidegger's early politics: communities and peoples are created by choosing and appropriating the past, rendering it meaningful. I will argue that this latter claim is shown through Heidegger's confrontation with Spengler, whose work is presented as the consummation of historicism.

Broadly defined, historicism is the worldview that all human qualities, concepts, values, and institutions are the contingent product of historical forces, as opposed to nature or the divine. Historicism denied the existence of eternal values (e.g. justice) and metaphysical concepts (e.g. providence). It even historicized science, subjecting "objectivity" itself to doubt. Accordingly, the spread of historicism across the various academic fields in Germany was accompanied by a growing skepticism and relativism, placing those fields in crisis. However, as the "consummate crisis of all crises," the crisis of historicism exceeded the bounds of academia.³⁵ It undermined the traditional cultural values that held communities together, as well as the belief in historical progress that defined modernity, since there was no objective measure of progress.

Heidegger responds to this crisis not by refutation, i.e. providing a criterion for making objectively, valid judgements. Rather he accepts the basic premise of the historicism – that human existence is fundamentally historical – while also undermining the crisis by arguing that historicity is the foundation that constitutes historical meaning in the first place. It may be true that eternal valuations do not exist, but historicity shows that historical values exist and are contingent upon human being. Hence, for Heidegger, historical meaning is not given, rather it is

³⁵ Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and The Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 39.

constructed out of the specific decisions of individuals and communities. Humans interpret and “choose [*wählt*]” to appropriate what has been from out of the contingencies of the present “moment [*augenblicklich*]” and the anticipation of the future (SZ: 385/367). Thus, historical decisionism provides Heidegger’s response to the crisis of historicism.

This decisionism also forms the basis of Heidegger’s politics, which is consistent with the German Conservative Revolution. In contrast to liberalism, decisionism claims that political decisions cannot be rationally adjudicated according to established parliamentary norms, especially when confronted with crises.³⁶ In the case of the crisis of historicism, decisionism means that because history cannot supply objective valuations for a community, then those values must be chosen independent of rational justification. Furthermore, as historical constructs, communities and peoples are not formed through deliberation, but exist in response to crisis.

This vision of history and politics emerges out of Heidegger’s confrontation with Spengler – another thinker associated with German Conservative Revolution – whose work is presented as the consummation of historicism (GA 63: 37/29). Heidegger rejects the political fatalism that follows from Spengler’s historicist relativism. For the latter, history shows that all cultures eventually enter into decline (*Untergang*), the West included. Rather than struggle against the inevitable, Spengler advocates that people accept their fate and choose to actively take part in decline. For Heidegger, the problem is that Spengler presents history as something that entirely determines human existence. It occludes the authentic decisions that render history meaningful in the first place. To this end, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger affirms the value of

³⁶ While decisionism is most associated Carl Schmitt legal thought, its roots are often located in Max Weber’s argument that politics and morality cannot be rationally formulated in a way consistent with the sciences. Although this charge has been subject to dispute. Dana Villa, “The Legacy of Max Weber,” *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, Ed. Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 80-81.

historical “struggle [*kämpfende*],” as opposed to passive or active acceptance (SZ: 385/367). By the 1930s, Heidegger’s decisionism and affirmation of historical struggle will manifest in his membership in the Nazi party, which he viewed as the vehicle to constitute a new beginning for the West, rooted in the historical recollection of the ancient Greek experience of the truth of being (the subject of the second chapter).

The Crisis of Historicism

In order to properly account for Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenology as a response to the crisis of historicism, I will first clarify the reasons why historicism resulted in crisis, or at least the perception thereof. From the Greek κρίσις, crisis contains multiple significations: (1) a separating or pulling apart, which calls for making a choice; (2) a decision or judgement; (3) a specific event that requires such decision.³⁷ Taken together, a crisis is an impasse, or site of separation, which calls for a concrete decision to be made. Accordingly, the question is why the historization of all human phenomena produced an impasse that called for decision. I will argue that the crisis appeared as a consequence of the development of historiographical research in the 19th century. Demonstrating that historiography was a legitimate and unique science - distinct from the natural sciences – resulted in an ethical and epistemic relativism and skepticism that internally undermined its very claim to objective knowledge. Outside of academia, this crisis was reflected in the growing doubt towards historical progress as such. I argue that this thesis is confirmed by the popularity of Spengler’s *The Decline of The West*, a text which explicitly affirmed cultural and historical relativism. Its success concerned the academic community, galvanizing the need for a proper response to historicism. This response was to formulate a

³⁷ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, 8th edition (New York: American Book Company, 1901), s.v. “κρίσις.”

philosophical foundation for historiography that would provide the possibility for making objective claims. This took shape in three methods – hermeneutics, neo-Kantianism, and phenomenology – which would influence Heidegger’s own method: hermeneutical phenomenology.

The term “crisis of historicism” initially appeared in 1921 with publication of an article by Ernst Troeltsch, bearing it as its title, “*Die Krise des Historismus.*” Troeltsch argued that historicism had led to a pernicious relativism that undermined the belief in “eternal truths.”

It (historicism) means the historicization (*die Historisierung*) of all our knowledge and feeling of the spiritual world, as it has developed in the course of the nineteenth century. We see everything here in the flux of becoming, in the endless and always new individuations, in the definiteness of the past and in the course of the unknown future. State, rights, morality, religion, and art are dissolved in the flux of historical becoming and we only understand ourselves as components of historical development.³⁸

By subjecting all human phenomena, and the knowledge thereof, to the contingences of historical interpretation, there appeared no universal and objectively valid values from which to compare and judge different cultures, past and present. The crisis of historicism can therefore be summarized as such: historicism necessarily results in ethical and epistemic relativism and skepticism. Yet, despite giving name to it, this crisis can be seen long before the appearance of Troeltsch’s article. Indeed, it was intrinsic to historicism and historical methodology, and is therefore evident from its very inception.

Historicism was conceived as the counter to naturalism, which maintained that all phenomena are natural and can be interpreted in terms of scientifically determinable laws of

³⁸ Ernst Troeltsch, “Die Krise des Historismus,” *Die neue Rundschau* 33 (1922), 573.

nature. Epistemically, historicism means that history and nature are irreducible objects of knowledge, and therefore historiography requires a distinct method. This first problem confronting historicism was how to legitimate historiography, as a unique science, i.e. a systematic body of knowledge possessing a method proper to its object. However, the attempt to solve the first problem produced a second, the problem of relativism and skepticism.

Why did historiography require legitimation in the first place? Why could it not be subject to the same methodological assumptions and practices of the natural sciences? This is for two reasons: (1) history concerns particular and contingent facts, as opposed to universal and necessary laws; (2) its object is also subjective, i.e. self-reflective, human activity. History deals with the documentation of particular and contingent facts, which are not immediately generalizable. It is for this reason, for example, that Aristotle rendered history into the lowest form of knowing, below both natural science and poetry. “The real difference is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. For this reason, poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts.”³⁹ Scientific knowledge is general, able to both explain and predict the behavior of particular phenomenon. According to this demarcation, history could never be a science. This position only became more entrenched during the Enlightenment, when mathematics became the paradigm of knowledge formation. Neither numerically determinable nor natural, history could not be an object of science.⁴⁰ But, why does history give only particular and contingent facts? Historical events are caused by the activity of human beings endowed with free will and the capacity for self-reflection. Historical events did not have to happen. Hence, they could have

³⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. W. H. Fyfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 1451b.

⁴⁰ Peter Hans Reill, *The German Enlightenment and The Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 11.

occurred otherwise. The historian is tasked with representing human beings in their concrete lives; taking into account not only the events as they happened, but as they were perceived and produced by those involved.⁴¹ Thus, unlike the natural sciences, historiographical method would require an element of interpretative reconstruction.

In light of these epistemic difficulties, historians were split between two possibilities: either demonstrate lawful generality and necessity in history or discover a scientific method proper to particularity and contingency. The former possibility was pursued by the philosophy of history. For example, both Kant and Hegel attempted to reconcile the contradiction between nature and history by positing the teleological goal of human freedom. The latter historicist solution was expressed in the work of the German “Historical school,” which included the historians Leopold von Ranke and Johann Gustav Droysen. Emphasizing particularity, the historical school explicitly avoided explaining historical events by “transcendent justifications” (e.g. reason, providence, spirit, etc.), since even these justifications are products of history.⁴² As such, historicism separates philosophy from historical research; even supplanting the former by historicizing it. As Ranke explains:

(history) does not want to recognize philosophy as something Absolute but only as an appearance in time. History assumes that the history of philosophy is the most exact form of philosophy; that absolute truth cognizable by mankind is found in the theories which appear in various ages, no matter how contradictory these theories may be... The historian denies that philosophy has any absolute validity.⁴³

⁴¹ Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History, The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to The Present* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 5.

⁴² Frederick C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

⁴³ Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 78.

What Ranke meant is that a philosophy is an expression of a specific age and is only absolutely true within its distinct historical time period. The problem with the philosophy of history is that it deductively locates and applies *a priori* concepts to history, ignoring that those concepts are historically constructed. Rejecting such *a priori* absolutes, Ranke argues that the historical method should concern the presentation of objective facts alone: “The strict presentation of the facts, contingent and unattractive though they may be, is undoubtedly the supreme law. After this, it seems to me, comes the exposition of the unity and progress of events.”⁴⁴ The presentation of particular facts should precede the inductive connection between those facts. This constitutes the most basic articulation of historiographical method that still remains in force.

But the solution to the first problem of historicism – the legitimation of historiography as a unique science – resulted in a second, the problem of historical relativism and skepticism. As mentioned, the object of historiography is the particular and contingent as opposed to the general and necessary. Accordingly, historicism is oriented around the principle of individuality: “the defining subject matter of history, and the goal of historical enquiry, is the individual, i.e., this or that determinate person, action, culture, or epoch which exists at a particular time and place.”⁴⁵ Johann Herder, for example, had expressed this principle in his foundational text, *Another Philosophy of History*: “Every nation has its center of happiness within itself, as every ball has its center of gravity.”⁴⁶ Rejecting generalizations, he argued that each nation and epoch has its individual values that make it internally perfect. For this reason, historians are urged to avoid judging historical periods according to anachronistic or anapostrophic values. The task of the

⁴⁴ Leopold von Ranke, “The Ideal of Universal History,” *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to Present* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 57

⁴⁵ Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, 4.

⁴⁶ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. I. D. Evrigenis and D. Pellerin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 23-32.

historian is to grasp this historical specificity, understanding the spirit of a given age independent of other time periods. But, taken to its logical conclusion, the epistemic focus on individuality resulted in a radical form of relativism, skepticism, and even nihilism.

This relativism takes shape in the anxiety that there is no objective, ahistorical standpoint to judge cultural norms, past and present. Relativism turns into skepticism once the objectivity of science itself is thrown into doubt. Historicism renders science into another historical product. Even “nature” becomes historical. At its most extreme, this relativism and skepticism towards values and knowledge forms into nihilism: the transition from merely doubting to outright denying the existence of objective values. Hence, the neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert would argue that historicism, when carried to its logical conclusion, could only result in “complete nihilism [*vollständigen Nihilismus*]”.⁴⁷ This constitutes the crisis of historicism: by successfully historicizing all phenomena, there appeared no objective and necessary criterion by which to judge norms. Historicism left us condemned to history without the means to judge it. Without this, the belief in historical progression and ultimate perfection became impossible, marking a period of cultural malaise that appeared to be empirically confirmed by the horrors of the First World War (the promise of technological progress was diverted into the creation of deadly military arms).

Not long after the war, a text appeared which seemed not only to confirm the crisis of historicism but to embrace it. As mentioned above, Heidegger viewed Spengler’s 1918 text, *Decline of the West*, as the ultimate expression of historicism, and it is not difficult to see why. In the text, Spengler intends to present an objective history that would release it from the “personal

⁴⁷ Heinrich Rickert, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie: Eine Einführung* (3rd) (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1924), 129

prejudices of observers;” particularly those in the West who had selectively universalized only a “fragment of the past” in order to affirm their present valuations.⁴⁸ In other words, he was critical of Western thinkers for producing a notion of world-history that was merely an expression of their own subjective evaluation. Hence, like the Historical school, Spengler claims that all values are historically and culturally relative, and those in the West have no sufficient reason to present their valuations as anything more than mere prejudice.

Spengler explicitly affirms historical relativism as belonging to the core of “real life.” It is only philosophy that denies this obvious fact.⁴⁹ As a consequence, there is no basis for judging other cultures. “Each culture [*Kultur*] has its own possibilities of expression, which appear, ripen [*reifen*], wilt [*verwelken*], and never recur [*wiederkehren*].”⁵⁰ With this floral analogy, Spengler defines his “morphological” (*morphologischen*) approach to history, which claims that each culture is a unique organism that is born and dies within a specific duration. “I see in world history the picture [*Bild*] of an eternal formation and reorganization, a wonderful becoming and passing away [*Vergehens*] of organic forms [*organischer Formen*].”⁵¹ In this regard, western culture is no different. Denying linear progress, the future of the West is as fixed as any other culture.⁵² As a document of “decline,” the text forms a history of the West which aims at disclosing its ultimate “fate” (*Schicksal*), i.e. the path of its beginning to end, birth to death. Rather than seeing a single progressive history, Spengler therefore posits a relative and unique fate that belongs to each culture and historical time period. Hence, fate and relativism are in

⁴⁸ Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Vol.1), 136.

⁴⁹ Spengler, “Pessimism,” *Prussian Socialism and Other Essays* (London: Black House Publishing Ltd, 2018), 132.

⁵⁰ Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Vol. 1), 29.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 54-55.

correspondence: “Relativism in history is an affirmation of the idea of destiny (fate).”⁵³ It is only through affirming relativism that the West can accept its fate. Indeed, it is this very possibility that makes the West unique.

According to Spengler, unlike other cultures, the West has achieved a level of historical awareness (i.e. historicism) that allows it to see its fate: “for the first time, a culture is able to foresee (*voraussehen*) which path fate has chosen for it.”⁵⁴ What is this fate for Spengler? He predicts the transformation of culture into civilization, which reduces all life values to the common denominator of money. This is accompanied by the decline of democracy into a new authoritarianism, or “Caesarism.” Presenting this as inevitable, Spengler does not criticize or approve this new Caesar, rather he claims that we can either accept this fate and work through it or resist and be destroyed. Hence, he concludes the second volume of *Decline*: “We do not have the freedom to achieve this or that, but to do what is necessary or do nothing at all. And a task that the necessity of history has set, will be resolved with the individual or against him.”⁵⁵ Hence, Spengler’s historicism led him to affirm a kind of Nietzschean *amor fati*. But, given his morphological model of decline (verified by the transition from Greek culture to Roman civilization), his account coincided with his radically conservative support for authoritarianism, i.e. “Prussian Socialism,” which would serve as an important influence on Nazism.⁵⁶

⁵³ Spengler, “Pessimism,” 132.

⁵⁴ Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Vol. 1), 218.

⁵⁵ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Vol. 2): *Welthistorische Perspektiven* (München: C. H. Beck, 1922), 635.

⁵⁶ Spengler’s relationship with Nazism is complicated. His influence on the far-right in Germany was broad and expansive, influencing many of those involved in the Nazi party. In his 1933 text *The Hour of Decision*, Spengler explicitly mentions that he “welcomed” the “national revolution” and sought council with Hitler himself. However, the text also criticized National Socialism for its appeal to the mass politics and its investment in biological racism. For this reason, Alfred Rosenberg, the primary architect of Nazi ideology, came to officially reject Spengler’s work.

Like Ranke, Spengler's historicism leads to a rejection of philosophy itself. In his self-reflective essay "Pessimism," Spengler identifies relativism as a fundamentally "unphilosophical" idea.⁵⁷ Because philosophy is necessarily opposed to relativism, it should not be surprising that historicism was met with a philosophical response, one that attempted to supply a foundation for historiography. Specifically, three different methods appeared that attempted to solve this very problem: hermeneutics, neo-Kantianism and phenomenology, reflected in the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert, and Edmund Husserl, respectively, all of whom would come to influence Heidegger's own approach to the crisis.

Three Methods: Hermeneutics, Neo-Kantianism and Phenomenology

In the late 19th century, the conviction emerged that if the historical school could not itself provide universal and objectively valid norms for judging history, then philosophy could step in to provide such a foundation, yet without giving into metaphysical speculation (e.g. Hegel's spirit). Dilthey's hermeneutics and Rickert's neo-Kantianism narrowed the role of philosophy to epistemology, aimed at producing "epistemic foundations" from which to posit historical judgments. Husserl's phenomenology also sought to posit a foundation, but by criticizing the very assumptions of epistemology. As such, phenomenology does not solve the problem of historicism, but rather dissolves the problem by criticizing its presuppositions. It crucial to understand these three methods since they form the backdrop of Heidegger's own method, hermeneutical phenomenology.

See: Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996), 128-129.

⁵⁷ Spengler, "Pessimism," 132.

Dilthey has often been accused of being a historical relativist, rendering him complicit in the crisis of historicism.⁵⁸ Indeed, he admits that historical knowledge is always subject to relativity, but he nonetheless saw this as a problem that needed to be resolved. Towards the end of his life, he summarized his work as the attempt to “overcome the anarchy of opinions” that historicism had produced.⁵⁹ However, what makes his solution unique is that he essentially accepts the basic premise of historicism. All human phenomena are historical, including even supposedly universal philosophical systems. Rather than escaping historicism through philosophy, Dilthey attempts to reconcile the two: “the same growth of historical consciousness that had such a destructive effect on the great systems, must help us remove the hard contradiction between the claim to universal validity in every philosophical system and the historical anarchy of these systems.”⁶⁰ Specifically, Dilthey proposes that this contradiction can only be resolved through an understanding of human life, which is both the subject and object of hermeneutics.

Dilthey maintains that historical research is possible because human life is essentially historical. Accordingly, the foundation for historiography (and the human sciences as a whole) lies in the explication of human life. As the “nexus of the historical world,” human life is the connection between seemingly discrete historical events.⁶¹ For example, the french famine of

⁵⁸ Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and The Crisis of Historicism*, 171.

⁵⁹ Wilhelm Dilthey, “Reminiscences on Historical Studies at the University of Berlin,” *Wilhelm Dilthey: Selected Works, Volume IV: Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, trans. Patricia Van Tuyl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 389.

⁶⁰ Wilhelm Dilthey, “The Types of World-View and Their Development in Metaphysical Systems,” *Wilhelm Dilthey: Selected Works, Volume V: Ethical and World-View Philosophy*, trans. James McMahon and Rudolf A. Makkreel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 78/254.

⁶¹ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Wilhelm Dilthey: Selected Works, Volume III: The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 218/238.

1788 and the revolution of 1789 are connected through the lives of those who suffered former and enacted the latter. History is hermeneutical because humans are both the active subjects and passive objects of historical events. This accounts for the possibility of understanding, interpreting, and, ultimately, judging history. History is necessarily interpretative, since the historian does not just explain why a historical figure acts one way or another, instead they intuitively *understand* their actions (i.e. motivations, values, etc.), which are then reconstructed and objectified through the act of interpretation. Hence, Dilthey defines interpretation as the “objectivation of (human) life;” the method of which is hermeneutics.⁶² In this manner, understanding the life an individual human, and by extension history, is comparable to the interpretation of a text.

In determining the rules for correct interpretation, Dilthey hoped that he could resolve historical relativism; he could accurately interpret past life as it was, such that it could be compared with present life, providing the condition for making objectively valid judgments. But this still required a more *general* determination of human life, i.e. an epistemological foundation from which to make such judgments. Dilthey narrows life to the psyche. By possessing similar psychic processes (e.g. willing, feeling, representing, etc.), we are able to transport, re-create, and re-experience the psychic life others, which are contained in texts and monuments.⁶³ This makes possible historical judgements: I can understand and judge a past human because we share the same basic structure of life.

⁶² Wilhelm Dilthey, “The Rise of Hermeneutics,” *Wilhelm Dilthey: Selected Works, Volume IV: Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, trans. Fredric R. Jameson and Rudolf A. Makkreel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 319/237.

⁶³ Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, 214-217/234-237.

This methodological picture is fairly consistent throughout Dilthey's work, even prior to his full turn to hermeneutics in the early 20th century. In his earlier text *Introduction to the Human Science*, also argues that the foundation of the historical sciences is found in life as "facts of consciousness." While he admired the Historical School's commitment to empiricism and particularity, it required a philosophical foundation that could only be found in epistemology and psychology, i.e. accounting for the psychic structures and acts of knowing that the historian presupposed.⁶⁴ Moreover, there needed to be synthesis of historiography with the other human sciences (e.g. sociology, linguistics, etc.), creating a whole image of human life, which would serve as the general backdrop for the particular claims of historiography.⁶⁵

However, Dilthey's appeal to consciousness and psychology should not be taken as a form of psychologism, an accusation made by Heinrich Rickert. Psychologism posits that "propositional validity claims" are reducible to claims about subjective "mental states," which forecloses the possibility of making objective claims.⁶⁶ For example, according to this position, claims are self-evident because the mind subjectively *feels* them to be. However, this accusation is a serious misunderstanding of Dilthey's identification of the psyche with life. As Eric S. Nelson argues, because Dilthey's psychic life is "acquired," then it always refers to a broader historical world: "The individual life-nexus expresses and knows itself in communication and action. It is acquired and developed through individuation in a language and historical situation. The self consequently cannot be understood independently of its epoch and milieu, its body and

⁶⁴ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Wilhelm Dilthey: Selected Works, Volume 1: Introduction to the Human Sciences*, Trans. Michael Neville (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), xvi/48.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 27-28/79-80.

⁶⁶ Eric S. Nelson, "Impure Phenomenology: Dilthey, Epistemology, and Interpretive Psychology," *Studia Phaenomenologica*, 10 (2010), 20.

environing world.”⁶⁷ Life is never located within the individual alone, it is the individual in relationship to other people and the broader world.

However, Dilthey’s method had admitted limitations, which resulted in the very impasses that he hoped to resolve. On the one hand, Dilthey sought and believed in the possibility of “formulating a universally valid science.”⁶⁸ On the other hand, all historical knowledge is relative and therefore subject to skepticism. This is a consequence of the hermeneutical method itself. A text requires the mutual understanding of the parts and whole, which change in the course of reading. With regard to life, this procedure of understanding is the same, understanding of ourselves, others and the world changes in time. Insofar as life is fundamentally indeterminate, so must understanding be as well: “We have here something determinate-indeterminate, an attempt at determination, a process that will never come to an end, an interchange between parts and whole.”⁶⁹ Interpretation concerning an historical event must therefore be subject to indeterminacy and doubt. As such, human life is marked by a “tragedy of finitude” that it always seeks to transcend, but fails.⁷⁰ While Dilthey made important steps in providing a philosophical foundation for unifying the human sciences and providing the proper method to interpret the past, he nevertheless saw his goal of resolving the crisis of historicism as a failure, and left it to his students to continue his project. In 1903, eight years before his death, Dilthey reflected on his life’s work: “I see the goal. If I fall short along the way, then I hope my young traveling companions, my students, will follow it to the end.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁸ This quote is from a letter Dilthey sent to Husserl. Charles Bambach, “Hermeneutics and Historicity: Dilthey’s Critique of Historical Reason,” *Interpreting Dilthey: Critical Essay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 99.

⁶⁹ Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, 227/247.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 244/264.

⁷¹ Dilthey, “Reminiscences on Historical Studies at the University of Berlin,” 9/389.

The epistemic limit of the hermeneutical method was evident to Dilthey's detractors. Most famously, and erroneously, Rickert accused Dilthey's work for being "imprecise," because it attempts to ground history in psychic life of the individual.⁷² While Rickert's objection is wrong since psychic life exceeds the individual, he is nonetheless correct to point to the imprecision of hermeneutics, i.e. any interpretation is necessarily incomplete. This imprecision is especially problematic with regard to value claims. Dilthey presents the method for correct historical interpretation but does not determine the trans-historical values from which to judge it, such a determination would contradict his sensitivity to historical particularity.

Rickert sought to overcome this problem by positing *a priori* valuations. Rickert wanted to locate the conditions of historical knowledge in logical concepts, rather than life. In his seminal text, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, he proposes to "discover the inner logical structure of all historical concept formation."⁷³ This proposal is presented as the counter to historicism. "For philosophy, historicism is even more dangerous than naturalism... If it is consistent, every historicism ends in relativism, even in nihilism."⁷⁴ It is nihilistic because it is a self-negating worldview; it presents no coherent picture of the world, since it admits that this picture is relative. According to Rickert, this is in direct conflict with philosophy which necessarily goes "beyond the historical to what is timeless and eternal."⁷⁵ With this in mind, Rickert's neo-Kantian task is to reconcile the contingency of historical material with eternal truths and values; thereby resolving the crisis of historicism.

⁷² Heinrich Rickert, *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Sciences: A Logical Introduction to the Historical Sciences*, trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 146.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

For Rickert, the key to understanding the past is to be found in more general cultural values.⁷⁶ Culture is the “substantive concept” of history, meaning that it is the proper content of historical research. More narrowly, Rickert means cultural values: what specific groups, at particular periods of time, value as good, desirable, and normal, as opposed to bad, undesirable, and abnormal.⁷⁷ People decide what is historically meaningful, and therefore worthy of record, based on these valuations. Indeed, for Rickert, it is this appeal to value that marks the unique scientific character of history. While the natural sciences explicitly attempt to form concepts that are “value-free,” historical concepts are always “value-relevant.”⁷⁸

Dilthey remained caught in relativism because he was unable to convincingly demonstrate that the psychic process of the living individual and their society could be generalized to those in the past. While the present historian is capable of interpreting the past, how do we know this interpretation is valid? For example, how can I be certain that my understanding of the “love” I have for my mother is identical to the “love” between Alexander the Great and Olympias. Rickert attempts to circumvent this problem by appealing to cultural values, which are not distinguished by individuality, but commonality. In other words, cultural valuations belong to a “community.” Indeed, for Rickert, individual values are impossible because individuals do not actually exist: “We know that there are no isolated individuals at all in empirical reality. Moreover, human mental life that has developed to the point of recognizing general values can only be a life with other human beings, or a social life.”⁷⁹ It is precisely in the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 146.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 131.

generality of valuations that Rickert hoped to locate eternal norms from which to constitute valid historical comparisons.

Rickert's solution is thoroughly Kantian. Particular valuations are reducible to the "value of the autonomous will." This follows from his claim that history concerns cultural valuations: "This is because we know that culture exists only in a community whose members regard certain values as a common concern – that is, as normatively general values – and, therefore, freely or autonomously take a value position on them."⁸⁰ In other words, the formation of particular cultural values presuppose the more general will that freely produced them. Thus, while modern historical culture consciously values autonomy, this value is eternal insofar as it presupposed in earlier time periods. From here we can make value comparisons and judgements about different historical epochs. For example, slavery is necessarily evil insofar as it denies autonomy. For this reason, Rickert's work can be seen as a sufficient attempt at resolving the crisis of historicism.

However, Rickert's position is not without problems. Freedom *qua* autonomy is a distinctly modern concept, so how can we be certain that it is eternally valid? It is not inconceivable that Rickert is anachronistically applying his own cultural values to the past. For example, it is by no means certain that the modern English word "freedom" and the ancient Greek word "ἐλευθερία" have comparable meanings. This brings in the basic problem of textual interpretation, and therefore Dilthey's hermeneutics. The meaning of these words emerges from the specific historical circumstances of living humans. Any attempt to understand them *a priori* would necessarily fail to attend to the historical character of life. Hence, we are caught between the hermeneutics and neo-Kantian methods. The former provides the means to interpret the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 235.

individuality of past life, but not the means to judge it; the latter accounts for judgements, but at the expense of individuality.

Faced with this difficulty, the phenomenological method is presented not as the means to resolve the crisis of historicism, but by dissolving the problem as such. Edmund Husserl points to the same critiques of historicism as Dilthey and Rickert. In his essay “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” Husserl writes: “It is easy to see that historicism, if consistently carried through, carries over into extreme skeptical subjectivism. The idea of truth, theory, and science would then, like all ideas, lose their absolute validity.”⁸¹ He maintains that philosophy can be a science with absolute validity by being rendered independent of history, which is demonstrated through the method of phenomenology. This is not to say that philosophy needs to be ahistorical. But he does delimit history to the role of “inspiration” for present philosophical research.⁸²

As the science of phenomena, phenomenology systemically classifies the ways in which phenomena appear in and for consciousness. In doing so, it discloses *a priori* structures of consciousness which make experience possible in the first place. For example, rather than explicating the particular perception of a physical chair, phenomenology examines the “essence” of perception itself. It is in this description of essences that Husserl thought objectively valid claims about empirical experience could be made. “Phenomenology can recognize with objective validity only essences and essential relations, and thereby it can accomplish and decisively accomplish whatever is necessary for a correct understanding of all empirical cognition and of all cognition at all.”⁸³ Phenomenology performs this act by theoretically bracketing out the

⁸¹ Edmund Husserl, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” *Phenomenology of The Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, Trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), 125.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 146.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 116.

existence (being) of things appearing for consciousness, instead examining it as something immanent to consciousness itself. According to this method, the seemingly subjective claim, “material things are extended,” is objectively valid insofar as it necessarily appears this way to consciousness. Because phenomena cannot be imagined otherwise, material things must be extended, regardless of whether or not something material exists.

This method has the advantage over historicism because it can foreclose historical facts, i.e. the existence of past things and events, which do not appear. Hence, this phenomenological account of consciousness can be separated from the contingencies of history, i.e. historicism. For Husserl, historicizing knowledge does not make it more or less objectively valid. For example, stating that the Pythagorean theorem is a historical fact does not render it invalid. Likewise, to use Husserl’s example, “ $2 \times 2 = 5$,” is necessarily invalid, regardless of when and where it is stated. By defending the existence of objective invalidity, Husserl refutes the belief that historicism negates the possibility of objective validity. He writes, “just as historical science can advance nothing relevant against the possibility of absolute validities in general, so it can advance nothing in particular against the possibility of an absolute (i.e. scientific) metaphysics or any other philosophy.”⁸⁴

Thus, Husserl does not resolve the crisis of historicism, he neutralizes it. The main consequence is that philosophy need not be concerned with history at all.

Remaining immersed in the historical, forcing oneself to work therein in historico-critical activity, and wanting to attain philosophical science by means of eclectic elaboration or anachronistic renaissance – all that leads to nothing but hopeless efforts. The impulse to research must proceed not from philosophies but from things and for the problems

⁸⁴ Ibid., 127.

connected with them. Philosophy... is essentially a science of true beginnings, or origins of ῥιζώματα πάντων.⁸⁵

Phenomenology returns to the beginning of philosophy, the perennial experience of phenomena. However, this third attempt would also prove susceptible to historical critique. In the 1930s, towards the end of his life, Husserl would turn his transcendental phenomenology towards the explication of the “life-world” of the subject, which is necessarily historical. “We stand, then, within the historical horizon in which everything is historical, even though we may know very little about it in a definite way. But it has its essential structure that can be revealed through methodical inquiry.”⁸⁶ A phenomenological investigation into history requires an explication of its condition of possibility, i.e. its essence, which Husserl calls “historicity” (*Geschichtlichkeit*). But this later move by Husserl is not novel. Indeed, it was anticipated by his contemporary, Dilthey, and his student, Heidegger.

Heidegger’s Synthesis: Hermeneutical-Phenomenology

Heidegger’s own method emerges out of productive confrontation with Rickert, Dilthey and Husserl. But this confrontation appears only within the context of a shared concern with establishing a secure foundation for the sciences, historical and natural. *Being and Time* centers around the establishment of fundamental ontology, which would serve as the ground for the sciences. While the sciences investigate specific beings (e.g. biology studies the being of living entities), fundamental ontology attempts to ascertain the meaning of being as such. The proper mode of access to the meaning of being is Dasein. Dasein (“being-there”) is a unique type of

⁸⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁸⁶ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 369.

being insofar as it possesses a “pre-ontological” understanding of being. “Dasein is the being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned about its very being... *Understanding of being is itself a determination of being of Dasein*” (SZ: 12/11). Fundamental ontology is therefore consonant with an analysis of Dasein: “Thus fundamental ontology, from which alone all other ontologies can originate, must be sought in the existential analysis of Dasein” (SZ: 13/12). By interpreting the ways that Dasein exists, Heidegger thereby seeks to lay out the conditions to re-raise the question of the meaning of being. The method of this analysis is the direct synthesis of Dilthey and Husserl’s methods: hermeneutical phenomenology. In brief, criticizing Rickert’s *a priori* method, I argue that Heidegger appropriates the phenomenological method but with the aim of disclosing life (i.e. Dilthey), as opposed to pure consciousness (i.e. Husserl). This account of life will provide the resources for his turn to ontology.

For Heidegger, “Ontology is possible only as phenomenology” (SZ: 35/33). Heidegger renders phenomenology into the science of the ways in which the being of beings appears, i.e. whereby beings can be said “to be.” But this is only possible on the basis of Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of being. Phenomenology is hermeneutical precisely because it interprets this understanding, making it objectively explicit in an analysis of Dasein (SZ: 37/35). This signifies the circularity of hermeneutical research. Dasein is simultaneously the subject and object of *Being and Time*. Through the specific voice of Heidegger, Dasein is seeking to interpret its own understanding of being, thereby becoming aware of itself. This point is directly made in his 1923 lecture course on hermeneutics and ontology. “In hermeneutics what is developed for Dasein is a possibility of its becoming and being for itself in the manner of an *understanding* of itself” (GA 63: 15/11). Through hermeneutical phenomenology, Dasein becomes what it always

already is. Heidegger reconciles this apparent contradiction by arguing that Dasein is essentially defined by its possibilities, its ways of being (SZ: 42/42). As such, Dasein is fundamentally indeterminate, an aspect of itself that it can accept and actively affirm or deny and passively ignore. This marks the difference between authenticity and inauthenticity, respectively. Positively, then, the task of hermeneutics is to render Dasein's authenticity explicit, which will also furnish the ground for adequately engaging with the question of the meaning of being.

While Heidegger obviously developed his method through his engagement with both Dilthey and Husserl, there is evidence that the former should be considered a greater influence than the latter.⁸⁷ For example, Heidegger remarks that despite not using the term, Dilthey was the first to “understand the aim of phenomenology” (GA 20: 163/118). Criticizing Husserl's emphasis on consciousness, the early Heidegger argued that phenomenology concerned the interpretation of life itself.⁸⁸ Phenomenology seeks to understand phenomena as they appear in lived-experience (GA 56/57: 68/55). Life cannot be grasped by Husserl's phenomenological reduction; this method can only understand life as an object for consciousness, not something lived. “In the theoretical compartment (i.e. Husserl's approach) I am directed to something, but I do not live (as historical ‘I’) towards this or that worldly element.” Theory can certainly make life explainable, but only by rendering it inert or dead. Hence, Heidegger calls this approach to life “de-vivification” (GA 56/57: 74/59). Life as experienced, however, is only understandable through “hermeneutical intuition” (GA 56/57: 117/89). Accordingly, phenomenology must be hermeneutical. This intuition of life is the basis for his later formulation of Dasein's pre-

⁸⁷ Robert Scharff, *Heidegger Becoming Phenomenological: Interpreting Husserl Through Dilthey, 1916-1925* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 14.

⁸⁸ This citation is from Heidegger's 1919 lecture “The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview,” which it did not appear in the printed version. See: Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 17.

ontological understanding of being. Just as Dasein understands itself as being, life understands itself as living.

The preeminent influence of Dilthey is also evident in Heidegger's critiques of neo-Kantianism, which marked his first development into an independent philosopher. Although Rickert served as Heidegger's habilitation thesis advisor, the former was one of the primary foils in Heidegger's early thought. In a lecture from 1920, for example, Heidegger explicitly criticizes Rickert for being incapable of grasping the phenomenon of life, despite being able to provide a logically coherent philosophical system. He writes, "Seen from his transcendental-philosophical standpoint, Rickert is absolutely consistent, however, from this standpoint he does not see the powers and possibilities of life philosophy" (GA 59: 126). Rickert's desire for objective validity led him to posit a necessary split between the world of transcendental, non-real values, i.e. the ought, from the world as it *is* lived, being. Accordingly, he has no means to evaluate the *truth* of his own values. Indeed, he cannot account for valuation as such, because they are, by his own admission, historical formations. This context is provided by hermeneutics.

While Dilthey would provide much of the impetus for Heidegger's early development, he would ultimately come to criticize the former on at least two accounts. First, like Rickert, Heidegger argues that Dilthey's hermeneutics was limited because he reduced life to its psychic "constitution" (GA 59: 127). In other words, he criticizes Dilthey for narrowing life to psychology. Second, although Dasein is certainly living, "life" is an inadequate word to describe Dasein's being. Life appears as a specific mode of being which is accessible to Dasein; but the latter exceeds and makes possible the being of the former (SZ: 50/49). Hence, Heidegger's critical break with Dilthey is formulated in his general transition from making the aim of hermeneutical phenomenology being, rather than life. Nevertheless, what remains consistent

beneath Heidegger's shifting thought is his investment in history. As hermeneutical, phenomenology is necessarily historical.

While early Husserl argues that phenomenology need not rely on history, Heidegger thinks that the latter is indispensable for the phenomenological method. As early as 1919, Heidegger claims that "understanding the motives of intellectual history is a genuine part of the preparation and appropriation of phenomenological critique" (GA 56/57: 131/103). Like Dilthey, because life can only be understood historically, and vice-versa, phenomenology must be historical. But, Dilthey's reliance on psychology meant that he failed to adequately think history as such, i.e. the being of history. He thinks about how it is possible to interpret history, but not what it means to *be* historical: Dilthey "did not raise the question of historicity itself, the question of the sense of be-ing, the question of the be-ing of beings. It is only with the development of phenomenology that we have gained the capacity to raise this question clearly and overtly" (BH: 255-256). This quote, from Heidegger's 1925 Kassel public lectures, marks the transition towards the ontological project of *Being and Time* from his earlier investment in life. Hence, history becomes ontological, an essential subject for an analysis of Dasein and the formulation of a fundamental ontology.⁸⁹

Historicity, History and Historiography in *Being and Time*

⁸⁹ Although Heidegger's work is always concerned with ontology in some form, Ingo Farin maintains that there is a radical break in his account of history in *Being and Time*. His earlier discussion of history is critical of ontology, since historical life is fundamentally open and indeterminate. Concerned about this indeterminacy, Heidegger sought an ontological ground of history, which would also ground his earlier thought. See: Ingo Farin, "The Different Notions of History in Heidegger's Work," *Hermeneutical Heidegger*, ed. Michael Bowler and Ingo Farin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 23-69.

In *Being and Time*, as discussed above, Heidegger sets out to ground the sciences in a more fundamental understanding of being that belongs to Dasein, i.e. fundamental ontology. This takes shape through an analysis of Dasein's being, specifically its temporal structure that forms the horizon for any possible interpretation of being. However, this account of temporality is merely formal without a description of the actual occurrence of Dasein, which in this case means its historical being, or historicity: "For we may advance to being by way of a special interpretation of a particular being, Dasein, in which the horizon for an understanding and a possible interpretation of being is to be won. But this being is in itself 'historical,' so that its most proper ontological illumination necessarily becomes a 'historical' interpretation" (SZ: 39/37). That an analysis of Dasein requires an account of history follows from Heidegger's earlier investment in the phenomenological description of historical life, as opposed to pure consciousness. The purpose of this section is to present an explication of Heideggerian temporality and historicity, and how this was meant to provide the foundation for ontology. It will be demonstrated that historicity is the condition of history and historiography. This will also help frame the decisionism of historicity: rather than being condemned to history, Dasein is relatively free to interpret and decide upon the meaning of the past.

It is still unclear, however, why fundamental ontology would require an explication of Dasein's historicity. Why would an account of the condition of possibility for being historical be necessary for elaborating an understanding of being? What exactly is the relationship between being and history? Beyond the analysis of Dasein, *Being and Time* includes a second task, one that was not fully realized in the published version of the text but does get fleshed out in other books and lecture courses. In order to re-raise the question of the meaning of being, the history of ontology has to be retrieved and subject to "phenomenological destruction

[*phänomenologischen Destruktion*]” (SZ: 39/37). Fundamental ontology requires critically paving away the assumptions and prejudices of the ontological tradition that rendered being as such unquestionable. This better explains the methodical role of historicity in the text. By describing historicity, Heidegger intends to demonstrate the very possibility of destruction, i.e. Dasein can grasp the history of ontology because it *is* historical.

But what exactly is destruction? Does Heidegger mean the absolute negation of the tradition? At the very outset of *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that the question of being has been “forgotten [*Vergessenheit*]” over the course of history (SZ: 2/1). However, this is somewhat misleading; it is not the case that the question was simply lost. In declaring being to be universal, indefinable, and self-evident, the ontological tradition had rendered it unquestionable: “The ontology that thus arises deteriorates into a tradition, which allow it to sink to the level of the obvious and become mere material for reworking (as it was for Hegel)” (SZ: 22/21). This “deterioration” indicates that while traditions can be affirmative ways of being, they can also lose their vitality, becoming a burden to Dasein. For Heidegger, the essential “enigma” that Dasein understands the meaning of being without being able to account for it indicates the groundlessness of ontology and the necessity of raising the question of the meaning of being as such. He writes: “The fact that we live already in an understanding of being and that the meaning of being is at the same time shrouded in darkness proves the fundamental necessity of retrieving the question of the meaning of ‘being’” (SZ: 4/3). This is the motivation for a “destruction” of the history of ontology. However, despite the violent sounding connotation, Heidegger insists that destruction is not a matter of negating the tradition. “On the contrary, it should stake out the positive possibilities in that tradition, and this always means to stake out its limits” (SZ: 22/22). Destruction is not negative, but positive. The destruction of the history of ontology occurs

through repeating that history, revealing and retrieving the concealed question of being that made it possible in the first place.

The need for destruction is also a function of Heidegger's account of time. Specifically, Heidegger argues that the tradition failed to grasp being because it reduced it to a single dimension of time: the present. Whether it is identified as substance, nature, or God, being is conceptualized in terms of "presence" and the present (SZ: 25/24). What is present – both in terms of nearness and time – always *is*. Being *qua* substance is the present foundation of fluctuating accidental properties. In Platonism, for example, the being of a chair – its form – remains identical even if its color, weight, or texture changes. Likewise, in theology, God's essence is to exist. So, while the created world might be born and perish, God exists eternally, i.e. is always present. In rendering being constantly present for us, ontology has the tendency to turn it into a kind of being, or a specific entity (e.g. God). This fails to grasp that being as such is not itself a being, that is to say it fails to grasp the "ontological difference" (SZ: 4/3). The meaning of being can only be adequately grasped through a rethinking of time; one that does not privilege the present, as well as seeing being as something distinct from any possible entity. As Heidegger summarizes: "Time must be brought to light and genuinely grasped as the horizon of every understanding and interpretation. For this to become clear we need an *original explication of time as the horizon of the understanding of being, in terms of temporality as the being of Dasein which understands being*" (SZ: 17/17). The analysis of Dasein serves to bring out this temporality, which includes time as history.

As mentioned above, phenomenological destruction requires a "repetition [*Wiederholung*]" of the ontological tradition. This is a crucial concept for understanding Heideggerian historicity as such. It names the existential act upon which Dasein's history is

made thematically visible: “Repetition first makes manifest to Dasein its own history [*Geschichte*]” (SZ: 386/368). In conventional language “history” refers to what has been, and therefore is no longer, e.g. “something is history.” In order for that past to become present to us, it must be repeated or replicated. This can take place through remembering a past event, reiterating it in writing, or even through historical reenactment. Rooted in the verb “*holen*” (to fetch or get something), “*Wiederholung*” also has the sense of “retrieving.” Hence, repetition means to retrieve something from the past, making it present *as* something historical. For Heidegger, historical repetition is one of the primary means by which Dasein understands itself and the world it exists in. Specifically, it understands itself through the retrieval and repetition of a “heritage” (*Erbe*) that meaningfully orients experience, such as in providing valuations and a sense of common identity (SZ: 383/351). For example, the repetitive celebration of Día de Muertos reaffirms ones belonging to a broader indigenous history in Mexico.

In making history something subject to repetition, Heidegger marks a demarcation between *Geschichte* and *Historie*, or history and historiography. The latter conceives of history as a linear series of casually connected events and as an object of research. In attempting to be objective, historiography attempts to bracket out the existence of the historian. Specifically, it brackets out the act of repetition that the historian performs. History is the exact opposite; in being Dasein’s “own,” it is something that cannot be bracketed out. However, while distinct, history is the condition of historiography, i.e. the historian’s self-bracketing presupposes their existence and access to history in the first place.

Yet, while repetition implies a certain degree of freedom relative to history, the possibility of repetition rests on determinate historical facts. *Geschichte* is etymologically related to the verb *schicken*, “to send.” History sends specific possible ways of being; it frames what

kind of people we can become. The possibility of being a computer engineer is impossible for a 14th century French peasant. Hence, throughout Heidegger's work, he frequently pairs "history" with the words "fate" (*Schicksal*) and "destiny" (*Geschick*).⁹⁰ This is not a matter of pre-determinism, but illustrative of the fact that the possible ways of being are limited and circumscribed by the occurrence of one's historical world. Indeed, with regard to phenomenological destruction, the history of ontology is another kind of destiny that has led to the forgetting of the question of being.

Yet the freedom of repetition means that the history can also be criticized, opening up new possibilities. This is made possible by Dasein's historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) and follows from its mutual entanglement with temporality. Dasein does not just exist in history, it *is* historical. Early in the text, Heidegger declares that the meaning of Dasein's being is temporality; this being is "there" insofar as it exists temporally (SZ: 17/17). However, his account of temporality is empty without explicating historicity. Heidegger writes, "Temporality reveals [*enthüllt*] itself as the historicity of Dasein" (SZ: 332/317). Heidegger uses the word "reveal" as a descriptor for truth. To say that historicity reveals temporality means that the structure of temporality – its essential truth – is made thematically explicit through historicity. In

⁹⁰ While repetition specifically makes history thematically present, it also occurs unconsciously in everyday life. Recalling that Dasein is defined by its possibilities, those possibilities do not emerge out of nothingness, rather they are passed down historically in the form of traditions and heritages. But these possibilities are not necessarily recognized "as traditional ones" (SZ: 383/365). They include things like occupations, values, and identities. For example, before 1948, women in the United States were barred from entering the military because they were traditionally read as physically weaker and more passive than men. For this reason, there was a repetition of men in the military, as opposed to women. However, one might object that this does not explain how novelty is possible. This possibility is derived from the fact that Dasein is relatively free to interpret the meaning of its past. Hence, each repetition is not a perfect copy of the past.

accord with Heidegger's hermeneutical circularity, while temporality makes historicity possible, it is historicity that reveals Dasein's temporality. "Thus, the interpretation of the historicity of Dasein turns out to be basically just a more concrete elaboration of temporality" (SZ: 382/364). This means that Dasein's historicity provides the substantial content that reveals temporality so that it is not merely an *a priori*, transcendental structure. With regard to history, Dasein is not just temporal, but is in a specific historical world.

This tacit identification of temporality and historicity informs Heidegger's unique interpretation of history and historiography. Dasein's temporality is not linear, it does not experience time as the passage of the present from the past into the future. Rather, the three dimensions of time are ecstatically unified in Dasein: Dasein constitutes the present through retaining what has been (the past) and anticipating the future. Linear time renders the future indeterminate, and therefore meaningless. But, insofar as Dasein's is defined by its *possible* ways of being, the future is prioritized; the past and present are meaningful in relation to the future. Hence: "Primordial and authentic temporality temporalizes itself out of the authentic future, and indeed in such a way that, futurally having-been, it first arouses the present. The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future" (SZ: 329/314). How one interprets their past is determined by the possibilities that they anticipate. This shows the hermeneutical character of Dasein's being: Dasein is always interpreting and reinterpreting its past relative to its future, out of which an ever-fluctuating present is formed. As the concrete elaboration of temporality, history is also formed from out of the anticipation of the future.

Although historiography attempts to conceal this fact, the selection of what is considered historically meaningful evidence always arises out of the future, e.g. the desired outcome of the historian's research. Heidegger writes, "even *historiographical* disclosure temporalizes itself *out*

the future. The ‘*selection*’ of what is to become a possible object for historiography *has already been made* in the factual existentiell *choice* of the historicity of Dasein, in which historiography first arises and in which it uniquely *is*” (SZ: 395/375). This choice is evident in historicity in general. Dasein retrieves and repeats its possible ways of being from out of historically contingent traditions and heritages. This choice comes from out of the future, or from Dasein’s “anticipatory resoluteness [*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*].” Heidegger writes, “Resoluteness that returns to itself and hands itself down then becomes the repetition of a possibility of existence that has been handed down. Repetition is explicitly handing down, that is, going back to the possibilities of the Dasein that has been there” (SZ: 385/367). For example, the American revolutionaries were explicitly resolved to form a political community that was molded after, or repeated, the structure of the Roman Republic. Historical continuity of the past into the future is formed out of this capacity to repeat the past and anticipate the future. Hence, historicity is the condition of history and historiography.

The Anxiety of Historicism

Rooting history and historiography in historicity has two important implications: (1) historicity is also the source of historicism, i.e. the historization of human phenomena presupposes Dasein’s being historical; (2) anticipatory resoluteness demonstrates that historical meaning (i.e. how history is repeated) is chosen or decided upon, rather than simply given. These two implications provide Heidegger’s specific response to the crisis of historicism. In this section, I will argue that rather than being concerned with the possibility of making objectively valid judgements, Heidegger accepts historicism because the resulting relativism and skepticism reveals a fundamentally “uncertain existence” that will come to define Dasein, i.e. in being towards its possibilities (GA 17: 99/71). Uncertainty is not a problem, rather it is the proper

condition of Dasein's being, and therefore key to constructing a fundamental ontology. Accordingly, while critical of historicism, this critique is always immanent, internally undermining historicism by embracing and radicalizing its implications. The result being historical decisionism: if historical meaning is not given, then it must be decided upon through anticipatory resoluteness, which is an aspect of authentic historicity.

The above claim should initially appear strange given how categorically Heidegger seems to reject historicism in *Being and Time*. He writes: "the emergence of the problem of 'historicism' is the clearest indication that historiography strives to alienate [*entfremden*] Dasein from its authentic historicity" (SZ: 396/376). Although Heidegger defends the possibility of authentic historiography, he nonetheless sees the latter as largely opposed to the former. Historiography presents history as a scientific object that exists independent of Dasein. It obscures the authentic repetition that constitutes history in the first place. Indeed, by "alienating" authentic historicity, Heidegger implies that historiography renders Dasein inauthentic, that is to say, as no longer its own. This coheres with his earlier description of inauthentic historicity. Dasein's past becomes "unrecognizable [*unkennlich*]" as its own, resulting in a fixation on the "Modern [*Moderne*]" (SZ: 391/372). However, the exact reason why "the problem of historicism" (i.e. crisis) is indicative of alienation remains unclear.

Fortunately, he provides more detailed accounts of historicism in earlier lectures. In his 1924 lecture, "The Concept of Time," Heidegger criticizes the "present generation" for having lost sight of authentic history due to its fixation on historicism, the effect of which is the "anxiety" of "relativism." This implies that this anxiety would be corrected by an authentic historicity, which would dissolve relativism as a problem. But Heidegger chooses to affirm anxiety, shifting it to a different subject. "But anxiety [*Angst*] in the face of relativism is anxiety

in the face of Da-sein” (BH: 209). In ontological terms, it is anxiety in the face of Dasein’s own being. In order to mitigate this anxiety, people seek to return to “supra-historical” concepts (e.g. world-spirit, divine providence, etc.) to provide such valuations (e.g. Rickert’s response).

However, this is just another way of ignoring the problem of historicism, rather than confronting its implications. These concepts are inauthentic precisely insofar as they treat history as something transcendent, something alien to Dasein’s historicity.

There is a further elaboration of this account of historicism in Heidegger’s contemporaneous lecture course, *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*. Heidegger argues that Husserl’s aim of locating objective validity in consciousness is predicated on the “neglect” for what is the real condition of knowledge, “human existence” (GA 17: 90/66). All knowledge acquisition, even certain knowledge, is motivated; it is grounded in the “care (*Sorge*),” or self-concern, that defines human existence. While other beings exist, Dasein is marked by its concern for its existence. Faced with an uncertain world, humans desire certainty as a means to “secure” their existence (GA 17: 60/44). Hence, the care for certainty presupposes a more primordial *uncertainty*, which is accompanied by the feeling of anxiety: “The care about already known knowledge is nothing other than *anxiety in the face of existence*” (GA 17: 97/70). As such, anxiety is actually what brings us to the foundation of all experience and knowledge, existence itself. Heidegger affirms historicism because its crisis reveals this very foundation: as historical, human existence is necessarily uncertain. Dilthey, Rickert, and Husserl had obviously all been motivated by this anxiety but had failed to adequately acknowledge and reckon with it. They had seen the fundamentally historical character of human existence as a problem to be solved. Conversely, for Heidegger, it is necessary to reflect on this historical anxiety.

In *Being and Time*, the phenomenon of “anxiety” (*Angst*) reveals Dasein’s being as groundless. Rather than having a fixed essence, Dasein is defined by its possibilities. As such, Heidegger points to its fundamental freedom to determine the meaning of its being. However, this freedom is not necessarily positive. Freedom provokes anxiety insofar as Dasein has to be responsible for its being: “Anxiety reveals in Dasein its *being toward* its ownmost potentiality of being, that is, *being free* for the freedom of choosing and grasping itself” (SZ: 188/182). This helps us to better frame the meaning of historicism for Heidegger. Historicism reveals this kind of anxiety by rendering all potential ways of being historically contingent, rather than necessary; there is no singular way of being that can serve as an objective measure for a “better” or “worse” way to live, such as nature, God, or Platonic ideas. In this condition, Dasein is individuated, forced to assume responsibility for its own valuations.

Yet Heidegger does posit one form of certainty that is consistent with anxiety. While uncertain of its being, Dasein is certain of its eventual death. “In its death, Dasein must absolutely ‘take itself back.’ Constantly certain of this, that is, anticipating, resoluteness gains its authentic and whole certainty” (SZ: 308/295). Anxious in the face of death, Dasein must choose its now temporally finite possibilities. This forms the basis for authenticity; in choosing its possibilities, Dasein chooses itself. For this reason, Heidegger identifies authentic anticipation with “being-toward-death [*Sein zum Tode*]” (SZ: 301/289). This formulation of authenticity is crucial to Heidegger’s historical project. Death forms the motivation for choosing which historical possibilities to repeat and retrieve. Hence, “authentic being-towards-death” constitutes the “concealed ground” of historicity (SZ: 386/367).

We are now better positioned to understand the exact meaning of Dasein’s authentic historicity and its relationship to historicism. Historicism had resulted in a generalized anxiety

that there existed no objective point of certainty to orient our life. All that we are left with is a vague horizon of equally viable possibilities, which calls for rethinking existence itself. Dasein's essence is its existence, its possible ways of being. Existential anxiety is not accidental, rather it defines its very being. However, this horizon is rendered finite, through the specific anticipation of death. Accordingly, the authentic repetition of history is articulated in being-towards-death. In this state, Dasein experiences its history as "fate [*Schicksal*]." Fate is a determined end (i.e. death) that is out of one's hands and yet also their choice. "This how we designate the primordial occurrence of Dasein that lies in authentic resoluteness in which it hands itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility that is inherited and yet has chosen" (SZ: 384/366). As authentic, Dasein *chooses* to repeat a tradition or heritage that is already given. In this way, Heidegger does not deny the reality of the historical, but it is not meaningful, or valuable, independent of Dasein. Dasein need not concern itself with whether or not its historically conditioned knowledge or values are valid, since these are meaningful only in the act of authentic decision. Hence, Heidegger's account of historicity results in decisionism.

At this point, Heidegger's account of authentic historicity makes history appear rather arbitrary. Indeed, Dasein is motivated to choose its historical possibilities from out of the anticipation of death. But how does it choose? Notoriously, Heidegger cannot provide a criterion since he explicitly denies being concerned with ethics. Ethical conduct is a second-order matter, one that presupposes Dasein's capacity *to be* ethical (e.g. hold itself responsible, keep promises, make decisions, etc.). At best, the analysis of Dasein provides the condition for ethics, but not for its application. Specifically, it accounts for the sociality of Dasein insofar as it always exists in being-with-others: "The world of Dasein is a with-world [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is being-with [*Mitsein*] others" (SZ: 118/116). Consequently, Dasein historical decisions are always in concert

with others. While this might not provide a criterion, it does mean that historical repetition is not entirely arbitrary, it takes shape within the shared investments (i.e. care) of a finite community (one that disappears or falls apart without shared action). Specifically, Heidegger argues that with the existence of a “community of people [*Gemeinschaft des Volkes*],” historical fate is modified into “destiny [*Geschick*].” Indeed, Heidegger suggests that destiny takes precedent over fate. “In communication [*Mitteilung*] and in struggle [*Kampf*] (with other Dasein) the power of destiny first becomes free. The fateful destiny of Dasein in and with its ‘generation’ constitutes the complete, authentic occurrence” (SZ: 384-385/366). Authentic historicity can only take shape in the struggles of a historical community. This passage indicates that while Heidegger’s account of historicity might preclude ethics, it does suggest politics. Historicity and history are always political for Heidegger.

Heidegger, Spengler, and The Conservative Revolution

Dasein can only be authentic by belonging to a political community, or a community of people (*Volksgemeinschaft*). Accordingly, if fundamental ontology requires historical destruction, and that destruction is made possible by authentic historicity, then it would appear that Heidegger’s project as a whole would have to be political in some form. But it is not clear that Heidegger presents a political orientation in *Being and Time* (e.g. liberal, conservative, anarchist, Marxist). Instead, he presents the conditions of political engagement itself. Habermas, for example, argues that although *Being and Time* invokes some of the common language associated with the German right in the 1920s, Heidegger nonetheless remained free of that direct ideology until after its publication.⁹¹ To be political - to belong to a πόλις – means forming

⁹¹ Jurgen Habermas and John McCumber, “Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective,” *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (1989): 438.

and belonging to a historically conditioned community, regardless of how that community is governed. Yet, it not for nothing that Heidegger's language does appear to confirm specific ideological tendencies; hence, the great number of secondary texts written on Heidegger's appeal to conservatism.

In this concluding section, I will argue that *Being and Time* can be interpreted within a radical, far-right ideological framework, especially as it was presented by the German Conservative Revolution. However, Heidegger's account of historicity also presents a unique form of conservatism. This will be made evident by Heidegger's critique of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of The West*. While Spengler's interpretation of history results in political fatalism, Heidegger's historical decisionism affirms the value of historical struggle and renders politics into a matter of creating communities in response to specific conditions. Initially articulated in *Being and Time*, this model of politics will remain operative in Heidegger's work in the 1930s and 40s, informing his personal decision to join the Nazi party.

Heidegger's radical conservatism is evident in three themes: (1) *Being and Time* is critical of modernity; (2) "anticipatory resoluteness" in the face of death reflects the German experience of WWI, which radical conservatives valorized; (3) his affirmation of "*Gemeinschaft*" (community) and "*Volk*" (people), over "*Gesellschaft*" (society). According to Alain de Benoist, the German Conservative Revolution is marked by a paradoxical "anti-modern modernism."⁹² It is critical of modernity (scientific rationality, individualism, etc.) because it broke with traditional norms. But the German Conservative Revolution is also thoroughly modern, given that it believes that a return to such norms requires a revolutionary change.

⁹² Armin Mohler and Karlheinz Weissmann, *The Conservative Revolution in Germany (1918-1932): A Handbook*, Trans. F. Roger Devlin (Whitefish: Washintgon Summit Publishers, 2018), xxvii-xxviii.

Likewise, *Being and Time* is a modern text that is simultaneously critical of modernity.

Inauthentic historicity is marked by a fixation on the modern, which is corrected by the authentic repetition of Dasein's heritage. Meaning is formed through authentically appropriating the past rather than simply affirming what appears novel. Indeed, it merely appears novel since the past that frames the present and future is obscured and forgotten. Of course, this initial critique of modernity becomes much more focused and pronounced in Heidegger's work in the 1930s and 40s, when modernity is identified as the consummation of metaphysical thinking (GA 95: 141-142/109).

However, meaning is not entirely determined by the past, there still needs to be an anticipation of the future, which is delimited by death. The transition from inauthenticity to authenticity is marked precisely by the anticipation of death. Inauthentic Dasein is socially encouraged to evade death. "The they [*das Man*] does not permit the courage [*den Mut*] to have anxiety about death" (SZ: 254/244). This forms the basic character of modernity: unable to recognize their mortality, inauthentic Dasein gives into the belief in an indefinite future, accompanied by the idea of infinite progress. However, the evasion of death and the belief in progress were undermined by the First World War. From the common experience of war emerged an ideology of war – *Kriegsideology* – that would permeate German conservative thought, fostering the ideological conditions of Nazism.⁹³ The immanence of death felt by those in the trenches was perceived by some as an almost religious experience. Life could only be adequately experienced in the face of death. While Heidegger never fought in any actual battles, this valorization of death is also present in his work, and its meaning would have immediately

⁹³ "Kriegsideologie" was originally coined by Thomas Mann. See: Domenico Losurdo, *Heidegger and The Ideology of War*, Trans. Marella and Jon Morris (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2001), 14.

resonated with readers. However, this resonance is softened with the English translation of *Vorlaufen zum Tode* into “anticipation of death” (SZ: 302/290). “Vor-laufen” translates literally into “running-ahead.”⁹⁴ Dasein does not just anticipate death, it “runs” into it; leaving the security of one position for the insecurity of another, reflecting the move from one trench to another. Moreover, this act requires resoluteness, a “running-ahead resoluteness,” or “*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*.” To German readers, this correlated with the courageous experience of trench warfare. Indeed, such an experience would invoke a “community,” “*Gemeinschaft*,” of readers. An authentic community that had faced death.

The notion of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (community of people) became popular during and after the war, signifying the belief that the “German nation was to be regarded as a homogenous community capable of expressing a single political will” and that the nation was the only source of “political authority.”⁹⁵ An essential component of *Kriegsideologie*, this account of community also posited the value of violent struggle. Ernst and Friedrich Jünger, for example, celebrated the war for forming a unique “community of blood.”⁹⁶ Similarly, Heidegger’s sense of community is formed through “struggle” (*Kampf*) and the resolute anticipation of death (SZ: 384/366). Community is also important for the German Conservative Revolution and *Kriegsideologie* because it is distinguished from “*Gesellschaft*,” or “society.” Society was rejected as an English construct that presupposed the separation between the public and private, which was perceived as being alien to Germany. This division was seen as being an impediment to the establishment of a

⁹⁴ Johannes Fritsche, *Historical Destiny and National Socialism in Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 2-3.

⁹⁵ Wolfram Pyta, “Hindenburg and the German Right,” *The German Right in the Weimar Republic: Studies in the History of German Conservatism, Nationalism, and Antisemitism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 37.

⁹⁶ Losurdo, *Heidegger and the Ideology of War*, 25.

German community. It is not incidental, then, that Heidegger never directly uses the word “*Gesellschaft*” in *Being and Time*. Moreover, Heidegger does make explicit criticisms of “publicness,” which “levels down” its possibility into socially acceptable norms (SZ: 127/123). As such, Authentic community forces Dasein out of inauthentic society.

Thus, while Habermas may be correct to point out that *Being and Time* is not explicitly political, i.e. expressing a political program, the text nonetheless exhibits radical conservative implications. In summation, Heidegger is skeptical of modern society, choosing to affirm the value of a community of people formed through historical struggle and a confrontation with death. But Habermas’ tacit defense of *Being and Time* also obfuscates the explicit presence of other conservative thinkers in his philosophical development. Most notably, Heidegger frequently pairs and contrasts his thought with Oswald Spengler across his various lectures.

Commentators have noted the clear resemblance of Spengler and Heidegger’s historical thought, especially with regard to the fact that they both interpret history in terms of fate or destiny.⁹⁷ Moreover, not long after the publication of *Being and Time*, in his lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, Heidegger’s diagnosis of the contemporary malaise includes an approving nod to Spengler. Citing Spengler’s *Decline of the West*, Heidegger reflects on the apparent decline of life via spirit.

Reduced to a formula, it (*Decline of the West*) is this: the decline of life in and through spirit. What spirit, in particular as reason, has formed and created for itself in technology, economy, in world trade, and in the entire reorganization of existence symbolized by the city, is now turning against the soul, against life, overwhelming it and forcing culture into decline and decay (GA 29/30: 104/70).

⁹⁷ Losurdo, *Heidegger and The Ideology of War*, 28.

This reference indicates Spengler's influence on Heidegger's later critique of technology. However, Heidegger is nonetheless critical of Spengler, defining his own work relative to the latter. Specifically, he identifies Spengler's *Decline of the West* as the consummate text of historicism, which would be corrected and overcome through authentic historicity. Thus, while Heidegger and Spengler both share overlapping political investments, there is a difference. This difference is helpful in explaining Heidegger's turn to National Socialism.

As discussed above, the crucial dimension of Heidegger's project is to revitalize our relationship to history, by demonstrating that history is not something external to us, rather it belongs to our very being. Human existence (i.e. Dasein) constitutes history. Spengler's interpretation of history, however, obscures this fact. For Heidegger, Spengler's mode of historical consciousness "suffocates" history" (GA 17: 114/82). His morphological model presents history as an objective and necessary process of birth, growth, and decay, absolving humans of having any responsibility for events. This is especially evident in his predication of the future: "... we can be just as sure that the nature and course of future life, of individuals as well as of cultures, are *not* accidental. Future developments can, of course, be brought to perfection, threatened, corrupted, and destroyed by the free choice of active persons. But they can never be diverted from their real direction and meaning."⁹⁸ While the exact shape of the coming Caesarism is not predictable, that it will happen is certain. For Spengler, then, the past, present, and future are objectively present within his "historical vision." But, for this very reason, Heidegger rejects Spengler's position as not actually historical, "but is merely a botany disguised as history" (BH: 271).

⁹⁸ Spengler, "Pessimism," 136.

One might object that in the quote above Spengler makes room for human freedom. Hence, his model does account for historical possibility. But, although Spengler does account for unpredictability with regard to specific acts, he does not for the “real direction and meaning” of history. The transition from culture to civilization is a necessary occurrence, regardless of time and place. At best, humans have the freedom to perceive this necessity and can choose to freely affirm it. This possibility is precisely what makes the West unique; its historical consciousness makes this affirmation possible. Western humanity is like someone who has foreseen their death, accepts it, and actively chooses to walk the path towards that very inevitability. While this appears to resonate with Heidegger’s account of historical destiny and Dasein’s being-towards-death, he is nonetheless critical of any predication of the future, however general.

Regardless of being free or unfree, Spengler’s *Decline of the West* objectifies, calculates, and renders determinate Dasein’s future. Heidegger writes, “The prediction and advance calculation of the future, the ‘decline of the West,’ is not a whim on Spengler’s part or a cheap witticism for the masses, but rather the consequential expression of the fact that regarding its ownmost possibilities which have been perceived for it, inauthentic historical consciousness has thought itself through to the end” (GA 63: 56/44). Spengler’s historicism is inauthentic because Dasein is alienated from its horizon of future possibilities, which defines its very essence. Certain of its death, authentic Dasein is free to interpret and repeat the historical past from out of its anticipation of the future. “Interpretation” is emphasized to show that this, for Heidegger, is the basic principle of hermeneutics (BH: 209). Hence, Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenology, and the analysis of Dasein’s historicity that emerges from it, is incompatible with Spengler’s predictable and calculable view of history.

With this picture in mind, one can see two interpretations of historicism present in Heidegger's earlier thought. First, as expressed by Spengler, historicism is the culmination of inauthentic historicity; it alienates Dasein's historical being. Dasein's historicity is concealed, presenting history as something necessary and determinate, objectively existing independent of Dasein. This results in the mistaken impression that it is not Dasein that renders history meaningful, but vice-versa. Second, however, historicism contains the positive possibility, for Heidegger, that the anxiety it produces can reveal Dasein's historicity. In other words, authentic historicity is unconcealed through sufficiently confronting the crisis of historicism. As such, historicism is the thin line between inauthentic and authentic historicity. It is precisely through a confrontation with Spengler that Heidegger can bring out the exact character of authentic historicity. Authentic historicity forms as a resolute decision that renders an historical past meaningful and valuable for the present and anticipated concerns of a community. As such, authentic historicity is not to be understood as only an intellectual concern (e.g. as a requisite for fundamental ontology), it is also a practical matter by which Heidegger approached the social crisis facing Germany after World War One.

Despite claiming not to be a pessimist, Spengler's work both reflected and influenced an attitude of pessimism that defined the Weimar Republic. Heidegger criticizes:

If such knowledge about the relativity of cultural works (the conclusion of *Decline of The West*) becomes effective in its living present, then it results in the resignation among the tired and weak. All productive work is obstructed through a constant squint [*Hinschielen*] upon what is already deposited, and the work is faded by comparing itself with past cultural works. In the field of knowledge, doubt comes to be dominant, and the hidden basic feature of life is despair [*Verzweiflung*] (GA 16: 50).

Realized in life, Spengler's historicism is accompanied by despair. The "German symptoms" of this "spiritual helplessness:" the conservative turn to "dogmas," romantic reverence for the past as such, the search for meaning in other cultural formations (e.g. the popularity of Vedic philosophy in Germany), and the broad interest in occultism. "These are the negative appearances of the struggle around the meaning of historical Dasein. Should this struggle for clear decisions [*Entscheidungen*] come, then all that remains is the path of scientific reflection on the essence of history" (GA 16: 50). This quote, made two years before the publication of *Being and Time*, clearly demonstrates that Heidegger's historical confrontation with Spengler was meant to facilitate the formulations of the decisions needed to overcome the helplessness experienced during the Weimer Republic.

Authentic historicity would eventually emerge as the proper condition for such decisionism. In it, a community is resolved to repeat what has-been not out of a conservative valuation of the past itself, but out of present and future needs. But this decision is not an end in itself. Rather it facilitates the struggle to come; "for in resoluteness the choice is first chosen that makes one free for the struggle over what is to follow and fidelity to what can be repeated" (SZ: 385/367). In according with German Conservative Revolution, Heidegger does not wish to end struggle, but to free the struggle such that Dasein can properly confront it. After all, historical communities maintain themselves in and through struggle. Both Spengler and Heidegger affirm the necessity of war; but the latter sees the former's work as conducive only for resignation and weakness. To be properly actionable, communities must view history as an open horizon, rather than a calculable testament to decline. History is a site of decision, not resignation.

In the 1930s, this view of history would be brought to bear on Nazi policy making. For example, with regard to Hitler's unilateral decision to leave the League of Nations: "The Fuhrer

has brought this will of the whole people to full awakening and welded it together into a singular decision” (GA 16: 189). It is not merely that the Führer exists to facilitate the will of the people, rather it is the former who realizes the will of the latter. The decision awakens the will, not the other way around. Spengler’s own radical conservatism, in Heidegger’s eyes, would be insufficient precisely because it makes such decision – communal or dictatorial – impossible. The future *is*, regardless of what decisions are made. Accordingly, unlike Spengler, Heidegger does not affirm dictatorship out of a belief in its inevitability, but freely affirms it as something valuable. In this regard, Heidegger’s later political decisions should be especially subject to moral critique and condemnation. Joining the Nazi party was not just a symptom of career machinations, but comes from a commitment to unilateral decision making, manifest in his account of authentic historicity.

Spengler would continue to be a foil for Heidegger’s thought into the 1930s and 40s. By this point, historicism became the “basic form of the unfolding [*Entfaltung*] of ‘nihilism,’” the name for abandonment of *beyng* (GA 95: 103/80). Here, Spengler remains a primary figure. His morphological model of history calculates history, which loses the present moment that calls for decision. At this point, decision means “whether the ground of the human being is to be taken from the truth of *beyng* or from beings” (GA 95: 105/82). Accordingly, Spengler continues to be an impediment to Heidegger’s historical project. But the project has now shifted. Rather than explicating the condition of possibility for history in order to pursue a destruction of the history of ontology, Heidegger is now invested in the inception of an “other beginning” for philosophy as such, one that he initially saw as politically realizable through the Nazi state. The first beginning is the history of metaphysics from Parmenides’ identification of being with thought, which ultimately resulted in Nietzsche’s will to power and the planetary spread of technological

rationality. In his work, Spengler describes the first beginning, but remains fixed in it: his image of decline characterizes the pitfalls of modernity as it transitions into planetary imperialism (i.e. the belief in a coming one world government that continues to galvanize the far-right). For Heidegger, this is a failed interpretation of the West. The West is rather “the future of history,” but only if the “essence of history is grounded in the event of the truth of beyng” (GA 71: 97/81). What is this other beginning? What is the truth of beyng, if it is different than the meaning of being?

Chapter Two

Between Emergence and Submergence: On Heidegger's History of Beyng

In the 1930s and early 1940s – often identified as his “middle period” – Heidegger’s historical project drastically changes. Rather than being concerned with pursuing a destruction of the history of ontology in order to properly ground philosophy, Heidegger now seeks to inaugurate a new philosophical history as such: another beginning. Specifically, in what Daniella Vallega-Neu calls Heidegger’s “poietic writings,”⁹⁹ he stages a “confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*],” or “interplay [*Zuspiel*],” between two philosophical beginnings: the first beginning (*ersten Anfang*) and the other beginning (*anderen Anfang*) (GA 65: 170/133). The first beginning refers to the inceptual emergence of the truth of beyng for the pre-Socratics and the historical transformation of this originary experience into metaphysics. The other is the coming history that takes shape through recollecting and appropriating the first beginning. Hence, like his account of repetition, Heidegger continues to think of the future as a creative return of what has been. Indeed, this other beginning is the experience of the first as such: “The first beginning and the inceptuality [*die Anfängnis*] itself are experienced for the first time in the other beginning” (GA 71: 27/20). In brief, the inception of the other beginning consists in unconcealing what was concealed and forgotten in the first beginning.

⁹⁹ The “poietic” writings refer to Heidegger’s unpublished, nonpublic writings from 1936-1944: *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (GA 65), *Besinnung* (GA 66), *Die Geschichte des Seins* (GA 69), *Über den Anfang* (GA 70), *Das Ereignis* (GA 71), *Die Stege des Anfangs* (GA 72). Although in Germany these texts are usually called the “*seynsgeschichtliche Abhandlungen*,” or treatises on the history of beyng, Daniela Vallega-Neu adopts the term “poietic” – Greek for “bringing forth” – to emphasize that these writings serve to bring about “the other beginning” of history. See: Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger’s Poietic Writings: From Contributions to Philosophy to The Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), ix.

Besides accounting for a shift in his thinking of *beyng*, Heidegger's new historical project also provides the content missing from his earlier description of authentic historicity. Chapter one had concluded that in trying to address the crisis of historicism, Heidegger had formulated a model of historical decisionism: historical meaning was not given, but rather decided upon. Despite the ethical and political connotations of *Being and Time*, this decisionism was in principle contentless and, therefore, not prescriptive. It described how history *could* be appropriated by a community, but not how that history *should* be appropriated. Heidegger's account of the confrontation of the first and other beginnings of philosophy provides a specific historical narrative, which he calls "the history of *beyng* [*die Geschichte des Seyn*]:" the history of the various occurrences of *beyng* (e.g. substance, God, will to power).¹⁰⁰ But what kind of narrative is this history of *beyng*? According to Peter Trawny, it is a tragedy. "The truth of being is onto-tragic. This is connected with the first of all inceptions, the inception of the history of being... A narrative element thereby flows into the history of being."¹⁰¹ This narrative tells the tragic concealment and forgetting of *beyng* by the different manifestations of beings as a whole, which ultimately resulted in the present state of technological nihilism.

However, although much has been written on the influence of Greek tragedy on Heidegger's history of *beyng*, little has been written on the particular influence of Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. Heidegger presents the tragic confrontation of the first and other beginnings in terms of *Untergang*: the "decline," or as I will translate, the "submergence" of *beyng*, which is contrasted with the *Aufgang*, or "emergence," of beings as a whole. Yet,

¹⁰⁰ Heidegger appropriates the archaic spelling *Seyn*, in order to distinguish it from his earlier ontological project of determining the meaning of being, *Sein*.

¹⁰¹ Peter Trawny, *Heidegger's Anarchy: Freedom to Fail*, Trans. Ian Alexander Moore and Christopher Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 39.

unlike Spengler's account of Western decay, this submergence is a positive event that allows for a new, other beginning to occur. The principle argument of this chapter is that Heidegger affirms the tragic submergence of being, and the West as such, as the condition for another beginning of history: "The West [*Abendland*] is the land of the other beginning, a land that takes its first delimitation out of such an advent. The West is the future of history, provided the essence of history is grounded in the event of the truth of being" (GA 71: 97/81).

Rendering the history of being into a narrative that represents the tragic submergence of the truth of being in the West, Heidegger provides content to his earlier historical decisionism. The decision is now whether or not this other beginning will occur. To this extent, Heidegger chooses to radically affirm any actions and situations that will facilitate this occurrence, i.e. will bring the first beginning to its end. "The ending in its demise should not be resisted... We cannot hope for anything from progression or regression. The beginning is everything" (GA 71: 97/82). Thought politically, Heidegger's account of the tragedy of being sanctions any actions and decisions made by a political community to realize the other beginning. It is not incidental, then, that Heidegger's turn to the history of being was co-extensive with his turn to politics in the 30s. This is reflected in three ways: (1) Heidegger's membership, affirmation, and later conservative critique of Nazism; (2) his determination of the German people as the proper heirs to the ancient Greeks, those who bore witness to the first beginning; (3) claiming the West as the place in which this transition between two beginnings occurs. Hence, the secondary argument will be that Heidegger's ambiguous relationship to Nazism was accompanied by an unambiguous German essentialism and affirmation of the West. The tragic decision in favor of the other beginning can only be made in the West by the German people. Heidegger arrives at this position through his confrontation with Spengler during his middle period.

To present a brief synopsis, this chapter will begin by contextualizing Heidegger's altered historical project in terms of the *Kehre*, or turning, that took place after the publication of *Being and Time*. Finding his earlier transcendental method inadequate, Heidegger responds by rendering being into an historical happening, an event. The *Kehre* was also accompanied by a radical rethinking of the concept of truth. Returning to the ancient Greek notion of truth as ἀλήθεια (unconcealment), Heidegger argues that the truth of being is its clearing for self-concealment. This play of clearing, unconcealment and concealment forms the basic trajectory of the history of being. It begins with the emergence of beings as a whole from out concealment for the ancient Greeks and the transformation of this experience into metaphysical thought. However, because metaphysics leaves the truth of being in submergence, then it produces the condition for the inauguration of the other beginning by the German people. I will conclude by arguing that Heidegger's history of being results in the kind of philosophy of history that historicism and his earlier account of historicity foreclosed. Providing a narrative context to his historical decisionism, Heidegger reintroduces a historical teleology that reinforces western supremacism. The primary political consequence is that it renders the German people into the primary subject of history, dovetailing with Nazi ideology.

Die Kehre, or Heidegger's Immanent Critique of Being and Time

In his 1946 essay, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" Heidegger points to a "turning" (*Kehre*) in his thought that curtailed the publication of the third division of *Being and Time*: "Time and Being." He argues that *Being and Time* partially failed to make this turn because it was hampered by the "language of metaphysics" (e.g. fundamental ontology). However, this turning is not the negation of the project of *Being and Time*, rather it is a matter of adequately experiencing the text for the first time. "This turning [*Kehre*] is not a change of standpoint from

Being and Time, but in it the thinking that was sought first arrives at the locality [*Ortschaft*] of that dimension out of which *Being and Time* is experienced, that is to say, experienced in the fundamental experience of the oblivion of being [*Seinvergesenheit*]” (GA 9: 328/250). In other words, the *Kehre* enacts the experience of the oblivion, or forgetting, of being, which motivated the very project of *Being and Time* in the first place. Hence, its first chapter opens with the claim that the question of being needs to be re-raised because it has been “forgotten” (SZ: 1/2). At least in retrospect, therefore, the *Kehre* should be understood as something immanent to *Being and Time*.¹⁰² Nevertheless, this could not happen within the text as it was published, because of Heidegger’s metaphysical language. The *Kehre* must therefore be accompanied by an “overcoming” (*Überwindung*) of metaphysics, which partially includes *Being and Time* itself.

To what extent is *Being and Time* a work of metaphysics? How is its language still trapped in the metaphysical tradition? At first glance these questions should appear strange, given that Heidegger’s critique of ontology can already be read as a confrontation with metaphysics. The problem with the ontological tradition is that it tends to reduce its primary question –the meaning of being – into metaphysics, or the investigation into the basic principles and causes of being(s). As universal, indefinable, and self-evident, being as such appears fundamentally opaque. At best, it can be understood through its condition or cause, i.e. some other, albeit transcendent, being (nature, the unmoved mover, God, etc.). In other words,

¹⁰² The exact meaning of the *Kehre* in Heidegger’s *oeuvre* has been contentious subject. William Richardson famously argued that the *Kehre* was a specific event in Heidegger’s thought, splitting his work into two distinct periods: “Heidegger I” and “Heidegger II.” For Richardson, the *Kehre* consisted in rendering being into an “active force” that discloses itself to humans. Thomas Sheehan, however, counter-argues that the *Kehre* never actually took place since it was implicit in *Being and Time*. This chapter accepts Julian Young’s diplomatic position that the *Kehre* did take place, but it does not mark a complete rupture with *Being and Time*. See: Julian Young, “Was there a ‘Turn’ in Heidegger’s Philosophy?,” *Division III of Heidegger’s Being and Time*, ed. Lee Braver (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 329-348.

ontology falters because it explains being by another being, presupposing and passing over the meaning of being in general. The project of fundamental ontology can therefore be interpreted as an attempt to circumvent metaphysics and return to ontology proper. This interpretation is confirmed in *Contributions to Philosophy*, where Heidegger claims that fundamental ontology was an attempt at overcoming metaphysics by means of grasping its foundation or ground (GA 65: 143). Accordingly, because fundamental ontology required the *Destruktion* of the tradition of ontology, then this tradition can also be designated as the history of metaphysics.¹⁰³

By Heidegger's own admission, the problem was primarily due to the fact that the language of Dasein's "understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*]" was presented as if it were a representational act by a transcendent subject (GA 9: 327/249). *Being and Time* could take on the appearance of a metaphysical text due to the presence of two intertwining factors: subjectivism and transcendental methodology. In combination, these result in the view that the being of beings is reducible to and grounded in some cognitive act by a subject, i.e. Dasein. Ironically, this (mis)-reading comes from Heidegger's greatest insight – one that would serve as prerequisite for the overcoming of metaphysics – the ontological difference.

The ontological difference affirms that being as such transcends particular beings: "Being and its structure transcend every being and every possible existent determination of a being. *Being is the transcendens pure and simple*" (SZ: 38/36). In having a pre-ontological, understanding of being, Dasein also fundamentally transcendent. Moreover, since knowledge of beings presupposes an understanding of being, then this understanding is transcendental. Beings

¹⁰³ In 1955, Heidegger explicitly conflates the tradition of ontology with metaphysics, since *Destruktion* was always aimed at recollecting the "originary experience of being belonging to metaphysics by deconstructing [*Abbau*] representations that have become commonplace and empty" (GA 9: 417/315).

can only be experienced and known by Dasein on the basis of its transcendental knowledge of being as such. For this reason, hermeneutical phenomenology is a transcendental method.

Heidegger writes, “Every disclosure of being as the *transcendens* is *transcendental* knowledge.

Phenomenological truth (disclosedness of being) is *veritas transcendentalis*” (SZ: 38/36). This

results in the appearance of metaphysics in three counts. First, as the condition of possibility for experience, being as such is not something empirically knowable. Second, in having the

transcendent knowledge of this condition, Dasein can be interpreted as a metaphysical ground.

This constitutes subjectivism, since Heidegger rules out the meaningful existence of beings

independent of Dasein, i.e. without Dasein being “there,” no entity can be said to exist. Third, the

difference between being and beings can be misconstrued into a logical distinction between

beingness and beings, both of which are representations for a thinking subject (GA 65: 423/335).

One could object that this appearance is an obvious misreading of *Being and Time*.

Although Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of being and its temporality create a horizon

for every possible experience of being or determination of time, this does not mean that time or

beings are produced by Dasein. That subjectivist conclusion would result in the solipsistic

skepticism that Heidegger explicitly rejects in *Being and Time* (SZ: 203/188). Dasein is defined

by its being-in-the-world, and therefore it cannot doubt the reality of its worldly experience. As

Richard Polt explains, “Heidegger never subscribed to such subjectivism, but instead developed

a nonsubjectivist type of transcendental thought in *Being and Time*. The horizontal schemata of

time serve as conditions of possibility of experience, they are not products of Dasein’s activity;

instead, time happens to Dasein, so to speak.”¹⁰⁴ Dasein does not constitute time (i.e. the manner

¹⁰⁴ Richard Polt, *Time and Trauma: Thinking Through Heidegger in The Thirties* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd., 2019), 22.

in which the Kantian subject does), since time meaningfully takes shape within Dasein's *finite* temporality, which in this case means the manner in which Dasein *receives* its past and anticipates its future, i.e. from out of its thrownness in a specific world and towards the inevitability of its death. While temporality constitutes linear time, it is still the case that Dasein exists within a world-historical time, i.e. has a past that it gives meaning to.

However, the picture above raises a significant problem, which Polt argues is the real reason for the *Kehre* in Heidegger's thought. Heidegger locates the horizon for re-raising the question of being in Dasein's transcendental temporality. What *is* can only be experienced in light of Dasein's temporality. However, this results in a form of temporal subjectivism that Heidegger sought to correct. There is no time independent of Dasein's existence.¹⁰⁵ There can be no empirical origin of time, since time presupposes temporality. But, at the same time, due to Dasein's finitude, time is also finite, emerging at a specific moment. Thus, Heidegger's transcendentalism produces a split conception of time, or another "time when time arises." This ruptures Heidegger's entire account of time: "from a transcendental viewpoint, that would confuse a condition of possibility of experience (temporality) with something that appears within experience (an event). As Heidegger wrestles with the question of the source of time, the transcendental structure appears to be cracking."¹⁰⁶ This need for a rethinking of time – and by extension being – is indicated in Heidegger's retrospective marginal notes in *Being and Time*. In reference to the task of "Time and Being," he calls for "overcoming" time as the transcendental

¹⁰⁵ This point is made even more explicit in 1935: "But strictly speaking, we cannot say there was a time when there were no human beings. At every time, there were and are and will be human beings, because time temporalizes itself only as long as there are human beings" (GA 40: 64/88-89).

¹⁰⁶ Polt, *Time and Trauma*, 25.

horizon precisely through turning back to the “source [*Herkunft*]” of both time and being (SZ: 39/37). But what is the source? For Heidegger, it is the event of the truth of being.

The Truth of Being as Event

The turning in Heidegger’s thought away from the implicit metaphysics of transcendental temporality takes shape through a changed position on truth, and with it a radical rethinking of being. As Heidegger explains in a retrospective note from the fourth edition of his essay “On the Essence of Truth:” “The answer to the question of the essence of truth is the saying of a turning within the history of being. Because sheltering that clears [*lichtendes Bergen*] belongs to it, being appears originally in the light of concealing withdrawal [*verbergenden Entzugs*]. The name of this clearing [*Lichtung*] is *ἀλήθεια*” (GA 9: 201/154).¹⁰⁷ Here the turning consists in naming and recognizing the essence of truth as the occurrence of being, i.e. it’s being an event. Given that being and truth are now co-terminus with each other, this has the effect of making truth into a temporal event as well. Hence, in the *Beiträge*, Heidegger writes, “Truth never ‘is;’ instead, it essentially occurs [west]. For truth is the truth of being, and being ‘only’ essentially occurs” (GA 65: 342/271). This determination accounts for the historization of being in Heidegger’s middle period. The history of being names both the occurrence of the truth of being and the historical documentation of the various manifestations of being, as evidenced in the western philosophical canon. Consequently, understanding what is meant by the truth of being is necessary for grasping the history of being, and vice-versa.

¹⁰⁷ The note first appeared in the second edition of the essay in 1949. The first version, which dates from 1930, makes no claims regarding the history of being or *ἀλήθεια*. It is also uniquely invested in rendering “rootedness-in-the-soil [*Bodenständigkeit*]” as the “essential ground of truth [*Wesengrund der Wahrheit*]” (GA 80: 340).

However, at this point, one might object that the identification of being with truth is obvious and not at all radical. After all, what *is*, is true. However, this is an essentially metaphysical claim that Heidegger criticizes. Given that the empirical world is experienced as a flux of perceptions, metaphysicians posit another transcendent and eternal world of being, which becomes the measure of truth. To know the truth means to transcend the world of becoming and grasp what eternally *is*. Consistent with the task of overcoming metaphysics, Heidegger brings these entangled notions of truth and being down to earth by rendering them into a temporal and spatial occurrence: "...what essentially occurs is also everything that belongs to truth, including time-space [*der Zeit-Raum*] and consequently 'space' and 'time'" (GA 65: 342/271). The truth of being is an event that occurs within a delimited place and moment, or what Heidegger calls "the clearing" (*die Lichtung*).

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger was already engaged in a radical re-thinking of truth but was limited by his commitments to transcendentalism. Specifically, he set out to phenomenologically criticize the traditional correspondence theory of truth, which claims that the essence of truth lies in the correct correspondence of a proposition with a given state of affairs. For example, the proposition, "the grasshopper is green," is true if the given grasshopper is indeed green. Consistent with his method of historical *Destruktion*, Heidegger undermines this theory by returning to the Greek origin of the concept of truth. The Greek word for truth, ἀλήθεια, does not signify a correspondence nor is it intrinsically related to propositions. Rendered in German as "*Unverborgenheit*," or "unconcealment," ἀλήθεια means taking beings out of concealment (*Verborgenheit*) (SZ: 219/210). In other words, truth is letting what was initially un-seen, be seen. To further express the sense of *Unverborgenheit*, Heidegger adds the descriptive words *Erschlossenheit* (disclosure), *Entdeckung* (discovery), *enthüllen* (reveal), and

Freiheit (freedom). Hence, truth is a matter of disclosing something about the world; making a discovery; and revealing what was formerly veiled in obscurity. In his later essay “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger adds the further determination of truth as freedom, understood as freeing beings so that they can be what they are, that is, “letting beings be [*Seinlassen*]” (GA 9: 188/144). In any case, the identification of truth with unconcealment means that the proposition is true by virtue of how it discloses something, allowing it to be seen. “The grasshopper is green” unconceals the entity before me *as* a grasshopper and *as* something green. Of course, a proposition can also be false, which in this case means that it fails to unconceal a being, leaving it shrouded in concealment. “The grasshopper is purple” is a false proposition if it does not disclose the color of the grasshopper.

The most significant consequence of this interpretation of truth is that it is neither something given nor eternally valid. Truth is constituted: it “must always first be wrested [*abgerungen*] from beings. Beings are torn [*entrissen*] from concealment. Each and every factual discovering [*Entdecktheit*] is, so to speak, always a kind of *robbery*” (SZ: 222/213). Even objective, mathematical truths (e.g. the Pythagorean theorem) are only recognizable *as* true if they are disclosed at a certain moment of time and according to a specific mode of comportment, e.g. Dasein *qua* mathematician. To this extent, Heidegger admits relativism. “In accordance with the essential kind of being appropriate to Dasein, all truth is relative to the being of Dasein” (SZ: 227/217). But he explicitly denies subjectivism. Truth being relative to Dasein does not mean that the latter can arbitrarily construct the former. In order for something to be disclosed, it must be present in some way beforehand. Hence, Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein does not deny the reality of objective truths; rather, it demonstrates that Dasein is the transcendental condition for that very objectivity. For example, the objective truth, “a triangle is a three-sided shape,” can

only be meaningfully posited on the basis of Dasein's pre-ontological understanding of being, the copula that connects the subject with its predicate. Nevertheless, Heidegger comes to see the need to amend this earlier position on truth precisely because it relies on transcendentalism. It cannot adequately account for the givenness of being that truth *qua* unconcealment rests on, i.e. that being *is* prior to Dasein's understanding of it.

With the *Kehre*, Heidegger attempts to construct a non-transcendental account of truth, which takes shape in two important ways. First, although Da-sein remains the site of truth, it is no longer identified with human being. The addition of the hyphen attests to Heidegger's explicit turn from transcendentalism. Rather than being a transcendental being, "Da-sein" names the receptive "clearing," or "the openness [*Offenheit*] of the open region [*Offenen*]," in which humans are able to encounter and understand beings as a whole; it is the "there" (*Da*) in which humans and beings are simultaneously unconcealed, i.e. free to be (*sein*) (GA 9: 189/145). Da-sein is an achievement for humans, which allows them to properly attend to beings and being as such. Indeed, by the time of the *Contributions*, Da-sein is rendered into the "ground" whereby "future humans" will be able to experience the truth of being and usher in the other beginning (GA 65: 297/234). Regardless, the fundamental point of the separation of Da-sein from humans is that the understanding of being is no longer taken for granted as something that belongs to human being. Humans have to be receptive to the truth of being in order for beings to be disclosed. Of course, this also means that humans can fail to be Da-sein, thereby leaving being veiled in concealment.

Second, Heidegger radically reevaluates concealment, which is now presented as the "counter-essence" of truth. Highlighting the negative prefix "un" (α), Heidegger notes that

unconcealment (ἀλήθεια) is derived from concealment or being concealed (λανθάνειν).

Consequently, any instance of unconcealment is always haunted by concealment.

Precisely because letting-be [*Seinlassen*] always lets beings be in a particular comportment [*Verhalten*] that relates to them and thus discloses them, it conceals beings as a whole. Letting-be is intrinsically at the same time a concealing [*Verbergen*]. In the ek-sistent freedom of Da-sein a concealing of beings as a whole comes to pass [*ereignet sich*]. Here there *is* concealment... Concealment deprives ἀλήθεια of disclosure [*Entbergen*] yet does not render it στέρησις (privation); rather, concealment preserves what is most proper to ἀλήθεια as its own (GA 9: 193/148).

Unconcealment always occurs in particular comportments, which simultaneously conceal the multiplicity of other phenomena. When we attend to particular beings, disclosing certain aspects about them, the totality of other beings – both actual and possible - recede into concealment. For example, the duck-rabbit illusion is a deliberately ambiguous image which reveals that the viewer can see the image “as” a “duck” or a “rabbit” – especially with coaching (e.g. “do you see the duck?”) – but not both. In Heideggerian terms, the image can be unconcealed as a “rabbit,” leaving its interpretation as a “duck” concealed.

But Heidegger’s presentation of concealment produces an essential problem.

Unconcealment shows what is the case; it is the measure of existence: what is, is true. Yet if unconcealment indirectly implies the existence of that which remains concealed, then what is *not*, also *is*. How does Heidegger account for the apparently contradictory co-belonging unconcealment and concealment? He purposely does not supply a direct answer. To do so, would render concealment unconcealed, negating the contradiction, rather than adequately reflecting on it. For this reason, Heidegger designates the fact of concealment, or the “concealment of

concealing [*Verbergung des Verborgenen*],” as “a mystery [*das Geheimnis*]” (GA 9: 194/148). If concealment is a mystery, which cannot in principle supply an answer in the form of a true proposition, then does Heidegger simply leave it aside? No, Heidegger urges us instead to reflect on concealment as such. Indeed, this will get at the very heart of the truth of being, which is rendered into the clearing for self-concealment.

In *Contributions*, Heidegger claims, “The essence of truth is the clearing for self-concealing. This intimately conflictual essence of truth shows that truth is originally and essentially the truth of being (event)” (GA 65: 348/275). This is a re-telling of the ontological difference. Unlike unconcealed beings, being is self-concealed. In order for beings to appear within the clearing, and for truth claims to be about them, being must recede into concealment.¹⁰⁸ Hence, the essence, or condition, of particular truths is the truth of being. Specifically, it is the clearing that simultaneously conceals. The reason for this is that the clearing is not itself an entity or being, rather it is the site or place in which beings are cleared.¹⁰⁹ Heidegger emphasizes the concealment of the clearing by calling it an “abyss:” “The abyssal ground is the primessential clearing concealment, the essential occurrence of truth” (GA 65: 380/300). This helps explain how humans can indirectly grasp the truth of being in Heidegger’s *Kehre*. Da-sein is another name for the clearing for concealment, and therefore the truth of being. Being grounded in Da-sein, then, humans are able to stand in and act as the clearing for beings to appear.

¹⁰⁸ The concealment of being is also in *Being and Time*. Heidegger argues that the being of beings is fundamentally “concealed.” The task of hermeneutical phenomenology is to unconceal it, making it into a thematized object. Post-*Being and Time*, however, the truth of being is incapable of unconcealment. It has to be attended to *as* concealed (SZ: 35/33).

¹⁰⁹ This is like an actual forest clearing. The clearing itself is not immediately seen. Instead, the things within the clearing and the dark forest surrounding it are first seen, from which the existence of the clearing is deduced.

The main role that the self-concealment of the truth of beyng plays in Heidegger's thought is to explain the forgetting of the question of being that motivates his life's work. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that the question has been forgotten because the ontological tradition had rendered being into something indefinable, i.e. not capable of providing a definite answer. As self-concealed, Heidegger now argues that forgetting is intrinsic to the truth of beyng. Returning to its Greek etymology, "λανθάνειν" (concealment) is more accurately translated as "forgetting" (GA 54: 33/22). What is concealed is forgotten, including the event of concealment itself. To give a concrete example, one does not just forget some fact or detail, one also forgets that they forgot it. Accordingly, the self-concealment of beyng is also forgotten. This results in the human fixation on the beings that surround them, which Heidegger diagnoses as the "abandonment by beyng" that results in modern nihilism (GA 65: 109/138). Abandoned by beyng, humans are left among beings that are utterly groundless. However, insofar as Da-sein can be the clearing that allows for the indirect appearance of the truth of beyng, i.e. its self-concealing, then there appears to be a point in which nihilism can be overcome. It is with regard to this point that the other beginning becomes a possibility and that the historical character of the truth of beyng becomes evident. The forgetting of beyng is an event that inaugurated the first beginning of philosophy and resulted in modern nihilism; the revelation of the truth of beyng constitutes a second event which commences another beginning, a new relationship to beyng that is not determined by metaphysics.

The key to this possibility of the second event is to recognize that beyng itself is an event, it is something that occurs. Truth *qua* unconcealment is not eternal, but rather context specific. It discloses at a certain time and place, i.e. time-space: "...time-space belongs to truth in the sense of the originating essential occurrence of being as event" (GA 65: 372/294). This temporalization

and spatialization of truth accounts for the entanglement of concealment and unconcealment that characterizes the truth of being. By definition, an event is not eternal, it is something remarkable that happens at a specific moment. Likewise, in being evental, Heidegger claims that truth “happens as clearing-concealing” (GA 65: 30/26). At the moment of the event, something is cleared, but the horizon of the past and future remain concealed. To give an ontic example, the event of the French Revolution concealed the future because it produced a rupture in the habitual expectations of those living in France, as well as concealing the past insofar as it needed to be reinterpreted to account for the event itself. The happening of the truth calls for a rethinking the world in which it took shape. Similarly, the occurrence of the truth of being ruptures our habitual and historically sedimented understanding of being and truth as eternal concepts.

In the *Contributions*, Heidegger posits: “Most intrinsically proper to this essence (of truth) is the fact that it is historical. The history of truth, the history of the shining forth, transforming, and grounding of its essence, contains only rare and widely separated moments” (GA 65: 342/270). Truth – the unconcealment of concealment – occurs at specific historical moments, i.e. the moments when humans receive and ground the truth of being. This is the proper sense of the history of being: it is a reception, interpretation, and documentation of the ways in which being and truth occur. For example, the modern identification of truth with certainty is entangled with the interpretation of being(s) as representations belonging to consciousness. How being appears is conditioned by what is taken to be the measure of truth, and vice-versa. However, this history should not be perceived as something entirely passive on the part of human being.

In accord with Heidegger’s earlier historical decisionism, the history of being also involves a fundamental “decision:” “whether being conclusively withdraws itself, or whether

this withdrawal, as refusal, becomes the first truth and the other beginning of history” (GA 65: 91/173). It is a decision on the part of humans whether or not the truth of being will be cleared or remain forgotten. Furthermore, insofar as history concerns the occurrence of being, then this decision is whether not history itself is won or lost (GA 65: 95/76). This point is reiterated in his later essay, “On the Essence of Truth.” Heidegger writes, “The rare and simple decisions [Entscheidungen] of history arise from the way the originary essence of truth essentially unfolds [entspringen]” (GA 9: 191/146). Humans are partially responsible for the decision of whether or not the history of being will ultimately result in the inception of the other beginning.

However, it would be mistaken to think that Heidegger means humanity in general. He specifically designates the German people as those to whom this decision concerns. In his *Black Notebooks*, for example, Heidegger defines being German in terms of bearing the destiny of the West. “To be German: to project the most intrinsic burden of the history of the West and to bear that burden on one’s shoulders” (GA 95: 1/1). Furthermore, Heidegger identifies the German people with the “future ones [Zukünftigen]” who will carry out the transition to the other beginning (or will fail to do so) (GA 95: 198/154). According to Charles Bambach, this is due to Heidegger’s myth of “Graeco-German affinity,” which posits that there is an essential linguistic and cultural accord between the ancient Greeks and the modern Germans.¹¹⁰ In regard to the

¹¹⁰ Heidegger is not the first to posit a linguistic-cultural affinity between the Germans and the Greeks. Fichte, for example, had both claimed that the German and Greek languages had comparable “inner values” and that both peoples were “original.” This “myth of Graeco-Germanic affinity” was a consistent theme of 19th and early 20th century German thought, reaching its height in the Nazi identification of the Greeks as Aryans. See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to The German Nation*, Trans. Isaac Nakhimosky, Béla Kapossy, and Keith Tribe (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2013), 55, 106; Charles Bambach, *Heidegger’s Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and The Greeks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 116-117; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Nazi Myth,” *Critical Inquiry* 16, No. 2 (1990), 309.

history of beyng, the first beginning occurs with the Greeks, the other with the Germans. Rhetorically asking when the first beginning occurred, Heidegger responds: “At the point when the Greek people, whose ethnicity [*Stammesart*] and language have the same provenance as ours, set about creating through its great poets and thinkers a unique way of Dasein for a human people” (GA 36/37: 6/5). This posited affinity would also correspond with Heidegger’s explicit commitment to Nazism in the early 1930s. Hence, in 1933, Heidegger claims that a return to the Greek beginning is necessary to “form” a world in which the “spirit” of the “Nationalist Socialist revolution” could be realized (GA 36/37: 6-7/6).

In any case, in order to properly understand the narrative structure of the history of beyng, the first beginning must be laid out. That is, it must be shown how the truth of beyng first emerged for the Greeks and how that experience transformed into metaphysics and modern nihilism. This will also account for the submergence of beyng that will provide the condition for the occurrence of the other beginning. In short, we will have access to Heidegger’s history of the West: the emergence and submergence of the truth of beyng.

Greaco-Germanic Tragedy

Although Heidegger’s poetic writings properly begin with *Contributions to Philosophy: of The Event* (GA 65), Heidegger notes that this project first took shape in spring of 1932 (GA 66: 424/362). This bore fruit in his summer lecture course, *The Beginning of Western Philosophy: Interpretation of Anaximander and Parmenides*. Here, Heidegger articulates the basic character of beyng-historical thinking. In order to bring about the “end of metaphysics” by means of grasping the truth of beyng, we must also “seek out the beginning of Western philosophy” in ancient Greek thought, specifically in the writings of Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus (GA 35: 1/1). According to Peter Trawny, this text marks the first formulation of

a “narrative” – the history of beyng - that “revolutionized his thinking” by creating a world-historical picture from which to criticize the present. Philosophy *qua* metaphysics seemed to have exhausted itself, ending in nihilism. Properly responding to the end, required seeking out its beginning.¹¹¹

It is instructive in German that the word for “history,” “narrative,” and “story” are the same: *Geschichte*. Heidegger’s history of beyng is not a history in the historiographical sense of composing a fact-based account of the process of events in time; it is rather a narrative or story. It is the story of the different ways that the being of beings was revealed at the expense of the concealment of the truth of beyng. But this story remains abstract, it needs a setting and perhaps characters that we can follow. The history of beyng is generally set in what is called “the West,” and more narrowly in ancient Greece and Germany. Accordingly, as Trawny notes, it contains two “leading actors:” “‘the Greeks’ and ‘the Germans,’ each time embodying, in a chiasmatic manner, both beginning and end.”¹¹² But how do these actors relate to one another in their respective setting? What is the genre of this story? Is their relationship comedic or dramatic? Is it horrifying or romantic? My argument is that this narrative is tragic and therefore the Germans and Greeks relate to one another tragically. But what is meant by tragedy?

By tragedy, I delimit the genre to its ancient Greek origin, i.e., the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Due to the Graeco-Germanic affinity, Greek tragedy would play an outsized role in German philosophy and aesthetics from the end of the 18th century until the 20th. Hence, in his celebrated work on tragedy, literary theorist Péter Szondi claims that “the

¹¹¹ Peter Trawny, *Heidegger & The Myth of a Jewish World Conspiracy*, Trans. Andrew J. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 9.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 14.

philosophy of the tragic is proper to German philosophy.”¹¹³ For this reason, he explicitly distinguishes the poetics of tragedy, i.e., its literary form, which was succinctly theorized by Aristotle, from the philosophy of tragedy, which is taken up by various German philosophers.

For Aristotle, tragedy is defined by several characteristics: it imitates an action that is “heroic” and “complete” in itself; has pleasurable language; it centers around dramatic action, rather than narrative progression; and these actions arouse “pity [ἔλεος]” and “fear [φόβος]” on the part of spectators, through which there is a “relief [κάθαρσις]” of such emotions.¹¹⁴ In terms of plot, the most powerful elements, which arouse pity and fear, are the “reversal [περιπέτεια]” and “discovery [ἀναγνώρισις].” Together these two emotion elements form the background for the third part of the plot, “calamity [πάθος]:” “A calamity is a destructive or painful occurrence, such as death on the stage, acute suffering and wounding and so on.”¹¹⁵ Using Aristotle’s example, Oedipus experiences a sudden reversal of fortune when he discovers that his wife is his mother and he had murdered his father, resulting in calamity. This scene produces catharsis because we, the audience, experience both pity and horror regarding Oedipus’ fate. This is in part due to the fact the tragic character is not primarily bad or evil, and therefore not deserving of such suffering. For Aristotle, tragedy is marked a reversal of fortune that is not the result of “vice or depravity,” but “fault [ἁμαρτίαν].”¹¹⁶ Oedipus’ tragic fault or error was his anger that caused him to murder the king, his father, and his pride which caused him to seek out knowledge of the murderer and his true parentage that would ultimately doom him. Curiously absent from Aristotle’s account of tragedy is one its essential themes: fate or destiny. Aristotle talks about the

¹¹³ Péter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, Trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 2.

¹¹⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b25-30.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1452a20-1452b15.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1453a10.

cause of tragic fate, i.e., fault or error, but not about the nature of this fate. Attention to this theme constitutes the transition from the poetics of tragedy to the philosophy of tragedy.

In Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795), Szondi points to a transition from understanding tragedy in terms of its effect on the audience (Aristotle), to reflection on the idea of tragedy, i.e., what tragic plays are attempting to convey about human life.¹¹⁷ For Schelling, Greek tragedy revealed the attempt on the part of humans to reconcile the contradiction between necessity and freedom. It is told to the king and queen of Thebes that their son will murder his father and marry his mother, so they sent him away to be exposed. Instead, Oedipus is pitied and sent away from Thebes, where he is adopted by the king and queen of Corinth. Discovering the same prophecy later on, Oedipus flees Corinth. Thereupon he unwittingly murders his own father, defeats the sphinx, becomes king of Thebes and marries his mother. He later discovers this fact and punishes himself by gouging out his eyes and going into exile. Attempting to escape fate, or necessity, each member of the family produces the very conditions that will result in its realization. In this way, the tragedy consists in the fact that downfall has always already virtually occurred; in fact, its virtual occurrence is precisely what results in its actualization. However, the genius of tragedy, for Schelling, is that it attempts to reconcile free will with necessity through suffering; that Oedipus suffers for a crime committed in error, is evidence of his freedom; he must suffer necessity because he is free.

The contradiction between freedom and necessity, evident in Greek tragedy, becomes a recurring theme in German philosophy, even if the exact terms of that contradiction might shift. For Hegel is it the contradiction between natural/divine law and human customs; for Hölderlin it is between human time and divine destiny; for Nietzsche it is between the Apollonian and the

¹¹⁷ Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, 7.

Dionysian. According to Dennis J. Schmidt, the “common denominator” for each of these philosophers of tragedy is that they apply these contradictions and forces to history itself. Consequently, history becomes thought primarily in terms of tragic destiny, or that freedom has to be thought from within historical necessity. To this lineage of philosophers of tragedy, Schmidt adds a figure who is curiously absent from Szondi’s work: Heidegger, who is viewed as presenting an historical account of tragedy with the “greatest force.”¹¹⁸

While Schmidt brilliantly discusses the role of Greek tragedy in Heidegger’s thought and gestures towards the tragic nature of history, his account fails to extensively engage with the key insights from Heidegger’s being-historical thinking, no doubt due to the constraints of what was published at the time. It is now known that Heidegger viewed being itself as tragic and it is for this reason that its historical destiny is itself marked by tragedy (GA 66: 223). I argue that Heidegger’s account of submergence provides the mainspring for understanding his tragic history of being. In a tragic narrative, the necessity of event is such that the downfall of the hero does not actually occur at the end of the play but has already virtually occurred at the beginning. Or as Heidegger explains: “This is why in the Greek tragedy virtually nothing happens. It commences [*fängt*] with the submergence [*Untergang*] (GA 53: 128/103).”¹¹⁹ Hence, the end is just the mirror of the beginning. Likewise, the history of being in fact begins with its end and ends with its beginning; the truth of being is submerged at the first beginning and the other beginning commences with the recognition, or to use Aristotle’s term, the discovery of this submergence. If there is to be another beginning for not only philosophy, but history as such,

¹¹⁸ Dennis J. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 282.

¹¹⁹ William McNeill and Julia Davis translate “*Untergang*” as “downgoing,” I substitute the translation with “submergence.”

then there needs to be reckoning with the tragedy of the first. In order to properly account for this destiny of being, however, it is necessary to begin with the beginning. What exactly was this first beginning and how did it submerge the truth of being? According to Heidegger, it begins with the emergence of beings as a whole, understood as φύσις for the Ancient Greeks.

The First Beginning: The Emergence of The Truth of Being

How did being first appear to the Greeks? The question contains the answer: it appeared as that which *is*. Not appearance understood in the modern sense as a representation or semblance of something else, but appearance as the emergence of beings themselves. “Appearance [*Erscheinung*] is emergence [*Aufgang*]: not the becoming seen and apprehend of something, but a character of the happening of beings as such” (GA 35: 3/6). “Emergence” signifies the happening of beings. But to the extent that happening is still separable from specific beings, then emergence indirectly refers to being as such. There is a distinction to be made between that which emerges and the act of emergence itself, or the distinction between *what* something is and the fact *that* it is. Thatness was felt by the Greeks with the disposition of “wonder” (θαυμάζειν), i.e. wondering why there are beings rather than nothing. In wonder, humans and beings are brought into relation: “Wonder displaces man into and before beings as such” (GA 45:170/147). As such, wonder marks the origin of philosophy.¹²⁰ “Emergence” is designated in Greek by the word φύσις. In his lecture 1935 lecture course *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes, “In the age of the first and definitive unfolding of Western philosophy among the Greeks, when questioning about beings as such and as a whole received

¹²⁰ This is famously stated by Aristotle in *The Metaphysics*: “It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize.” See: Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, Trans. High Trednwick (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 982b.

its true inception, beings were called φύσις” (GA 40: 10/14). The first beginning therefore begins with the experience of φύσις: the emergence of beings as a whole.

But why does Heidegger invest his time in determining the Greek experience of φύσις? The word directly refers to beings as a whole and indirectly refers to the appearance of being as such, yet it seems far removed from the truth of beyng: beyng *qua* clearing for self-concealment. Fortunately, in *The Event*, Heidegger supplies an answer to this very question.

Within this presentation of the first beginning, a presentation that is inceptual (i.e., dealing with the history of beyng), to what extent must being indeed receive precisely the name of φύσις, although φύσις does not express the essence of the truth of beyng as that essence is thought in the other beginning? Using the name φύσις here is necessary to the extent that φύσις correctly grasped, points to emergence and thereby intimates ἀλήθεια and also to the extent that φύσις at the same time is in this determination sufficient to unsettle immediately the previous misinterpretation of the beginning as a philosophy of nature (GA 71: 57-58/46).

As this quote signifies, with regard to the history of beyng, φύσις is fundamentally ambiguous. If properly grasped, emergence as φύσις “intimates” the meaning of ἀλήθεια and therefore the truth of beyng. However, φύσις can also lead to error. Relegated to an experience of beings alone, φύσις can be taken to mean “presencing [*Anwesenung*],” or that which is already emergent (GA 71: 56/45). From here it is easy to interpret it metaphysically as “constant presence [*beständige Anwesenheit*].” In other words, the very possibility of metaphysics is contained within φύσις (GA 65: 195/154). Accordingly, the destiny of the history of beyng hangs on how φύσις is understood. How does this error occur? As indicated by the quote above, it primarily stems from (mis)-understanding φύσις as nature.

What is Heidegger's justification for translating "φύσις" as "*Aufgang*" (emergence), rather than "Natur" (nature), which would be the conventional translation? Φύσις is rooted in the word "φύειν," which means "to bring forth, produce, or grow."¹²¹ In the noun form, "φύσις" ambiguously names that which is brought forth and bringing forth itself, or what emerges and emergence. "It says what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance – in short, the emerging-abiding sway" (GA 40: 11/15). For Heidegger, "φύσις" designates both beings as a whole and being as such for the Greeks: what *is*, emerges. This sense of the word is lost with the subsequent Latin transliteration into "natura," which more narrowly means "to be born." It loses its ontological sense (coming-into-being), gaining a biological sense (coming-into-life). In English, this connection of nature and life leads the former to be rendered distinct from those things produced by human activity, i.e. what is artificial. In referring to a distinct group of beings, "nature" does not refer to being. Hence the transformation of φύσις into nature is one of the marks of the forgetting of being that motivates Heidegger's thought.¹²²

Heidegger further differentiates "φύσις" and "nature" by emphasizing the etymological relationship between the former and "light," as opposed to "growth." Φύσις is related to the words "φῶς" and "φάος," which translate as "light." Hence, derives "φανός," the word for lamp

¹²¹ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, 8th edition (New York: American Book Company, 1901), s.v. "φύειν."

¹²² However, "nature" also has two other senses, which more closely relate to φύσις. First, nature means that which defines a specific being (e.g. "human nature," "the nature of a chemical," etc.). Second, the behavior of beings as a whole, the subject of physics (e.g. laws of nature). The first indirectly refers to the being of a specific being, that which makes something what it is. The second, indirectly refers to the Greek determination of φύσις as the being as a whole, which would even include the behavior of artificial objects, e.g. both a hammer and a planet are subject to gravity.

and lantern. These words are also related to the verb “φαίνω,” or “to shine, to appear” (GA 55: 16-17/15). From this word comes “phenomena,” i.e. that which appears. Thought together, then, “φύσις” also means that which brings light or appears. Accordingly, emergence is synonymous with appearing. Artificial or spontaneous, any entity is an instance of appearing, which refers to appearing as such, i.e. the happening of being itself. Thus, the first beginning refers to the naming and wonder in the face of the original appearance of being.

Connecting emergence and appearance, Heidegger demonstrates the fundamental relationship between emergence and unconcealment, φύσις and ἀλήθεια. Heidegger writes: “For the Greek essence of truth is possible only together with the Greek essence of Being as φύσις. On the grounds of the unique essential relation between φύσις and ἀλήθεια, the Greeks could say: beings as beings are true. The true as such is in being” (GA 40: 78/107). More specifically, as Heidegger claims in his 1943 lecture course on Heraclitus, ἀλήθεια is the very essence of φύσις (GA 55: 173/130). In other words, emergence is the unconcealment of what is previously concealed. But, as discussed above, concealment is the “counter-essence” of unconcealment. The former preserves what is most proper to the latter. Consequently, concealment is also the counter-essence of φύσις: emergence requires and presupposes concealment (GA 54: 176/118).

Heidegger demonstrates this relationship through a reading of Heraclitus’ fragment 123: “φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ,” which is usually translated as “nature loves to hide.” Translating “κρύπτεσθαι” as “conceal,” Heidegger translates the passage as “Emerging to self-concealing gives favor” (GA 55: 110/84).¹²³ Hence, self-concealment belongs to emergence, or to any

¹²³ The word “κρύπτεσθαι” comes from the verb “κρύπτεώ,” which can mean “to conceal, hide.” See *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, 8th edition (New York: American Book Company, 1901), s.v. “κρύπτεώ.”

instance of emergence, there is accompanying concealment. This compliments Heidegger's account of the truth of *beyng* as the clearing for concealing. *Φύσις* indirectly refers to the concealment of *beyng* as such. For this reason, Heidegger maintains that Heraclitus intimated the truth of *beyng*. But this truth was subsequently lost or forgotten over the course of history, i.e. the history of *beyng*. Specifically, metaphysical thinking obscured concealment by transforming *φύσις* into something constantly present, or always already unconcealed.

The first beginning occurs with the astonishment that “being is – (because its essence is disclosure [*Entbergung*],” which then transforms into an account of what and why being is, which is purview of metaphysics. This mode of questioning conceals the truth of *beyng* because it renders it into a kind of being, i.e. a *what*. For this reason, Heidegger claims that metaphysics primarily consists of the tautological proposition, “being (ens entium) ‘is’ being” (GA 70: 53). In other words, being is something present or already emergent. This formulation obscures the dynamic sense of *φύσις*, emergence of what is from out of concealment (*beyng* as such).

Heidegger presents a helpful description of this transformation in *The Event*. “The character of clearing is transformed into presence. And presence steps back behind the things that are present; being becomes *ιδέα*... Emergence, on account of what is astonishing about it, immediately becomes presence, from which are distinguished coming to be and passing away” (GA 71: 25/18). Heidegger is specifically referring to the Platonic dialogues as the origin of metaphysics. For Plato, what is most being, or constantly present, is something's idea or form. For example, while a chair may change in time (e.g. its color fades), its idea remains constant. This manner of thinking being alters the referent for *ἀλήθεια*. “Beingness as *ιδέα* thereby is of itself what truly (*ἀληθῶς*) is, *ὄν*“ (GA 65: 220/172). If we want to know the truth of something, we have to grasp its idea. Furthermore, this also accounts for the transformation of *ἀλήθεια* into

the correctness. Truth is the correct correspondence of the perceptible thing with its idea, and later its correspondence with a proposition.

But metaphysics achieves its proper formulation with Aristotle. While his text φυσικὴ ἀκρόασις (*Physics*) concerns the behavior of beings as a whole (φύσις), his τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ (*Metaphysics*), or what comes after the physics, concerns the meaning and principles of being. As such, the emergence of beings becomes distinguished from their principles or reasons for being, or that which constitutes the beingness (οὐσία) of beings. Heidegger explains:

But when τί τὸ ὄν (what is being) is asked, the question is not aimed at the particular being, but rather beyond it (μετὰ), “over” it towards the being of beings. The question τί τὸ ὄν does not think τὰ φυσικὰ but rather μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ. The thinking that thinks οὐσία – i.e. beingness – moves beyond the particular being and over toward being. It is a thinking μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ – that is, “metaphysics.” From Plato and Aristotle up to the current day, western thinking is “metaphysics” (GA 55: 57/46).

Aristotle formerly defines metaphysics, establishing it as a tradition that exists to the present day. As such, Aristotle plays a more significant role in the forgetting of being. He delimits the study of φύσις to the physical behavior of natural entities, separating it from the study of being as such. Being as such no longer refers to emergence from out of concealment, but rather presence.

Paradoxically, over the course of history, this determination of being results in nihilism: “Being alone is and being remains empty smoke and an error” (GA 70: 55). Being as such is nothing, since being cannot be understood except by making it into another being. For example, being defined as necessarily existing, God is both the metaphysical source of beings and is itself a being. Such thinking renders the truth of being incomprehensible, i.e. nothingness. This lack at the heart of metaphysics is indirectly experienced as an “abandonment” by being, which

Heidegger diagnoses as nihilism (GA 65: 119/95). In general terms, the transition of φύσις to nihilism is the destiny that belongs to the history of beyng. But in accord with the tragic sense of destiny, nihilism appears as the end of metaphysics, but it actually belongs to it from the very beginning. Heidegger writes, ““Beyng is already abandoning beings when ἀλήθεια becomes the withdrawing basic character of beings and thereby prepares the determination of beingness as ἰδέα” (GA 65: 112/88). Yet, it is crucial to understand that nihilism is not a mere defect or fault of metaphysics. Rather, it preserves the truth of beyng: “the abandonment of beings by being means that beyng *conceals itself* in the manifestness of beingness. And beyng itself is essentially determined as this self-withdrawing concealment” (GA 65: 112/88). Nihilism tacitly names the truth of beyng. Accordingly, grasping the truth of beyng and thereby inaugurating the other beginning actually requires taking up and working through the nihilistic kernel of metaphysics. Subverting the emergence of beings experienced in the first beginning, the other beginning takes shape through the “submergence;” which means the forgetting of beyng that occurs as concealment (GA 70: 54).

The Other Beginning: The Tragedy of Submergence

In *The Event*, Heidegger summarizes the relationship between emergence and submergence as such: “The beginning is unique. The word of the inceptuality [*der Anfängis*] is multiple. Hence there are many ways to say the beginnings. We know the first beginning as the emergent [*den aufgehenden*] (φύσις); we know the other beginning as the submergence [*den untergehenden*] (event [*Ereignis*])” (GA 71: 302/262).¹²⁴ While the first beginning took shape in astonishment before the emergence and unconcealment of beings as a whole, the coming other

¹²⁴ I use the word “submergence” for “*Untergang*,” rather than Rojcewicz’s “downgoing.”

beginning occurs in the event whereby the submergence of beyng is recollected and appropriated. The emergence of beings as a whole was coextensive with the submergence of beyng, or, in other words, the unconcealment of beings required the concealment of beyng. The abandonment by beyng that marks the transformation of metaphysics into nihilism already occurred in the first beginning. The truth of beyng – its self-concealment – was submerged. For Heidegger, the other beginning consists in finally recollecting this very submergence that determined the fate of the history of beyng, allowing the truth of beyng to be disclosed. This will account for the tragic construction of the history of beyng: the submergence of beyng that is revealed at the end of that history, occurred at the beginning. The identification of metaphysics with nihilism, and nihilism with beyng itself, is the tragic moment, i.e. the event. However, rather than lamenting this fate, Heidegger ultimately affirms the tragedy of beyng as the condition for another historical beginning; specifically, as a beginning that reifies the existence of the West as the source of salvation for the various ills associated with modernity.

In order to properly understand and frame Heidegger's tragic narrative, it is necessary to clarify the terms introduced so far and to address a few questions. What exactly is meant by submergence, or *Untergang*? How does this relate to Spengler's account of *Untergang*, which is negatively translated as decline or downfall? Why is submergence identified with self-concealment on the part of beyng? Why does the other beginning take shape through the recollection of the truth of beyng? Does this act of recollection relate to the forgetting of beyng?

One of the difficulties in reading Heidegger consists in working through the sheer entanglement of his concepts. Hence, submergence and self-concealment are almost interchangeable. What is submerged is concealed, and the act of submergence is self-concealing. Granted that the other beginning consists in appropriating the truth of beyng, and that beyng is

fundamentally self-concealing, then the other beginning is the event by which submergence of beyng that underlies the history of beyng is appropriated. Hence, Heidegger writes, “The other beginning is the appropriating event (unconcealing concealment). The event is submergence – recollection [*Erinnerung*]” (GA 71: 303/263). In other words, the event of appropriation consists in the recollection and saying of the submergence of beyng, its self-concealment. With regard to the history of beyng, there are two specific senses of submergence. First, submergence names the truth of beyng that is intimated, yet concealed, in the first beginning. Second, it names the historical “transition [*Übergang*]” between the first and other beginning (GA 65: 66/53; GA 70: 103). The history of beyng accounts for the submergence of beyng that is coextensive with the history of metaphysics. The other beginning occurs when metaphysics is exhausted, making possible the saying of the truth of beyng. But what exactly does Heidegger mean by recollection? Why is the submergence/self-concealment of beyng grasped by means of recollection?

Being and Time opens with the claim that the question of being has been forgotten (SZ: 1/2). With the *Kehre*, Heidegger further argues that this forgetting of being is symptomatic of its truth. By not being an entity capable of unconcealment, the truth of beyng is that it is self-concealing, which Heidegger etymologically connects to forgetting. The Greek word for concealment, “λανθάνειν,” can be translated as forgetting. Hence, what is concealed is also forgotten. For this reason, the unconcealment of beyng as self-concealing means also recollecting or remembering what was forgotten. The event that appropriates the history of beyng, the submergence of beyng as such, which brings forth the other beginning of history is an act of recollection. Heidegger usefully explains in his Nietzsche lectures:

Recollection in the history of being thinks history as the arrival, always remote, of the perdurance of truth’s essence. Being occurs primarily in this essence. Recollection helps

the remembrance of the truth of being by allowing the following to come to mind: the essence of truth is at the same time the truth of essence. Being and truth belong to each other just as they belong intertwining to a still concealed rootedness in the origin whose origination opening up remains that which comes (GA 6.2: 439; EP 75).

Recollecting not only locates an origin, the self-concealment of beyng, but it also designates a future, a history to arrive. Not unlike his earlier account of historical repetition, recollection is a return to the past that bestows a future. Indeed, in his poetic writings, Heidegger closely links anticipation and recollection: “Every thinking ahead is a gift of recollection” (GA 70: 98). The other beginning takes shape through a recollection of the first beginning, unconcealing the submergence of beyng as such. In this way, recollection is not just simply remembering. It is also a fundamentally creative act.

Although the history of beyng surveys the entire of history of metaphysics, Heidegger primarily recollects the truth of beyng through critical readings of the Pre-Socratics. In this case, I will return to Heidegger’s reading of Heraclitus, whose fragment 123 reveals the co-belonging of emergence and self-concealment. Φύσις does not just emerge from concealment, but also recedes back into it, just as a flower emerges and dies. Moreover, any instance of emergence is always of beings – what *is* – which conceals beyng as such. Rendering concealing synonymous with submerging, Heidegger thereby points to the identity of emergence and submergence, *Aufgang* and *Untergang*. “Emerging and self-concealing (i.e., submerging) are the same” (GA 55: 153/116). Of course, it is rational to object to this claim as contradictory. If submergence is the negation of emergence, then how could they be identical? This objection is based off certain metaphysical assumptions: the principle of sufficient reason and the principle of contradiction. The latter forbids that a positive can also be a negative. The former claims that a positive must

precede a negative, which follows from the claim that nothing can come from nothing. Given that unconcealment is a negation of concealment, then submergence is not actually a negation of emergence. But nor is emergence a negation. Emergence reveals submergence, just as unconcealment reveals concealment. This can be demonstrated in experience: although regarded as opposites, neither light nor darkness are negations of one another. At best, the claim that “darkness is the absence of light” posits the absolute polarity of the two phenomena, not that one is the negation of the other. But even these apparent opposites can co-belong. A candle in a dark room shows the darkness at its limits.

However, in other texts, Heidegger argues for a certain priority to submergence. While necessarily entangled, submergence is the condition of emergence.

The emergence begins with the abyss [*Ab-grund*] and this means with the *submergence*... The first being [*Sein*] is emergence and thus already submergence because the clearing that comes down over it is ungrounded [*ungegründet*] and no longer promising. What emergence was and remains before the entire history of being, as its submergence, must become experienced as *the event of the appropriation of the abyss* [*Ereignis des Abgrundes*]” (GA 66: 96).

This passage requires much unpacking. What is meant by abyss? I have already talked about the event of appropriating being, but what of abyss? Is there something abyssal regarding the truth of being? If abyss is more primordial than emergence, then why would this be the case for submergence as well?

In his poetic text *On the Inception* (*Über den Anfang*), Heidegger claims that the first beginning is the abyss, the “ungrounded [*Ungegründete*]” of the truth of being (GA 70: 13). Emergence is ungrounding insofar as the wonder before beings as a whole conceals being as

such, since understanding *what* beings are presupposes an understanding *that* they are. Beings emerge from self-concealment, which is then forgotten. Without being, then, beings appear to hover over an abyss. As such, the abyss is another descriptor of being: “Being occurs as abyss” (GA 66: 100). However, by placing a hyphen between “Ab-“ and “grund,” Heidegger emphasizes that the abyss is still a ground, albeit one that “self-concealing” *as* ground (GA 65: 379/300). The abyss is simultaneously “nothing [Nichts]” and a “ground” (GA 66: 99). How does Heidegger account for this apparent contradiction? Rather than being an abyss in the sense of an empty space, the abyss actually designates the “fullness [die Fülle] of what is still undecided [*Nochunentschiedenen*] and is to be decided [*zu Entscheidenden*]” (GA 65: 382/302). The abyss is not a lack, but a site of a possibilities. Not only of possible emergent beings, but also the possible ground upon which self-concealment of being can be indirectly cleared. This helps better explain the meaning of Da-sein in Heidegger’s middle period. Rather than a human being, “Da-sein” names the “there” that grounds the abyss [GA 65: 386/305]. As such, the event of appropriation means that humans become “Da-sein,” grounding and experiencing the truth of being as abyss.

That being *qua* abyss precedes emergence accounts for the priority of submergence. Returning to the quote: “The emergence begins with the abyss [*Ab-grund*] and this means with the submergence” (GA 66: 96). Beings emerge from the abyss, or that which is submerged. Connecting the abyss with submergence, Heidegger renders submergence into another name for the self-concealment of being. Self-concealment is submerged relative to the unconcealment of emergence. But emergence is also “submergence into the abyss” (GA 71: 148/127). This is empirically shown through the experience of beings as they decay and die, e.g. a flower emerges

and submerges into the ground.¹²⁵ Hence, submergence stands between both ends of emergence: beings emerge from and return to the submergent abyss of beyng. This is to say that the truth of beyng is not exhausted by emergence, the latter of which metaphysics attempts to eternalize, i.e. beingness remains identical beneath the empirical changes of beings. The submergence of beyng from metaphysics means that the appropriation of the former is not foreclosed by the latter.

By articulating the cohesion of beyng, abyss, and submergence, we can better understand the historical character of submergence. The other beginnings occur when the abyss is appropriated from submergence (GA 70: 13). For Heidegger, submergence is identical with the “transition [Übergang]” between the first and other beginning, or the history of beyng. This is further demonstrated by the fact that the end of metaphysics is coextensive with submergence (GA 70: 103). Beyng-historical thinking is consonant with thinking the submergence of beyng that underlies the various formulations of metaphysics. Heidegger writes:

Beyng-historical thinking is submergent thinking. This (thinking) is incomparable to historical doom and gloom [*historischen Untergangsstimmung*], which only clings to perishing and cessation, to impotency and decay and reckons with these as mere ending... Beyng-historical thinking thinks in the beginning and thinks from out of the confrontation of the first and other beginning” (GA 70: 94).

By attending to submergence, beyng-historical thinking stages the confrontation between the first and other beginnings, i.e. demonstrating the submergence of beyng that the emergence of beings as a whole concealed. The first beginning (metaphysics) results in nihilism precisely because it

¹²⁵ Heidegger specifically connects submergence to death: “Death... has the character of submergence” (GA 70: 138).

showed that beyng was not an emergent entity; rather, it is submergence itself.¹²⁶ Submergent thinking recognizes this as the truth of beyng and proceeds to critically reflect upon the history of metaphysics.

As mentioned in the quote above, while identifying beyng-historical thinking and submergent thinking, or thinking of the *Untergang*, Heidegger is insistent that submergence is not a negative term. Moreover, the history of beyng is not a negative account of history. Submergence is neither the decay nor decline into a determinate end, since its recollection is a creative event that marks the occurrence of the other beginning. The end is simply another beginning. In this case, Heidegger is using the term deliberately both to invoke and also dissociate his thought from Spengler, who renders *Untergang* simply into decline.

If the submergence that describes the history of beyng is creative, then why is it still a tragic narrative? Heidegger's unique account of tragedy is complex and surprisingly underdiscussed. There are three distinct moments in Heidegger's thinking of tragedy, which result in the distinct determinations of tragedy. First, Heidegger's most famous account of tragedy comes from his reading of *Antigone* in his 1942 lecture on Hölderlin's "Der Ister." In this play, Antigone's tragic decision to defy Creon in order to honor her brother's death results in her own demise. Rather than highlighting the tragic conflict of divine and human law, or the conflict between men and women, Heidegger chooses to point to a specific moment of the choral ode, which states: "Manifold is uncanny yet nothing / more uncanny [*Unheimlich*] looms or storms beyond the human being." For Heidegger, "uncanny," or δεινόν, is not only the

¹²⁶ Heidegger indicates the entanglement of submergence and nihilism in *The Event*. Here, "Abandonment by being [*Seinsverlassenheit*]" (another name for nihilism) is identical with submergence (GA 71: 78/65).

“fundamental word [*Grundwort*] of this tragedy” but of “Greek tragedy in general” (GA 53: 82/67). However, unhappy with this translation, Heidegger renders “uncanny,” or “*Unheimlich*,” into “un-homely,” or “Un-heimische” (GA 53: 87/71). That which is uncanny, which can be understood as strange, frightening, inhabital, dangerous, or powerful, is also un-homely. Whereas the homely strikes one as comfortable or fitting, something that one is at home in, un-homely is precisely what is unfitting or disconcerting. For Heidegger, because all beings are fundamentally un-homely, human beings seek to render them homely, i.e., fitting to their way of being; for example, producing a dam to make use of the water current.

But what is tragic, however, is that human beings are in fact the most un-homely of all beings. This is evidenced precisely by the activity on the part of humans to make their environment homely; they make their world homely, in order to make up for an originary unhomeliness. But why are they un-homely in the first place? According to Heidegger, this due to their fundamental relationship to being as such: “This kind of uncanniness [*Unheimlichkeit*], namely, unhomeliness, is possible for human beings alone, because they comport themselves towards beings as such, and thereby understand being. And because they understand being, human beings alone can also forget being” (GA 53: 94/76). Recall that forgetting or concealing being is a consequence of the truth of being, which is indirectly expressed as nihilism. Because human beings are defined by their relationship to being as such, which is forgotten, then humans are necessarily entangled in an abyss. This is abyssal connection between human beings and being as such is manifest in another key motif of tragedy, death. Like being, death is characterized by a curious entanglement of presence and absence: we will actually die (presence), but who knows when (absence).

In the same choral ode it is recited: “the singular onslaught [*einzigem Andrang*] of death he can / by no flight [*Flucht*] ever prevent” (GA 53: 150/120). For Heidegger this is taken to mean that what is most homely to human beings is in fact their death, that which cannot be taken away from them and which is revealed as the foundation of existence. Human beings care about being because they are finite. This forms the tragedy of human existence; human beings unhomely relative to beings because they are homely to death and being as such. Antigone accepts this belonging to death by committing suicide, which she commits in the homeliest of places for Greek woman, for those tasked with mourning dead family members, i.e., the tomb. Heidegger writes:

It is this One [*Eine*] (death) to which Antigone already belongs, and which she knows to belong to being. For this reason, because she is thus becoming homely [*heimischwerdend*] within being, she is the most unhomely one [*Unheimische*] amid beings. Such being and potential for being homely [*Heimischseinkönnen*] is here said in poetizing. The human potential for being, in its relation to being, is poetic. The unhomely being the homely [*unheimische Heimischsein*] of human beings upon the earth is ‘poetic’ (GA 53: 150/120).

In other words, what is most homely to human beings is precisely what un-homes them, death. Thus, tragedy articulates the fundamental relationship between human beings, death, beings as a whole, and being.

Second, in his late 30s lectures on Nietzsche, Heidegger presents tragedy in terms of Nietzsche concept of eternal return (GA 6.1: 246; Vol 2: 28). Heidegger argues that eternal recurrence is another metaphysical determination of beings a whole: “The doctrine contains an assertion concerning beings as a whole” (GA 6.1: 223; Vol. 2: 5). It is introduced by Nietzsche

as thought experiment which aims to determining the worth of one's life, i.e., posing the question of whether or not one would live their life eternally (KSA 3: 570/§341). Heidegger takes this idea further by arguing that it actually describes beings as whole; all beings recur infinitely. In any case, this idea is fundamentally tragic because one's fate, including instances of triumph and suffering, is always already determined and cannot be changed. With this state of affairs in place, Nietzsche tasks us with embracing tragedy. He writes in his posthumous notes: "It is the heroic spirits [*die herioschen Geister*] who say Yes to themselves in tragic cruelty [*in der tragischen Grausamkeit*]: they are hard enough to experience suffering as a pleasure" (KSA 12: 10[168]/§852). Regardless of one's specific attitude towards tragedy, it is nonetheless the case that, for Heidegger, Nietzsche intimates that reality, as a metaphysical construct, needs to be understood tragically: "...the tragic is proper to the metaphysical essence of beings" (GA 6.1: 248; Vol. 2: 29). This account of tragedy seems far removed from its other determination, i.e., uncanniness. But they are connected insofar as the tragic hero must accept their suffering as necessary, e.g., Antigone's suicide or Oedipus' blindness. Furthermore, they both intimate the fundamental relationship between human existence and death, even if that death is thought to recur infinitely.

To the tragic determination of human existence and beings as a whole, Heidegger has a third determination, which renders being itself tragic. In both his account of Nietzsche's eternal return and *Antigone*, Heidegger emphasizes that tragedy concerns submergence (*Untergang*). In his Hölderlin lecture, Heidegger claims that nothing really happens in Greek tragedy because the tragic downfall already occurred at the beginning: "It (Greek tragedy) commences with the

submergence [*Untergang*] (GA 53: 128/103).¹²⁷ In this case, Antigone's downfall is actually a submergence, her return to what was self-concealed at the very beginning, i.e. her becoming homely in death: "Her dying is her becoming homely, but a becoming homely within and from out of such being unhomely" (GA 53: 104). In his Nietzsche lecture, Heidegger also claims that tragedy begins with submergence: "The 'only thing' that happens in tragedy is the submergence [*Untergang*]" (GA 6.1: 251: Vol. 2: 31).

This same identification of tragedy with submergence is clear in his poetic writings as well. In *Besinnung*, Heidegger writes that "the tragic [*des Tragischen*]" belongs to being precisely because the submergence is not the end; rather, it is the "circle [*das Rund*] of the beginning [*Anfang*]" (GA 66: 223). As circular, the beginning is the end, and the end is the beginning. This claim is made under the section heading "The history of being," signifying that this history is a tragedy wherein submergence names another beginning. To go back to our earlier example of Oedipus. The truth of his acts of patricide and incest were submerged relative to the emergent truth of his being the King of Thebes. Indeed, in order for him to lay claim to being King these deeds had to be submerged. Unconcealing that truth resulted in him blinding himself and going into exile.

For Heidegger, identifying tragedy with the history of being does not mean that we are condemned to the same horrible fate as Oedipus or Antigone. Human beings have the possibility of creating a novel future through unconcealing the truth of being as submergence. But this means that humans have to also be open for that possibility: "The tragic [*Tragische*] is a preeminent assignment of the human being to the essential occurrence of being, in accord with

¹²⁷ William McNeill and Julia Davis translate "*Untergang*" as "downgoing," I substitute the translation with "submergence."

current openness of the human being for what is essential” (GA 95: 418/326). In responding to what is essential - the submergence of the truth of being - humans can inaugurate another path for history, another beginning. But, for Heidegger, this is not the task of any and all human beings. Whether the tragedy of being is attended to or not, belongs to the specific purview of the German people.

Although each is slightly different, Heidegger’s poetic texts are invested in accounting for the interplay between the first and other beginnings of history. As texts, they uniquely oriented towards the future. For example, the opening text, *Contributions to Philosophy*, invokes “future ones,” or those who will attend to the truth of being (GA 65: 395/113). These future ones are prepared for through the self-sacrifice of those who submerge (GA 65: 397/315). Outside, the poetic texts, these future ones become explicitly German. By becoming “futural [*Zukünftige*],” the Germans are those who “allow the thrust [*Stoß*] of being to come upon them, who pre-think into this that is coming, who ever again ground for the earth a space of struggle over the decision regarding the gods, and who thereby lay the ground for a history” (GA 95: 198/154). The Germans are futural in dual senses: they are those who come in the future and those who are also directed towards the future. In other words, they will come in the future because they are themselves futural. In being futural, they are then tasked with decided upon being, the gods, and even with constituting another history, i.e., another beginning.

Heidegger presents his starkest account of German futurity in his 1943 Heraclitus lecture course. Here, the very “fate of the West” as a whole rests on whether or not the Germans will stand in “harmony with the truth of being” and if they are able, through “readiness for death,” to “save the inceptual” from the “spiritual poverty of the modern world” (GA 55: 180-181/135). The task of the Germans is to save the West from the modernity, which is another way of saying

nihilism. The Germans are tasked with working through the submergence of the West in order to bring about a new future, i.e. the other beginning. This passage raises significant questions. What does Heidegger mean by the West? Why are the Germans specifically tasked with saving the West? Does this narrative really detract from Spengler's *Decline of The West*, which was subject to so much criticism in the 1920s?

Heidegger's Philosophy of History, or The Submergence of The West

Heidegger claims that the history of being is not a theory or philosophy of history (GA 65: 32/28). Yet in constructing a tragic narrative of history that contains a fate or destiny, i.e. an end or telos, then it is difficult not to see the history of being as something like a philosophy of history. This narrative presents being as a force of historical change. Hence, Heidegger explains a myriad of historical phenomena, such as the Second World War or the Russian Revolution, in terms of the metaphysical abandonment of being, its submergence. The history of being is therefore necessarily entangled in world-historical events. Despite positing a destiny, however, Heidegger still makes room for possibility. Specifically, this destiny results in either the event that inaugurates another beginning or the first beginning continues indefinitely, including the continuation of its nihilistic symptoms, e.g. environmental devastation according to technological rationality. Heidegger's historical decisionism consists in deciding how this destiny will take shape.

To conclude this chapter, I will argue that the tragic teleology underlying the history of being discloses a philosophy of history, which represents a stark contrast from Heidegger's early account of historicity and historicism. Heidegger internally undermined the crisis of historicism by grounding historical meaning and value in Dasein's historicity. In other words, he radicalized historicism by subjecting it to a form of decisionism. This account is incompatible with a

philosophy of history, which presents history as an entity that exceeds the existence of Dasein. Yet in order to provide the experience of the forgetting that initiated the question of being, as well as critique his earlier transcendentalism, Heidegger's history of being produces a narrative that does indeed exceed human existence.

This implied philosophy of history has important consequences for Heidegger's politics. The history of being universalizes history, presenting the West as the beginning, end, and re-beginning of world history. In other words, Heidegger's history of being presents the world-historical value of the West, and especially of Germany. It undermines the provincialism that characterized historicism, in favor of a western-centric narrative that served the ideological goals of the Nazi state. To make this argument, I will return to Heidegger's confrontation with Spengler, showing that the former undermines the latter through a counter reading of the "*Untergang*" of the West. The West is not in "decline," rather its "submergence" is presented as the condition for another beginning.

Although being-historical thinking criticizes the traditional history of the "western" philosophical canon, it does so at the cost of reifying the existence of both that canon and the very existence of the West as such. Hence, Heidegger confirms an intellectual continuity between the ancient Greeks and contemporary philosophy. As Robert Bernasconi explains:

However different in approach Heidegger's account of the history of Being might be from standard presentations of the history of philosophy, he not only vigorously upheld the thesis of the Greek origins of philosophy, he also presented the history of being

against the backdrop of narrative account of the history of philosophy that at least on the surface resembles the standard account.¹²⁸

Heidegger reinvents the traditional history of philosophy in the very act of overcoming it.

Consequently, while the history of being appears to take up the entire history of philosophy, it actually narrows “philosophy” considerably.

But Heidegger does not just re-center Western philosophy. He renders the “the West” identical with philosophy itself. He writes in his 1943 lecture course on Heraclitus:

There is no philosophy other than western philosophy. ‘Philosophy,’ in its essence, is so primordially western that it bears the ground of the history of the west. From out of this ground alone, technology has arisen. There is only a western technology. It is the consequence of ‘philosophy’ and nothing else (GA 55: 3/3).

In this passage, Heidegger tacitly identifies Greece with the West. Taking it for granted that philosophy is a Greek concept, Heidegger draws the conclusion that philosophy is and can only be a western phenomenon. Heidegger then makes the stronger claim that philosophy is the “ground” of the history of the West. Consistent with the history of being, philosophy is the causal engine operating behind Western history. The most important appearance of philosophy is technology, or technological rationality. Consequently, the global spread of technology (globalization) is really a form of Westernization. In this we can interpret a form of historical universalism present in Heidegger’s thought. In his previous lecture course, he not only affirms that there is a “destiny of the West,” but that this destiny “conceals a world-destiny” (GA 54: 114/77). In short, Western history is world history. As such, Heidegger’s history of being

¹²⁸ Robert Bernasconi, “Heidegger and The Invention of The Western Philosophical Tradition,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (1995), 240.

articulates a Western Universalism, i.e. the West as universal cause and model of historical development.

Of course, it can be objected that the history of *beyng* serves to overcome this universalism. After all, Heidegger is invested in overcoming the history of metaphysics, which includes the planetary expansion of technology. Nonetheless, this objection is insufficient. As Sean Meighoo argues, Heidegger's history of *beyng* is a form of "negative teleology" that still presupposes the existence of the West as such. Unlike positive historical teleology which posit an end of history that is the perfection of its origin (e.g. Hegel), negative teleology presents the end as a decline from that origin (e.g. Spengler). Positive or negative, these teleologies are "complicit" in Western-centrism (or what Meighoo calls "Western ethnocentrism") by presenting the West as an existing entity.¹²⁹ Specifically, Heidegger's negative teleology affirms the general historical picture presented by Hegel (i.e. that metaphysics begins with the pre-Socratic identification of the thought and being and ends with the absolute reification of identity), while also rendering this history into a submergence of the truth of *beyng* intimated by the ancient Greeks.

Though negative, the history of *beyng* uncritically affirms the existence of the West. Meighoo writes, "In Heidegger's argument on the end of philosophy, the history of the West thus continues to bear a special mission for all humanity, a mission that is made only more poignant by its negative charge. The universal import of the history of the West is affirmed for Heidegger by the global dominance of scientific technology."¹³⁰ Although useful, Meighoo's account is limited by his focus on Heidegger's later work in the 1960s. He does not attend to the unique

¹²⁹ Sean Meighoo, *The End of the West and Other Cautionary Tales* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), xiii.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

meaning of the “the West” and task of inaugurating another beginning in Heidegger’s middle period. Meighoo also translates the West into a geographic place, i.e. Europe. For Heidegger, however, the West is distinct from Europe. Instead, it takes on the temporalized sense of naming the submergent happening of *beyng* in which the other beginning takes shape. While “Europe” names the end of the first beginning, “the West” names the other beginning. In *The Event*, Heidegger writes: “What is European and planetary is the ending and completion. The West is the beginning” (GA 71: 95/80). With this in mind, Heidegger explicitly sets out to undermine Spengler’s negative teleology of the West, where the “West” designates decline as an end.

Recall that Heidegger’s account of authentic historicity is partially produced through a confrontation with Spengler’s historicist reading of the history of the West. For Spengler, history is marked by a series of discrete cultures that, according to a logic of inevitable decay, decline into civilizations and eventually disappear altogether. As he expresses in *The Decline of The West*: “Each culture [*Kultur*] has its own possibilities of expression, which appear, ripen [*reifen*], wilt [*verwelken*], and never recur [*wiederkehren*].”¹³¹ This is consistent with historicism insofar as each culture has its own unique values that are incomparable with other cultures across time. Reflecting on this tragic fate, Spengler urges those in the West to affirm decline; a position he partially derives from Nietzsche. Rather than eternal valuations of justice and truth, “world history is the world court [*Weltgericht*]” rules in favor of the “stronger [*stärkeren*],” “fuller [*volleren*]” and “self-certain life [*selbst gewissern Leben*],” a ruling that Spengler identifies with the “will to power [*Willens zur Macht*].”¹³² With this picture of historical “fate [*Shicksal*]” in mind, which includes the historical transition into a new form of authoritarianism, i.e.,

¹³¹ Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Vol. 1), 29.

¹³² Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Vol. 2), 635.

“Caesarism [*Cäsarismus*],” Spengler urges us to affirm decline or be destroyed by it. “We do not have the freedom to achieve [*zu erreichen*] this or that, but to do what is necessary [*Notwendigkeit*] or nothing at all. And a task, which the necessity of history has set, will be resolved [*gelöst*], with or without him (the historical individual). The fates lead the willing and drag the unwilling [*Ducunt fata volentem, nolentem trahunt*].”¹³³

Like Heidegger, Spengler’s historical narrative is fundamentally tragic; it sees history as necessity and fate, and asks us to take part in it willingly, i.e., to reconcile freedom with necessity. If something awful happens, then at least we can take responsibility for it, rather than be destroyed by it. Spengler hits the tragic note most forcefully in his 1931 text, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life*: “Every high culture is a tragedy. The history of mankind as a whole is tragic.”¹³⁴ During Heidegger’s middle period, i.e. his turn to the history of being, Spengler remains a crucial figure. Heidegger continues to be critical of Spengler’s historicism, but now he also affirms the *Untergang* (submergence) and its tragic character. But by *Untergang*, Heidegger names this phenomenon as the preservation of the self-concealment and submergence of being, through which another beginning can take shape. Rather than a specifically historical tragedy, Heidegger’s tragic narrative goes to the very heart of being, from which he sees something novel arriving.

What primarily differentiates Heidegger from Spengler is their views on history and technology. Through Nietzsche, Heidegger affirms the idea that Spengler and Ernst Jünger are the culminating figures of Western thought, i.e., those who further developed Nietzsche’s philosophy (GA 66: 27; GA 71: 116/99). Spengler’s account of the decline of the West from

¹³³ Ibid., 635.

¹³⁴ Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life*, Trans. Chales Francis Atkinson and Michael Putman (London: Arktos Media Ltd., 2015), 69.

culture to civilization articulates the dominance of machination and technology, which characterize the life of modern human beings. Humans relate to beings and themselves in terms of objects used as means to specific ends. Spengler writes that “Civilization has itself become a machine that does, or tries to do, everything in mechanical fashion.”¹³⁵ The contemporary world is characterized by totalization of mechanical and machine thinking and organizing. In Heideggerian terms, *that* beings are is irrelevant compared to determining *what* beings are and for what ends they can be deployed. Through Spengler (and Jünger), “‘beings in the whole’ are thought machinationally [*machenschaftlich*] and the human as executor [*Vollstrecker*] of machination is determined from out of the essential entanglement. Thereby the human, as articulated mass and individual of such structure, is always at the same time the powerful and apathetic, and especially the leader and to those melted down [*das Engeschmolzene*]” (GA 66: 28/21). Humans are reduced to objects among objects, rendering them incapable of preventing the transition into civilization. Hence, the decline of the West is inevitable. However, Heidegger finds this position unacceptable, and in need of overcoming, which called for a rethinking of the “West.”

Unlike Spengler, Heidegger does not affirm decline in principle. Rather he affirms it to the extent that it prepares the condition for another beginning of history. “The ending in its demise [*Verendung*] should not be resisted. Yet we must also not abandon to it anything that is preparation for the beginning. We must not impede the demise. We must not claim that the withdrawal into ‘fatalism [*Fatalismus*]’ is an ‘attitude [*Haltung*].’ We cannot hope for anything from progression [*Fortgang*] or regression [*Rückgang*]. The beginning is everything” (GA 71: 97/82). History of being is oriented towards beginning, rather than the progress or regress into

¹³⁵ Ibid., 72.

an end. Indeed, the end produces the conditions for another beginning. For this reason, Heidegger is not opposed to the nihilistic results of the first beginning. This tragic conclusion of the history of *beyng* has to be brought about.

Heidegger emphasizes his difference from Spengler's fatalism in terms of a distinct reinterpretation of both "*Untergang*" and "*Abendland*." "*Abend*" translates into "evening." Therefore, the West is the evening land, or the land where the sun sets. But, insofar as the setting of the sun and onset of night prepares the way for another morning, then the West intimates another historical beginning. This is the *beyng*-historical meaning of the West. "The 'West,' experienced in terms of the history of *beyng*, is the land of the evening, and the evening prepares the night out of which the day of the more inceptual beginning already eventuates (the other beginning)" (GA 71: 95/80). This rethinking of the West accords with Heidegger's unique use of "*Untergang*." Instead of decline or decay, it signifies sinking down or submergence, in the sense that the sun submerges beneath the horizon. Hence, Heidegger identifies the West with the "land of the submergence, i.e. the submergence of the inceptuality of the beginning" (GA 71: 272/235). It is the land in which the truth of *beyng* is concealed and can possibly be unconcealed. Spengler is therefore right to speak of the "*Untergang*" of the West, but wrong to render it into an inevitable decline.

In rendering the West as the beginning and end of the history of metaphysics, Heidegger displaces its spatial sense, rendering it something intimately temporal. Specifically, with submergence, it designates what is to come, i.e. the future. Heidegger writes, "The West is the future of history, provided the essence of history is grounded in the event of the truth of *beyng*" (GA 71: 96/81). It is not to be identified with a geographic space. In order to make this

distinction, Heidegger makes a curious comparison between the idea of the West and that of Europe.

The West, as a concept of the history of being, has nothing to do with ‘Europe [Europa],’ as a concept of modernity [dem neuzeitlichen]. What is European is the preliminary form of the planetary [Planetarischen]. The new order [Neuordnung] that is Europe constitutes an anticipation of planetary dominance [Herrschaft], which of course can no longer be an imperialism [Imperialismus], since emperors are impossible in the essential domain of machination [Machenschaft]. What is European and planetary is the ending and completion. The West is the beginning [Anfang] (GA 71: 95/80).

Within this complicated construction we can glean some insight into what Heidegger means by “Europe.” “Europe” obviously refers to the continent of Europe and its inhabitants. But insofar the people of this continent (Germany, France, England, etc.) have sought to expand their power through colonialism and imperialism, then the idea of “Europe,” its modern values and products, have become planetary in scale. Hence, Heidegger will add that “Europe” dominates “Asia,” “the Western hemisphere,” and even the “the East of Russian Bolshevism” (GA 71: 95/80). In other words, the according to the Heideggerian construction of “Europe,” we could replace the notion of “westernization” with “Europeanization.” Thus, at the end of modern history, Europe is identified with the planet as a whole. As such, Heidegger Western universalism can be understood as his attempt at thinking an alternative to “European universalism.”¹³⁶ That the

¹³⁶ Like Heidegger, Immanuel Wallerstein argues that “European Universalism” is the universalized spread of the particular values and preferences of Europe. However, Wallerstein sets out to construct a form of “universal universalism” which would generally apply to all people without appealing to European prejudice. This is incompatible with Heidegger’s Western universalism, which ignores the very existence of other people in favor of a German-centric future. See: Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York: New York Press, 2006), xi-xiii.

future belongs to the West, is not to say that it reflects European goals and values, but rather that it relates to something radical new, i.e., another beginning as such. Hence, it undermines any unified appeal to European superiority as a spatial and geographic region.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Heidegger does historically privilege one group of people. The future of the West and by extension the world as a whole, is German. They bear the fate of the history of the West. For Heidegger, this is for two reasons. First it is due to the Germans being an essentially indeterminate people, i.e. their essence is *to determine* their essence, or more specifically to “struggle [*Kampf*]” over their essence (GA 95: 31/24). Hence, they are rendered fundamentally futural. They are also for this reason fundamentally historical, since the meaning of history is derived from the anticipation of the future. Second, they carried out the consummation of the first beginning, i.e. modernity. Narrowly defining modernity in terms of the reduction of the emergence of beings as a whole to consciousness, which is dialectically sublimated into absolute knowing, Heidegger identifies modernity with the results of German Idealism, and Hegel specifically (GA 95: 29/23). Because Germans brought about the culmination of the first beginning, then they are also tasked with realizing another beginning. For Heidegger, the event of the other beginning requires grappling with German philosophy. In particular, a confrontation with Hegel and Nietzsche is needed, the consummate thinkers of modernity and the history of the first beginning.

By designating the Germans as those who will appropriate the first beginning, Heidegger’s history of being still functions as a mode of historical decisionism. Submergence is accompanied by the “inceptual decisions [*anfänglichen Entscheidungen*],” which render possible the appropriation of the truth of being (GA 66: 167/139). The German’s are the specific humans who make these decisions. Yet would not historical decisionism correspond to historicism?

Heidegger's earlier decisionism consists in accepting that humans are relatively free to decide the meaning of the past. Unlike the philosophy of history, historicism casts aside natural or supernatural determinations of history that would provide "objective" judgements of the past (e.g. Hegel can explain the purpose behind all historical events in terms of the realization of the absolute). Accordingly, Heidegger accepts and radicalizes the implications of historicism. But if the history of being is decisionistic, then how can it be a form of philosophy of history?

Heidegger reconciles the history of being with decisionism by arguing that the decision is not made by human beings, at least not entirely. As he discusses in the *Contributions to Philosophy*, the transition to the other beginning is already "decided [*entschieden*]" (GA 65: 177/139). But what is not decided is the specific way this decision is carried out. Humans do not decide to appropriate the truth of being, rather there is mutual entanglement. Humans decide on the basis of their receptivity to the truth of being. The site of the decision is *Da-sein*: "The decision must create that time-space [*Zeit-Raum*], the site for the essential moments, in which the highest seriousness of meditation [*Besinnung*], in unity with the greatest joyfulness of bestowal, grows into a will to ground [*Willen des Gründens*] and build but from which also no confusion is far removed. Only *Da-sein*... can bring about a radical change [*Wandlung*] in beings" (GA 65: 78). Through the happening of being, history itself decides the possibility of human beings becoming *Da-sein*, a possibility that humans can certainly fail to achieve. Regardless, this rethinking of decision away from human existence to the truth of being requires a rethinking of what is meant by historicism.

While early Heidegger undermines the nihilistic result of historicism by establishing *Dasein*'s anticipatory resoluteness as the source of historical meaning, Heidegger in his middle period rejects historicism entirely as something antithetical to the history of being. At this point

in time, Heidegger more closely aligns historicism (*Historismus*) with historiography (*Historie*) as opposed to history (*Geschichte*) as the happening of being. This change is accompanied by a slightly altered definition of historicism: it is “the view that the past is always seen out of a present situation, such that it switches with this situation – ‘*Relativismus*’” (GA 66: 181). The interpretation of the past is relative to the present. Accordingly, a past event can never be grasped as such. This shifts the meaning from its 19th century determination that the past is so different from the present that they are incomparable. Because the past is unreachable except from the perspective of the present, then the past is always going to be compared and interpreted according to the relative values of the present. This new sense of historicism justifies present valuations by rendering them historically conditioned.

Historiography still consists of treating the past as a scientific object, but now it explicitly presupposes the historicist worldview. Hence, Heidegger claims that historicism is the “domination [*Herrschaft*] of historiography through which it (historiography) masters the essential completion [*Wesensvollendung*] of the modern humans as subjects and the rational animal unfolds into historical animal [*animal historicum*]” (GA 66: 181). Modern humans cannot view themselves as anything other than historiographical entities, i.e. beings that have developed according to contingent circumstances which can only be understood relatively. In other words, despite being historically determined, modern humans cannot view themselves except according to present standards. Being unable to actually account for their origins, humans experience themselves abyssally, without a basis for existing. Historicism and historiography therefore are not just instances of modern nihilism, rather they are the very shape in which nihilism unfolds (GA 95: 103/80).

The abyssal kernel of historicism (historiography) is further marked by its identification with a mode of technology (*Technik*) (GA 66: 183). As mentioned, metaphysics results in rendering beings as a whole into objects of use, i.e. things to be produced and manipulated as means to specific ends. Hence, technology – understood as a mode knowing that manipulates natural material according to human ends – is the completion of metaphysics (GA 66: 173). Historiography is technological insofar as both concern “production [*Herstellen*].” The former produces and objectifies the past, while the latter produces the future. Thought together, they signify the “arrangement of the present as object and condition” (GA 66: 183). Historiography becomes another means of technologically arranging the world into an object of use. More specifically, it is about using the past for the purpose of the present and future. In other words, it serves to rationalize the contemporary actions by finding an historical precedent. For example, the relative success of the New Deal in 1930s is still used today to justify more public spending in response to recessions. Historiography qua technology serves to socially engineer the present and future from specific interpretative re-productions of the past.

With this account, Heidegger anticipates what would come to be called post-history and presentism. In his book *Regimes of Historicity*, Francois Hartog argues that the contemporary experience of history is “presentism:” the past and future are only interpretable from the perspective of the present. The past is anachronistically interpreted according to present valuations, while the future is anticipated according to present anxieties (e.g. computer modelling of future climate change).¹³⁷ The present is emphasized as the judge of both the past and future. Presentism contributes to the formation of post-history. Locked in the present,

¹³⁷ Francois Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia university Press, 2015), 201-202.

through narrow interpretations of the past and programmatic planning of the future, historical events are foreclosed.¹³⁸ In other words, after history, nothing happens. Perhaps famous and influential formulation of post-historical thinking occurred in Francis Fukuyama's essay "The End of History?." The foreign policy advisor to multiple US presidencies, advocates for Hegel and Kòjeve's thesis that the end of history had been realized in Western liberalism, if history is reduced to the conflicts and contradictions between political ideologies. In other words, democratic liberalism is the only functional and desirable form of governance, and what's left of historical development consists in nations choosing this model. Curiously, despite appearing to laud this historical conclusion, Fukuyama is melancholic: "The end of history will be a very sad time... In the post-historical period, there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history."¹³⁹ The end of history is a time without strife, but for that same reason it is also one of boredom.

Of course, post-history has yet to take shape, but the correspondence of historiography and technology aims at this ultimate end. For Heidegger, this would realize the eternalism that metaphysical thought strives for. Avoiding the epistemic uncertainty of the perceptible world, metaphysicians seek the eternal certainty of what was always already present (e.g. God). Technology attempts to reconcile these two realms – physical and metaphysical - according to a logic of programmatic prediction and arrangement.

As technology, historiography forecloses not simply historical events, but decision-making itself. Decisionism claims that events cannot be responded to according to pre-

¹³⁸ Wilém Flusser, *Post-History*, Trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novaes (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013); Lutz Niethammer, *Posthistorie: Has History Come to an End?*, Trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1992)

¹³⁹ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest*, No. 16 (1989), 18.

programmed rules or precedent. As fundamentally unforeseen, events call for decision without recourse to the past. Historical decisionism serves to overcome the history of the first beginning that results in the nihilism of presentism and post-history. If meaning is historical, then nihilism is the very absence of history. The decision belonging to the history of being consists in grasping the truth of being that will constitute a new historical event. Heidegger specifically calls for the “liberation [*Befreiung*]” of “history [*Geschichte*]” from “historiography,” through deciding between beings and being, i.e. the truth of being (GA 66: 184). Since this decision depends on the receptivity of humans to happening being, then it cannot be predicted or calculable in advance.

Thinking these issues together, the tragedy of the history of being must be affirmed and carried out, such that another beginning can take shape. This is the fate that belongs to the West. But who affirms this tragedy and decides in favor of another beginning? This is the specific world-historical task of the German people. This means that they are tasked with overcoming the post-historical conditions that historicism fosters. This conclusion cannot be read independent of Heidegger’s political commitments in the 30s and 40s.

It is evident by the late 30s that Heidegger was already disillusioned with National Socialism, a movement that he “mistook” as a way towards another beginning. He writes in his *Black Notebooks*:

Thinking purely “metaphysically” (i.e., in heeding the history of being), during the years 1930-1934 I saw in National Socialism the possibility of a transition to another beginning and interpreted it that way. Thereby I mistook and undervalued this “movement” in its genuine powers and inner necessities as also in the extent and kind of its greatness. What

starts there, and specifically in a more profound – i.e., more comprehensive and drastic – way than in Fascism, is the consummation of modernity (GA 95: 407-408/318).

In Heidegger's early formulation of the history of being, National Socialism was seen as the means for realizing another beginning. By the late 30s, the regime is now identified with the consummation of modernity, i.e. the forgetting of the truth of being through the technological determination of beings as a whole. With National Socialism, being not only remained submerged, but the fate of the West was also concealed. However, this claim should not be understood as a critique on the part of Heidegger. Indeed, he still refers to the "inner necessities" and apparent "greatness" of National Socialism. This accords with Heidegger's tragic construction of the history of being. National Socialism is just another fate that humans are left to decide upon. And as implied by Heidegger's claim that the end (of the first beginning) should not be "resisted," then he would have to affirm National Socialism as a necessary conclusion to the first beginning (GA 71: 97/82). The history of being forecloses political critique. At best, it casts an eye towards a future to come and decides in favor of futurity itself. For Heidegger, the "great doom [*große Verhängnis*]" for humanity is not war or genocide, it is that "submergence" is "denied [*versagt*]" for humans, foreclosing the very possibility of another beginning. (GA 96: 251/199).

Regardless of the fate of National Socialism, Heidegger maintains that it is the German people who are subject to this tragedy and are therefore left to decide. Heidegger concludes his 1943 lecture course on Heraclitus with this appeal to the historical task of the German people.

In whatever way the fate of the Occident may be conjoined, the greatest and truest trial of the Germans is yet come; namely, that trial in which they are tested by the ignorant against their will regarding whether the Germans are in harmony with the truth of being,

and whether they are strong enough in their readiness for death to save the inceptual in its inconspicuous adornment from the spiritual poverty of the modern world (GA 55: 180-181/135).

The Germans must save the West from the spiritual poverty that characterizes modernity. It is the Germans who must grasp the submergence of being in order to bring about another beginning. The tragic fate of the West is necessarily tied to the German people, and it appears to be them alone.

We are left with some questions. If his history of being leaves Heidegger to affirm the historical necessity of political movements, e.g. National Socialism or Soviet communism, does he actually have an identifiable political? What would be a Heideggerian notion of the political? These are the questions that will be explored in the next two chapters. In the third chapter, I will argue that Heidegger constructs a unique notion of the political during his years of active involvement in the Nazi party. Through his confrontation with the political writings of Hegel and Carl Schmitt, Heidegger comes to define the political as the self-assertion (*Selbstbehauptung*) and subsequent care (*Sorge*) of an historical community, or people (*Volk*). In the fourth chapter, I will argue that Heidegger comes to reject the very notion of the political as something tied up with modernity and therefore the forgetting of the truth of being. Heidegger derives this position from his confrontation with Nietzsche and Ernst Jünger.

Part Two

The Political and Power

I explain the transition of Heidegger's political thought from his early affirmation of National Socialism as a possible source for another beginning for philosophy to his turn away from the party, which he concludes is another symptom of modern nihilism. Not only does Heidegger express discontent with the politics of his day, he ultimately concludes that all forms of politics need to be rejected because they are essentially tethered to the will to power, i.e., the consummate shape of the tragic history of being. Thus, Heidegger transitions from political decisionism to quietism. In chapter three, I argue that Heidegger constructs a theory of the political consistent with the spirit of National Socialism through a confrontation with Hegel and Schmitt. Against Nazi orthodoxy, Heidegger affirms Hegel's theory of the state and opposes Schmitt's definition of the political as the determination of friends and enemies. Heidegger defines the political as the self-assertion and care of the people in and through the state. In chapter four, I argue that Heidegger's rejection of the political in the late 1930s derives from his confrontation with Nietzsche and Jünger. For Heidegger, Nietzsche consummates the history of metaphysics by identifying the will to power as the being of beings; Jünger demonstrates how the will to power is actualized, i.e., the *Gestalt* of the worker, the technological mobilization of the planet, and the totalitarian work-state. Jünger and Nietzsche tacitly reveal that the nihilistic forgetting of being occurs through the power and will, leading Heidegger to conclude that another beginning requires a releasement of both. To the extent that it is entangled with power, this requires relinquishing the very idea the political.

Chapter Three

Fire from Water: Heidegger's Confrontation with Hegel and Schmitt

In his poetic text, *On Inception*, Heidegger makes two claims regarding Hegel: first, the consummation of metaphysics in Hegel's system is the condition for its overcoming; second, however, in order to understand the history of being, one should not appeal to Hegel's philosophy of history. "To call to Hegel for help in order to make 'clear' being-historical thinking, would mean obtaining fire from out of water" (GA 70: 193). This is not the first time that Heidegger compares his thought to Hegel by means of the elemental opposition of fire and water. As early as 1924, Heidegger demarcates Husserlian and hermeneutical phenomenology from Hegel's dialectics by means of this simile: "When today the attempt is made to connect the authentic fundamental tendency of phenomenology with dialectic, this as if one wanted to mix fire and water" (GA 63: 42/33). Hegelian dialectic sublimates immediate phenomena in the act of knowing, refusing to engage with the appearing as such, i.e., as it appears within a lived context. In part this is due to their different objects. Dialectics seek to demonstrate absolute knowing, as that which is absolved of immediate experience. Whereas, phenomenology is invested in outlining the conditions for a proper interpretation of phenomenal givenness itself. With this distinction, Heidegger wants to posit a firm oppositional demarcation between phenomenology and dialectics, one that is reiterated throughout his corpus. However, this picture of absolute opposition is not entirely accurate. In the early 1930s, during the first years of the Nazi regime, Heidegger explicitly appeals to Hegel's account of political life. In other words, Heidegger sets out to obtain fire from water.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate two broad positions. First, Heidegger's tragic construction of the history of being is an inversion of Hegel's progressive philosophy of history.

Heidegger accepts Hegel's account of history as the progressive realization of absolute truth but argues that this absolute is predicated on the forgetting of the truth of being. Hegelian history cannot reach its end because it presupposes an ontological remainder that it cannot sublimate. To fully understand Heidegger's history of being, a sustained critique of Hegel's philosophical system is required. Second, through reading Hegel's *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*), Heidegger constructs an account of the political, which he views as consistent with the spirit of National Socialism: the political is the "self-assertion" (*Selbstbehauptung*) and "care" (*Sorge*) of an historical community, or people (*Volk*) (GA 86). Heidegger comes to this position not only through a confrontation with Hegel, but also Carl Schmitt's concept of the political, the determination of friends and enemies by a sovereign power.¹⁴⁰ While Schmitt had declared that Hegel's theory of the state was "dead" after the rise of the Nazi party movement, Heidegger counters that this theory had come "alive" in the "National Socialist State" (GA 86: 85/119).¹⁴¹ Thought together, these two arguments present a complex image of the place of Hegel's system in Heidegger's history of being, an image that intertwines the overcoming of metaphysics, the call for another beginning, and the meaning of the political under Nazism.

Hidden Hegelianism?

The posited opposition between Hegel and Heidegger is not absolute. Indeed, when closely read, this opposition is ambiguous. In *Being and Time*, for example, Heidegger states that Hegelian dialectics is the "opposite" of his project of fundamental ontology, while conceding

¹⁴⁰ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 27.

¹⁴¹ Carl Schmitt, *State, Movement, People: The Triadic Structure of The Political Unity*, trans. Simona Draghici (Corvallis: Plutarch Press, 2001), 35.

that they appear the same in terms of their “results” (SZ: 405/386). Both projects result in the appearance of an ontology grounded in history. But they are oppositional to the extent that Heidegger seeks the foundation of ontology through the destruction of its very history that Hegelian dialectics affirms. In any case, according to Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, the appeal to history by both philosophers points to a “hidden Hegelianism” in *Being and Time*.¹⁴²

This Hegelianism continues to be evident into Heidegger’s middle and late period.

Michel Haar speaks of the history of being as an “inversion of Hegelianism.”

But what propels history, what permits taking into account the mutations of the essence of truth, is the *increasing oblivion* of the commencement, of the inaugural essence of truth as *aletheia*. It is in this sense that one can again speak of an inversion of Hegelianism: the Hegelian becoming of truth becomes the progressive establishment of the reign of errancy, the development of nihilism. The withdrawal of Being hides to the point of leaving nothing; even that of the oblivion effaces itself.¹⁴³

The history of being accepts the Hegelian history of spirit but inverts it by arguing that the progressive concretization of the absolute is predicated on the forgetting, or “re-nunciation [*Ab-sage*]” of the truth of being (GA 68: 14/11). As such, Hegel’s system (along with Nietzsche’s thought of the will to power) consummates the history of metaphysics, and therefore is the highest point from which to inaugurate another beginning (GA 66: 27/20).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, “Heidegger and Hegel: Exploring the Hidden Hegelianism of *Being and Time*,” *Hermeneutical Heidegger*, Ed. Michael Bowler and Ingo Farin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 144.

¹⁴³ Michel Haar, “The History of Being and Its Hegelian Model,” *Endings: Questions of Memory in Hegel and Heidegger*, ed. Rebecca Comay and John McCumber (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 51.

¹⁴⁴ This is inverted relationship between Heidegger and Hegel’s respective accounts of history is a consistent theme in Heideggerian scholarship. See: Karin de Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time: Heidegger’s Encounter with Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000),

It is impossible to understand the project behind Heidegger's beyng-historical thinking without a confrontation with Hegel. As discussed in chapter two, this project first took shape in summer of 1932 in a lecture course on the origin of Western philosophy. Here, Heidegger seeks out this origin in order to bring about the "end of metaphysics" (GA 35: 1/1). One year later, in a lecture course entitled, "The Fundamental Question of Philosophy," Heidegger shifts the historical account of Western philosophy towards its culmination: Hegel's philosophical system. "In the confrontation with Hegel, the entire history of the Western spirit before him and after him up to the present is speaking to us. In such truly historical confrontation, we find our way back to the fundamental happening of our ownmost history" (GA 36/37: 13/10). For Heidegger, Hegel's philosophy stands at the "highest position of the entire history (of philosophy)" (GA 36/37: 12/10). Overcoming the history of metaphysics (the first beginning of philosophy) means overcoming Hegel's dialectical system.

Hegel's philosophy is the culmination of the metaphysical tradition for two reasons. First, Hegel's metaphysics claims absolute knowledge: it determines the identity of thought and being, i.e. what is thought, *is*. Second, Hegel justifies this claim to absolute knowledge by constructing a narrative that dialectically sublimates the entire history of Western philosophy, culminating in his own system. For these two reasons, Hegel forecloses the possibility of other metaphysical systems: "Thus, any future, still higher standpoint over against it, which would be superordinate to Hegel's system... is once and for all impossible" (GA 68: 4/4). If philosophy is rendered synonymous with metaphysics, then there cannot be a system beyond it. In order to explain why

309; Denis J. Schmidt, *The Ubiquity of the Finite: Hegel, Heidegger and the Entitlements of Philosophy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 96-124. See also my essay: Rylie (Ryan) Johnson, "Thinking the Abyss of History: Heidegger's Critique of Hegelian Metaphysics," *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual*, Vol. 6, 2016, 51-68.

Heidegger accepts Hegel's claim to the absolute, I will begin by explicating the first reason.

What is Hegel's system of absolute idealism? How can it absolutely grasp the being of beings?

Hegelian Dialectic: Method and Metaphysics

Hegel asserts in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, "the absolute alone is true, or the true alone is absolute" (GW 9: 54/50). From this one derives a few positive determinations of truth: it is total, infinite, and unconditioned. One also derives negative determinations as well, since truth cannot be relative, finite, or conditional. Truth is always the case regardless of when and where it is stated; it cannot be otherwise and is therefore certain. This is made clear by Hegel's assertion in *The Science of Logic* that absolute knowledge is the identity of certainty and truth (GW 21: 33/29). This identity has significant implications for understanding the lineage of Hegel's thought. Something certain is a truth known without being subject to doubt. By being known, certainty tacitly introduces a knower, i.e., a thinking subject. For Heidegger, this means that Hegel stands within the modern philosophical tradition, beginning with Descartes, which centers a subject that represents itself as a thinking "I" confronted by representable objects, discovered either in perception or by thought alone. Heidegger writes, "This representation of the 'I represent' is *certainty*, the knowledge that is *known* to itself as such" (GA 65: 335/266). In this way, certainty dovetails with modern idealism, i.e. what *is*, is an ideal representation. Hegel's absolute idealism is the most extreme formulation of idealism because it does not just claim that all beings are representations but is certain of it; it cannot be otherwise. This point is clearer when one accounts for its onto-theological character.

Heidegger refers to metaphysics as "onto-theology [*Onto-Theo-Logik*]" (GA 11: 66/59). Metaphysics is not just an ontology, which studies the being of beings; it is also a theology that articulates the cause or ground of the being of beings. This being is most often rendered as God,

but not exclusively. It could also be called substance or nature as such (e.g., Spinoza), it could even be just the “I” unto itself (e.g., Fichte). Regardless of what it is called, metaphysics tends to move from thinking the being of beings to thinking their cause, which is another higher being. While all metaphysical thought is onto-theological, the most prominent example is Hegel’s system of absolute idealism, as represented in the *Science of Logic*. As Heidegger explains: “We now understand the name ‘logic’ in the essential sense which includes also the title used by Hegel, and only thus explains it: as the name for a kind of thinking which everywhere provides and accounts for the ground of beings as such within the whole in terms of Being as the ground (λόγος). The fundamental character of metaphysics is onto-the-logical” (GA 11: 66-67/59). Hegel’s logic both provides the groundwork for beings as a whole, a ground consistent with the essence of God, i.e., as that which by definition exists and is the creator of all beings.

Hegel himself makes this point obvious in the *Science of Logic*, claiming that the content of his system can be rendered as the “*exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit*” (GW 21: 34/29). His system does not merely posit the existence of God and describe its various powers and activities, it exposes in thought the being of God prior to the act of creation, i.e., the production of beings as a whole. As such, Hegel’s system of absolute idealism amounts to establishing an identity between the thinking subject and God. It is in this manner that Hegel is the consummate thinker of metaphysics, he attains the knowledge consistent with highest possible being, which is also the cause of beings as a whole. But how is this possible? How does Hegel demonstrate such a bold position? The answer lies in Hegel’s identification of metaphysics with logic, and his account of dialectics as its proper method.

In *The Science of Logic*, Hegel sets out to recover metaphysics from both the commonsense and scientific denigration of the subject, the latter of which arose from the Kantian renunciation of speculative thought. Hegel bemoans: “With Science and common sense thus working hand in hand to cause the downfall of metaphysics, the singular spectacle comes into view of a cultivated people without metaphysics – like a temple richly ornamented in other respects but without a holy of holies” (GW 21: 6/8). Yet, Hegel’s response is not to simply return to earlier metaphysics systems, such as, scholasticism or Spinozism. Rather, Hegel renders post-Kantianism into “metaphysics proper” or “pure speculative philosophy” (GW 21: 7/9). This is most clearly stated in the first volume of his later *Encyclopedia*. “Logic thus coincides with metaphysics, i.e., the science of things captured in thoughts that have counted as expressing the essentialities of things” (GW 20: §24). Logic *qua* metaphysics concerns the pure determinations (“essentialities”) of possible objects of thought. This to say the concepts that condition any encounter with objects, both intelligible and empirical, e.g., being, nothing, existence, quantity, quality, etc. But this is not to say that Hegel’s logic is completely divorced from older forms of metaphysics. Quite the opposite; Hegel synthesizes post-Kantian logic with the insights of earlier metaphysics.

Robert. B. Pippin summarizes Hegel’s system as post-Kantian logic (i.e. conditions of possible sense) subjected to an “Aristotelian model for metaphysics.”¹⁴⁵ For Aristotle, metaphysics is a science that deals with the first principles of all beings, or what allows beings to be.¹⁴⁶ In Hegelian terms, this means dealing with the principles of thought through which beings

¹⁴⁵ Robert B. Pippin, “Hegel on Logic as Metaphysics,” *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. Dean Moyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 217.

¹⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1003a.

can be rendered thinkable. This point is explicitly made in *The Science of Logic*, where Hegel invokes the ancient conception of metaphysics, but with idealist implications:

This metaphysics thus held that thinking and the determination of thinking are not something alien to the subject matter, but are rather their essence, or that the things and the thinking of them agree in and for themselves (also our language expresses a kinship between them); that thinking in its immanent determinations, and the true nature of things, are one and the same content (GW 21: 29/25).

What is thinkable is real, and what is real is thinkable.¹⁴⁷ In this manner, logic delimits the horizon of possible objects of thought. As a whole, then, *The Science of Logic* serves to demonstrate that thought immanently contains all possibilities of being, which means that it acquires certain knowledge *absolved* from the contingencies of *a posteriori* sensation, i.e. absolute knowledge.¹⁴⁸ As Hegel describes: "...logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. *This realm is truth unveiled, truth as it is in and for itself*" (GW 21: 34/29). In Heideggerian terms, Hegel's absolute knowledge grasps the truth of beings as a whole, what those beings must possess in order to be at all.

The method by which absolute knowledge is disclosed is dialectical.¹⁴⁹ Hegel's dialectical thinking accounts for the identity of logic and metaphysics. Both Dialectic and

¹⁴⁷ I am deliberately alluding to Hegel's claim in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*: "What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational" (PR: Preface)

¹⁴⁸ Heidegger deconstructs the etymology of "das Absolute" to highlight its relationship "absolve," "to set free of," or "acquit." Absolute knowledge is knowledge absolved from conditions and contingences. As such, it is knowledge understood as liberation (GA 32: 21/15).

¹⁴⁹ Hegelian dialectic is explicitly distinguished from Platonic and Kantian dialectics. Hegel criticizes Platonic dialectical argumentation because it merely results in negative claims of what an ideal form is *not*. For Hegel, dialectics should provide positive knowledge claims (GW 21: 41/35). Hegel applies this criticism to Kant as well. Kant's "transcendental dialectic" only demonstrated that metaphysical speculation cannot result in certain knowledge, e.g., certainty regarding the existence of God, the soul, or universal purposiveness. However, Hegel does

metaphysics engage with pure reason, which is the subject matter of the science of logic. Given this science concerns the pure concepts of thought, then the dialectic is the method by which these concepts are transformed and deduced. But, insofar as thought forms the horizon for possible experience, then these transformations are encountered in experience as well. For this reason, the dialectical method is not delimited to one region of being and is the proper method for dealing with all domains of knowledge: logic, nature, psychology, politics, and history. Hence, Hegel claims that dialectic is the “principle of all natural and spiritual life” (GW 21: 40/35). Furthermore, as implied by the quote, dialectics is more than just a method: it is an account of how the world actually is. Hegelian dialectic is both the method and object of his thought. This identity allows for the possibility of absolute knowledge: knowledge itself is identical with the means of knowing it. If one can determine the proper method, then we are already on the way to absolute certitude. For this reason, grasping the dialectics is essential to understanding Hegel’s thought as a whole: “Properly construing and recognizing the dialectical dimension is of the highest importance. It is in general the principle of all movement, all life, and all activity” (GW 20: §81). So far, I have only talked about dialectics, but how exactly does it work as a method?

Hegel describes dialectic as a process consisting of three moments: (1) “abstract,” (2) “dialectical,” and (3) “speculative” (GW 20: §79-83). This first moment abstracts a given content through the activity of “understanding” (GW 20: §80). To understand is to abstract a universal form from particular content. The universal constitutes the identity between different particulars. The second, dialectical moment proceeds to negate this identity by showing how the universal is

commend Kant for recognizing that reason naturally seeks to transcendent knowledge, a fact that Hegelian dialectic seeks to systematically demonstrate (GW 21: 40-25).

particular; that is, finite and subject to difference (GW 20: §81). This obviously results in a contradiction: the posited claim is actually its opposite, e.g. the universal is particular, the infinite is finite, etc. This contradiction is resolved in third, speculative moment. Calling it “positively rational [*Positiv-Vernünftige*],” Hegel claims that this moment “grasps the unity of the determinations in their opposition, the affirmative that is contained in their dissolution and their passing over into something else” (GW 20: §82). This moment negates the previous negation, resulting in a positive identity between what was previously contradictory. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel calls this third moment “determinate negation,” or the negation of a negation that results in a positive claim (GW 9: 57/53).

Usefully, Hegel summarizes the dialectical method in one word: “*Aufhebung*,” or sublimation. Just as the speculative moment unifies two contradictory terms – terms that negate one another –, the word “*Aufhebung*” expresses an internal contradiction. On the one hand, its verb form “*aufheben*” means “to keep” and “to preserve.” On the other hand, it also means “to cause to cease” and “to put an end to” (GW 21: 94/81-82). That which is sublimated is simultaneously preserved and negated. Furthermore, insofar as “*aufheben*” is rooted in the verb “*heben*” – “to hoist, to lift, to raise” – then sublimation raises the preserved and negated term to a higher unity.

For the purpose of staging a confrontation between Heidegger and Hegel, the latter’s account of the dialectic of being is perhaps the most illustrative example. The first moment of Hegel’s logic posits being as such, that something is. However, divorced from any particular content (e.g. “this being is a book”), being as such is entirely abstract, immediate, and devoid of content. It is an absolute identity expressed in the tautological proposition “I=I” (GW 20: §86). Thought out, this abstract identity results in the second, dialectical moment, or the moment of

negation. Hegel writes: “Now this pure being is a pure abstraction and thus the absolutely negative which, when likewise taken immediately, is nothing” (GW 20: §87). Being as such is not a being, i.e. it is nothing. Hence, the dialectical moment arrives at an obvious contradiction: being is nothing, or what *is*, is *not*. But the contradiction is sublimated in the third, speculative moment, which in this case produces a third term, becoming. “The truth of being as well as of nothing is therefore the unity of both; this unity is becoming” (GW 20: §88). Becoming proceeds from being to nothingness back to being, and so on and so forth. Becoming allows being (i.e. that something is) to be meaningfully spoken about. A determinate “something” is differentiated from other things. As differentiated, it contains an element of being (“it is x”) and negation (“x is not y”). Hegel calls this differentiated, determinate being, “existence [*Dasein*]” (GW 20: §89). As such, Hegel defines that which exists as that which has come into being.

The ultimate object of Hegelian metaphysics is the sublimation of all knowledge and concepts into a certain, unified totality: a system of pure reason. It will “develop an unconscious power to assimilate in rational form the otherwise dispersed manifold of cognitions and sciences, the power to grasp and hold them in their essentiality, to strip them of every externality and in this way to abstract from them the logical element” (GW 21: 43/37). In other words, all phenomenal experience of beings and their scientific treatments can be unified and subject to rational determination. Hegel denotes the system as a whole with the terms “absolute idea [*absolute Idee*]” and “the concept [*der Begriff*]”. As systematic, logic does not concern one concept independent of others. Rather each concept necessarily refers to the totality of concepts, which Hegel renders singular as “the concept” (GW 21: 17/19). Towards the end of the logic, the concept as such is spoken of as the absolute idea, which is the “sole subject matter and content of philosophy” insofar as it contains “all determinateness within it” (GW 12: 236/735). If

philosophy seeks certain knowledge, then its object is something completely determinate, that is to say, not subject to the possibility of error, which is the result of indeterminacy. A system of pure reason is totally determinate since it is not dependent upon external content. And even if it concerns an empirical science, e.g. experimental physics, it nonetheless subjects that sense data to rationally determined concepts. Hence, the absolute idea sublimates the totality of not only intelligible concepts, but also empirical experience as well.

In *The Event*, Heidegger calls Hegel's absolute idealism the consummation of metaphysics because it "believes that the truth of beings has been attained and secured" (GA 71: 149/128-129). Absolute idealism does not just grasp the truth of beings, i.e. what beings are, it secured this knowledge, thereby rendering it absolute. By doing so, the absolute idea that accounts for the totality of possible beings is rendered into the highest being. Hegel writes, "the absolute idea alone is *being*, imperishable *life*, *self-knowing truth*, and is *all truth*" (GW 12: 236/735). The absolute idea is the constantly present-at-hand being that grounds the flow of appearances. Furthermore, the absolute idea accounts for the condition of possibility of beings as a whole, i.e. the concepts that beings must conform to, as representations, in order to be said to exist at all. With this, Hegel realizes the knowledge of beings as a whole that the metaphysical tradition had been striving for since the ancient Greeks.

Hegel's Philosophy of History: The First Beginning as Circular Progress

The second reason for why Heidegger views Hegel as the consummate thinker of metaphysics is because he dialectically sublimates the entire history of philosophy within his own system. In *Contributions*, Heidegger writes:

Hegel gathered the entire earlier (even pre-Platonic) history of philosophy into an affiliation, and since he conceived of such knowledge in its phases and their sequence as

absolute self-knowledge, he thus came into possession of a necessity arising out of the essence of beingness (idea), a necessity according to which the phases of the history of the ideas had to form themselves into those phases... In other words, Hegel's history of philosophy, seen in terms of his way of questioning, was the *first philosophical* history of philosophy, the first appropriate interrogation of history but also the last, and last possible, interrogation of that kind (GA 65: 214/167).

Hegel re-presents the history of philosophy as the history of the various attempts to grasp the absolute idea, which are synthesized in his system. Each stage in the history of philosophy is just a "moment" of the "development of the idea" (GW 20: §86). Because there is one object of philosophy, the absolute idea, then there is only "one philosophy at different stages of its unfolding," i.e. his own system of absolute idealism (GW 20: §13). Rather than dismissing Hegel's history of philosophy as conceited, Heidegger accepts it, even deeming it "appropriate" (GA 65: 214/167). Hegel's history is an accurate representation of the history of metaphysics, or the first beginning of philosophy. It is an account of the various formulations of the being of beings, which Hegel identifies with the absolute idea. However, this acceptance is precisely the point of confrontation. Hegel's history rests on the "re-nunciation [*Ab-sage*]" of the truth of being (GA 68: 14/11). Hence, Hegel's progressive history of the emergence (*Aufgang*) of the absolute is testimony to the tragic submergence (*Untergang*) of being, discussed in chapter two.

Hegel's history of philosophy rests on an identity between philosophy and its history. "The same development of thinking that is portrayed in the history of philosophy is also portrayed in philosophy itself, only freed from its historical externality, purely in the element of thinking" (GW 20: §14). Philosophy is the systematic study of the absolute idea that appears concretely in the history of philosophy. In conventional thought this position is itself a

contradiction. On the one hand, philosophical knowledge is eternal. On the other, historical knowledge is contingent (LHP I: 8). Hegel's philosophy of history resolves this contradiction by accounting for how the eternal absolute develops *in time*, a development that mirrors the dialectical transformation of the concept in his system of logic.

This identity between philosophy and history has three important implications for Hegel: (1) history concerns what is eternal, as opposed to what is past; (2) this history follows a progressive and necessary pattern, from indeterminate, immediate being to absolute knowing; (3) although progressive, this history is also circular. First, because the philosopher seeks in history the different formulations of the absolute, then history no longer concerns what is simply the past. Rather it deals with what "is eternal and absolutely present" (GW 20: §86). In accord with Hegel's dialectical theory, which claims that contradictions are not simply refuted, but are rather carried over, earlier accounts of the absolute (e.g., Plato's form of the good or Spinoza's substance) contain a kernel of truth that needs to be preserved. The historian of philosophy has to see each philosophy as valid in its own way according to the logic of the absolute. The history of philosophy is therefore rendered metaphysical. The philosopher is tasked with ascertaining what is constantly present beneath the contingent moments of historical thought. Each philosophical era is an adequate step forward in the process of realizing the absolute, or the being of beings.

Second, as a process to realize a specific end, Hegel presents the history of philosophy as following a necessary and progressive pattern. In his first lecture course on the history of philosophy, Hegel writes that the "history of philosophy is a progression impelled by an inherent necessity, and one which is implicitly rational and *a priori* determined through its idea... Its history is just as absolutely determined as the development of notions, and thus the impelling force of the inner dialectic of the forms" (LHP I: 36-37). Reason's need to dialectically resolve

the contradictions inherent to thought is reflected in this history. The course of this path is necessary and always already determined by the presupposition of that absolute knowledge is metaphysically real but requires actualization. Each development in the history of philosophy is neither random nor arbitrary, but is rather an improved account of the absolute, which sublimates failed accounts. Hence, for example, Parmenides' identification of the absolute with pure being was sublimated by Heraclitus' becoming (GW 21: 70/60).

Third, Hegel's account of history as the progressive realization of absolute knowledge and freedom is also circular. Like many of Hegel's positions, this claim appears contradictory at first. He reconciles this contradiction by means of his concept of determination. Hegel's system of reason presupposes the absolute at the beginning, but it remains indeterminate. In this state, it is not clear that the absolute is actual. The system serves to determine this indeterminate absolute that it presupposes. Hence, his method "coils in like a circle." Hegel explains: "It is in this manner that each step of the *advance* in the process of further determination, while getting away from the indeterminate beginning, is also a *getting back closer to it*; consequently, that what may at first appear to be different. The *retrogressive grounding* of the beginning and the progressive further determination of it, run into one another and are the same" (GW 12: 251). The end of the system is the determination of the beginning. This point is reiterated in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. "This transformation is the circle returning back in itself, which presupposes its beginning and reaches only at the end" (GW 9: 429). This circular account of his system has important implications for his history of philosophy.

Like Heidegger's return to the pre-Socratic experience of being, which was subsequently concealed by the metaphysical tradition, Hegel also stages a return, but one that renders the pre-Socratics into metaphysicians. Hegel sees in Parmenides, in particular, the first articulation of the

absolute identity of being and thought: “Pure being constitutes the beginning, because it is pure thought as well as the undetermined, simple immediate, and the first beginning cannot be anything mediated and further determined” (GW 20: §86). Just as his logical system begins with the absolute identity of being, the history of philosophy begins with Parmenides’ claim that being alone exists. But, given that his system amounts to a move from what is abstract to concrete, indeterminate to determinate, and immediate into mediate, this beginning obviously remains abstract, indeterminate, and immediate. Parmenides claim has no actual content to make it true. Left indeterminate, being as such is not meaningfully differentiated from nothingness. Hence, its indeterminacy results in a logical contradiction that is sublimated. The result: an identity of being and thought with determinate content, i.e., Hegel’s system. Hegel returns to the beginning of philosophy in order to ground and also demonstrate the superiority of his system, one that does not just know the absolute idea, but demonstrates its actuality.

The Other Beginning: Negativity and Abyss

In his poetic texts, Heidegger sets out to dismantle Hegel’s system by returning to its beginning. He locates the origin of the dialectic and ceases its movement, undermining Hegel’s claim to absolute knowledge. In his lecture on onto-theology, Heidegger calls this move to the origin a “step back [*Schritt zurück*],” which is explicitly distinguished from dialectical sublimation, *Aufhebung*, which always goes forward in order to resolve previously posited contradictions. Heidegger explains:

For Hegel, the conversation [*Gespräch*] with the earlier history of philosophy has the character of *Aufhebung*, that is, of the mediating concept in the sense of an absolute foundation [*Begründung*]. For us, the character of the conversation with the history of thinking is no longer *Aufhebung*, but the step back [*Schritt zurück*] ... The step back

points to the realm which until now has been skipped over [*übersprungenen*], and from which the essence of truth becomes first of all worthy of thought (GA 11: 58/49).

Specifically, Heidegger steps back to the ontological difference that the dialectic renounced as contradictory: “We speak of the difference between being and beings. The step back goes from what is unthought, from the difference as such, into what gives us thought” (GA 11: 59/50). This difference is the unthought origin of thought. In other words, the that-ness of being as such allows thought to think the what-ness of beings, but at the expense of forgetting the difference.

In the language of Heidegger’s poietic texts, the step back goes to the truth of being as self-concealment. Hegel intimates this truth by recognizing the identity between being and nothingness, but viewing this as a contradiction, he then sets out to resolve the contradiction by means of speculative third term, i.e., becoming. The self-*negating* quality of being as such, however, is its self-concealment, which Heidegger views as the unthought origin of thought. Thus, while Hegel encounters the self-concealing abyss of being and proceeds to step over it, Heidegger chooses to step back into the abyss, i.e., the origin of thinking and the dialectic itself. To this end, Heidegger’s being-historical confrontation with Hegel takes shape through the specific concepts of negativity and negation, which will be revealed as rooted in the truth of being.

In terms of the narrative structure of the history of being, this confrontation with negativity will explain how Heidegger can immanently undermine the possibility of Hegel’s claim to have definitively concluded the history of philosophy; the possibility of another beginning is contained in the truth of being which the system of absolute idealism cannot sublimate. Hence, in the working notes to his lecture on onto-theology, Heidegger opposes himself to Hegel around the concept of history. For Hegel, “history” is the “occurring in the

sense of process [*Pro-zesses*],” which is the “progress of dialectical thinking.” While for Heidegger, “history” is “destiny [*Geschick*]” as “event of appropriation [*Ereignis*]” and “inception [*An-fang*]” (GA 11: 107). At stake in Heidegger’s history of being is events, inceptions, and beginnings that are not constrained by overdetermining concepts of process and progress. A genuine beginning cannot be determined from what is, but rather must appropriate what is not yet, i.e., the abyss that characterizes the truth of being itself.

As mentioned, in his middle period, Heidegger engages in a being-historical confrontation primarily around the concepts of negativity and negation. Heidegger’s primary point of critique is that Hegel inadequately thinks the meaning and origin of negativity: “Negativity is essentially and decisively pervasive, and it ‘is’ unquestionably with the absolute idea itself, and yet the origin of negativity remains in the dark” (GA 68: 22/18). Admittedly this claim should appear strange at first given how pervasive the terms “negativity” and “negation” are in Hegel’s system. For example, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes the historical development of spirit in terms of self-negation: “... the negative is the negative of itself” (GW 9: 466/808); the positive activity of spirit requires “looking the negative in the face and lingering with it” (GW 9: 27/21); the “negative” is called the “energy of thinking” (GW 9: 27/20); self-consciousness is identified with “pure negativity” (GW 9: 428/460). In the *Science*

(progress) is the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its *particular content*; or that such a negation is not just negation, but is the *negation of determined fact* which is resolved, and is therefore *determinate negation* (GW 21: 38/33).

In order for positive content to be derived from contradictory claims, a determinate negation must intervene to render these claims positive relative to one another. Hence, negation is at the heart of Hegel's entire system and its claim to the absolute, which is developed logically and historically. And yet, while Hegel's *Science of Logic* sets out to account for and ground the necessary concepts of thought, which should include negativity and negation, according to Heidegger, this concept is simply presupposed as a power of spirit and a necessary step towards dialectical resolution. Hegel describes the activity of negation, i.e., negativity, but does not appear to reflect on the very fact that negativity is possible at all. Hence, it remains "dark" as to where negativity comes from (GA 68: 22/18). This is not a passing matter, if Hegel's system sets out to demonstrate the unconditional ground of knowledge, the absolute, and if it along the way presupposes negativity as a condition for demonstrating the absolute, then the system remains groundless and therefore not actually absolute. From a Heideggerian perspective, Hegel's system is self-negating, but without a speculative resolution.

Heidegger believes it to be obvious that Hegel cannot actually account for negativity. Despite its importance, negativity remains "questionless," because Hegel is a metaphysical thinker. In other words, Hegel is ultimately invested "presence and permanence," i.e., the beingness of beings, which are not contaminated by negativity (GA 68: 40/31). Since negativity is just a means to absolute knowing, Hegel does not take it "seriously," and for this very reason it is in fact not actually negative. Heidegger writes: "Hegel's negativity is not a negativity because it never takes seriously the not [*Nicht*] and the nihilating [*Nichten*] – it has already sublated the not into the 'yes'" (GA 68: 47/37). Hegel presupposes the affirmation, or positive term, that determinate negation reveals. Indeed, in the same passage from *Science of Logic* that lauds the power of the negativity, one also notices Hegel's dismissiveness of negation. For example, he is

adamant that negation does not resolve into “nullity” and “abstract nothingness;” he also calls indeterminate negation, “just negation” (GW 21: 38/33). Negation is always already subsumed by determination and affirmation; Hegel is unconcerned with negation and negativity as such, because these are simply nothingness. Moreover, as a metaphysician, what matters for Hegel is not even being, but the being of beings, with determinateness, content, and existence.

Hegel’s metaphysical investments in the being of beings is evident in the first moment of the dialectic, the same moment that Heidegger seeks to step back into and therefore discover the origin of negativity, which will be revealed as the truth of being itself. Recall that the dialectic begins with the contradictory identification of pure being and nothingness: “Now this pure being is a pure abstraction and thus the absolutely negative which, when likewise taken immediately, is nothing” (GW 20: §87). This contradiction results in the emergence of a third speculative claim: “The truth of being as well as of nothing is therefore the unity of both; this unity is becoming” (GW 20: §88). Being as such gives way to becoming, which is determinate being, or existence; that which *is*, comes into being. Hegel’s dialectic reflects the metaphysical assumption that being must have a determinate content, it must exist as an entity. Thus, the end of the dialectic results in the claim that the entirely self-determined absolute idea “alone is *being*” (GW 12: 236). According to Heidegger, the initial identity of pure being and nothingness cannot be logically maintained and therefore must be renounced: This re-nunciation [*Ab-sage*] as essential presupposition of the possible absoluteness of unconditioned thinking” (GA 68: 14/11). For Heidegger this specifically means the renunciation of the ontological difference and his later truth of being: being as such is different from beings insofar as it is not a being, it is no-thing.

Hegel’s system posits the truth of being, but then immediately renounces it. This renunciation articulates the radical difference between Hegel’s absolute system and Heidegger’s

beyng-historical thinking: “Hegelian thought, a metaphysic...differentiates itself infinitely from the beyng-historical content [*Gehalt*] that says: beyng is never a being; this not-being, in opposition to all beings, is refusal [*Verweigerung*], wherein beyng itself in its ownmost essence withdraws and beckons itself as the origin, in which nothing has source” (GA 66: 58). Beyng-historical thinking has as its primary content that beyng is not a being, and in this way is marked by its “refusal” to be. This mode of thinking also enacts a “refusal” of the dialectal drive for the absolute, i.e., to render being qua nothingness into a determinate content, something that becomes as an existing entity. One can say that Heidegger refuses Hegel’s renunciation of the ontological difference; Hegel sees the latter as a fault of logic that has to be sublimated, while Heidegger views the ontological difference as the very ground of thought. As the “origin” of nothingness, the essence of beyng is characterized by withdrawal or self-concealment. But in what way is it the origin of nothingness, could one not counter that nothingness is the origin of beyng? What does this have to do with negativity?

The vehicle for Hegel’s renunciation is negativity; by negating them, Hegel can say no to nothingness and pure being, resulting in the affirmation of becoming and existence. But Hegel fails to actually sublimate pure being/nothingness precisely because these terms are the origin of negativity. As a concept of cognition, negativity is entangled with the idea of nothingness, i.e., that there can *not* be; negativity presupposes the idea of pure negation or nothingness. According to Heidegger, negativity is a species of nothingness, and for that reason is only “encounterable in its purest and most definite form” as “nothing” (GA 68: 17/13). But how can nothingness be encountered, if it is not a being? The problem is resolved through Heidegger’s account of the truth of beyng.

In order for nothingness to be encountered, it must also be present in some form. The truth of being expresses this very ambiguous play of absence and presence, or unconcealment and concealment. Hence, the truth of being is in fact the ground of nothingness. But this is perhaps misleading. Since it is not an entity, being is not a stable ground. Hence, it is defined by self-concealment. As such, it is a groundless ground, or an abyss. Heidegger articulates this ambiguous co-belonging of being, nothingness, and abyss thusly: “The nothing as the a-byss [*Ab-grund*], being itself. But here being not in a metaphysical sense, not in orientation toward and from beings, but from out of its truth” (GA 68: 37/29). Nothingness is the truth of being, its self-concealment, which, as groundless, is also an abyss.

However, if Heidegger believes that nothingness can be encountered, then he must also believe that the abyss can occur in some form. As discussed in chapter two, the abyss qua self-concealment of being can be indirectly unconcealed. For Heidegger, the truth of being is itself identified with the “clearing” in which beings as a whole can appear. The space of appearance is itself not an apparent entity, not a being. Hence, the clearing for appearing is just another name for the a-byss (GA 68: 15/12). The a-byss is therefore not an “empty” space, it is rather the name for the necessary withdrawal of being that allows things to appear, i.e., a withdrawal that does not itself appear (GA 68: 45/37). Hegel’s metaphysical adherence to beingness leaves such potential unquestionable in and for itself; it cannot be represented in thought and is therefore reduced to an abstraction in need of determinate negation. Yet, for Heidegger, by invoking negativity in the first place, Hegel already requires the truth of being, that nothingness and being are necessarily entangled. Hence, there is an abyss at the heart of Hegel’s system which is unthinkable in terms of his absolute thinking.

In terms of Heidegger's being historical project, attending to negativity is ultimately tied into making the "decision" upon which the other beginning can be thought. "It lies in the essence of setting up this decision that, unlike any decision before, it must become a historical (not historiological) confrontation while, at the same time, it must have carried out the leap in what is ungrounded, perhaps even into what is abyssal" (GA 68: 41/32). Making a decision is leaping into the abyss, i.e. something that is undetermined and undecided. But why is this decision historical? This is for two reasons. First, because the a-byss is itself historical. This derives from Heidegger's claim that being is historical. It is an event that happens, as opposed to something eternally present. As an event, being itself is also rendered into a decision, one that results in the "e-vent [*Er-eignis*]" (GA 68: 43/34). Second, with regard to the particular confrontation with Hegel, this decision is also historical because the system of absolute idealism is historical. Hegel's philosophy of history tacitly negates the truth of being in order to justify its claim to absolute knowing. Heidegger's decision in favor of the truth of being is against absolute history, i.e. the one that overdetermined the first beginning as the only possible history; the Heideggerian decision is in favor of the other beginning.

The other beginning amounts to the return to the truth of being that lies at the heart of the first beginning, one that Hegel indicates but does not reflect on as such. This truth of being – being is self-concealing, is nothing – is contradictory according to metaphysical thought, which for Hegel means that it must be dialectically resolved. Inquiring into the truth of being means rejecting, then, the dialectic. "Since Hegel's 'dialectic' remains wholly within metaphysics, it is insufficient for this questioning (i.e. the truth of being)" (GA 71: 108/92). For this reason, the transition from the first to the other beginning is not a matter of dialectical sublimation. The two beginnings do not stand in contradiction. In *Contributions*, Heidegger explains that in the

historical confrontation “the first beginning must therefore be placed back into its unadulterated greatness and uniqueness; the confrontation does not sublimate it but instead first grounds its necessity for the other beginning” (GA 65: 221/173). The other beginning is not radically different than the first, rather it consists in grasping the first beginning as such, locating the forgetfulness of the truth of being that remained concealed within the metaphysical tradition. Furthermore, the other beginning takes shape through a recollection of the origin of metaphysics: “The overcoming of metaphysics is not negation and sublimation; in it the having-been [*das Gewesene*] arrives at its essence and remains, thus recollected [*erinnert*]” (GA 70: 193). Thus, recollection is the non-dialectical retrieval of the history of philosophy, with the aim of opening a new space for thinking, i.e., another philosophical beginning.¹⁵⁰ Through recollection, Heidegger does not sublimate the history of philosophy, but rather grasps the beginning as such.

Heidegger’s Confrontation with the Hegelian State: Against Decline

Thus, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Heidegger demonstrates the need to recollect Hegel’s philosophy of history in order to tragically affirm the other beginning. In other words, this means affirming the *Untergang*, or submergence, of being. The necessity of submergence becomes so urgent for Heidegger that by the early 1940s he concludes that the greatest doom to befall human being would be if this condition were “denied” (GA 96: 252/199). Curiously, this position is radically out of step with Heidegger’s thought in the early 1930s. At the moment when Heidegger began to conceive of the history of being and makes his first leap into politics,

¹⁵⁰ Hegel also points to “recollection” in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Because the absolute is speculatively posited at the beginning of the dialectic, albeit in an abstract and immediate form, then the end of the dialectic amounts to “the inwardizing re-collection” of the logic as a whole, and its instantiation in history (GW 9: 433/467). However, from a Heideggerian perspective, this recollection is limited by Hegel’s metaphysical presuppositions. It cannot recollect the truth of being because its inherently contradictory character.

Untergang is still understood negatively, i.e., in terms of decline or decay, rather than submergence; it is something to be avoided or overcome. Hence, in a 1934 lecture to international students, Heidegger urges that Europe be “preserved from decline,” directly echoing Spengler’s *Decline of the West* (GA 16: 307). Accompanying this negative construction of *Untergang*, Heidegger also has a different perspective of Hegel’s thought. While Hegel is still understood as the consummate figure of modernity and the philosophy of history, Heidegger expresses an attraction to Hegel’s political philosophy. Seeking to determine his own position on the meaning of the state and the very concept of the political, Heidegger chooses to confront Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (GA 86: 613).

In this second half of the chapter, I argue that Heidegger’s initial affirmation of National Socialism needs to be understood in the context of avoiding European decline through a reading of Hegel’s political philosophy. This will also require understanding Heidegger’s confrontation with Schmitt, whose account of the political the former explicitly rejects as inadequate. In the notes to his winter 1934-1935 seminar on Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Heidegger explicitly counters Schmitt’s claim that Hegel’s theory of the state had “died” with the rise of the Nazi movement, claiming conversely that this theory had yet to come “alive” in the “National Socialist State” (GA 86: 85).¹⁵¹ Heidegger attempts to render the Hegelian state consistent with National Socialism. To this end, he also constructs a conception of the political contrary to Schmitt. For Schmitt, the political consists in the determination of “friends” and “enemies” by the sovereign state.¹⁵² For Heidegger, however, the political is the “self-assertion” and “care” of the people (GA 86: 174, 655). The determination of a people as a political entity

¹⁵¹ Schmitt, *State, Movement, People*, 35.

¹⁵² Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 29-30.

precedes the friend-enemy distinction. Schmitt made the people into something dependent and passive, requiring both another (an enemy) and the state to achieve concrete existence. Hence, in *State, Movement, People*, Schmitt calls the people “apolitical.”¹⁵³ While Heidegger also admits the political necessity of the state, he wants to determine the positive role for the people as such, a people who will be able to stem the tide of European decline. Before investigating Heidegger’s concept of the political, it is essential to first understand what is meant by decline. What is this early formulation of *Untergang*, if it is not a matter of attending to the submergence of being? Answering this question, will re-introduce an essential term in the confrontation between Heidegger and Hegel: spirit (*Geist*).

For Heidegger, the tethering of the people and the possibility of decline (*Untergang*) determines the very essence of National Socialism. Heidegger outlines the conditions for avoiding decline as such: “Europe will only then be preserved from decline [*Untergang*] and a new ascendancy [*Aufstieg*] will be achieved, if each of its people [*Völker*] acts from out of the spirit of self-responsibility [*Geist der Selbstverantwortung*] and unconditional honor [*unbedingten Ehre*]” (GA 16: 307). How does a people become responsible for itself and thereby avoid decline? The text provides a complicated answer. A given people takes responsibility for itself – which in this case means its national identity and sovereignty – through education (*Erziehung*).¹⁵⁴ For this reason, Heidegger maintains that the university system is tasked with forming a people *into* a people. More specifically, this task is orchestrated with the state and

¹⁵³ Schmitt, *State, Movement, People*, 12.

¹⁵⁴ Heidegger’s use of “*Erziehung*” for education is idiosyncratic. As opposed to synonyms like *Bildung* (personal maturation), *Ausbildung* (professional education), or *Unterricht* (education in a classroom setting), *Erziehung* primarily refers to education of a child by their parents. Hence, it can also be translated as upbringing, nurturing, and rearing. For the National Socialist university system, education of a people is analogous to the rearing of children into adults. The state takes on the authoritarian role of a parent to a people.

defines, for Heidegger, the essence of National Socialism: “*Education of the people into the people through the state* – that is the sense of the national socialist movement, this is the essence of the new formation of the state [*der neuen Staatsbildung*]” (GA 16: 307). Thus, the essence of the new state and political regime was to form a people, such that they would be able to overcome the perceived decline (*Untergang*) befalling Europe as a whole.

By decline, Heidegger means the Spenglerian designation of a culture’s weakness and slow disintegration into non-being. Obviously, decline is not meant to be taken literally, as if a culture were a biological organism capable of material death and decay. Rather what is afflicted by decline, is the *spirit* of a culture or a people. Perhaps the best articulation of spiritual decline is found in Heidegger’s 1935 summer lecture course, entitled *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

The spiritual decline [*Der geistige Verfall*] of the earth has progressed so far that peoples are in danger of losing their spiritual strength [*geistige Kraft*], the strength that makes it possible even to see the decline (which is meant in relation to the fate of ‘being’) and to appraise it as such. This simple observation has nothing to do with cultural pessimism – nor with any optimism either, of course; for the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the reduction of human beings to a mass, the hatred and mistrust of everything creative and free has already reached such proportions throughout the whole earth that such childish categories of pessimism and optimism have long become laughable (GA 40: 29/40).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Although Heidegger does not specifically use “*Untergang*” for “decline” in this instance, *Verfall* is an appropriate synonym, especially given that he tethers *Verfall* to “fate [*Schicksal*],” which is consistent with his tragic determination of *Untergang*. *Verfall* can be translated as “decline,” “decay,” “deterioration,” “dissolution,” or “downfall.”

The greatest danger of spiritual decline is that people will no longer have the “spiritual strength” to recognize decline. In other words, only those possessed by spirit have the capacity to perceive and confront decline, which symptomatically expressed in terms of the “darkening of the world,” “the destruction of the earth,” and the “reduction of human beings to a mass.” Spirit is in opposition to decline, and can there be understood in terms “strengthening,” “invigoration,” “rejuvenation,” “revitalization.” Spirit is defined by its self-strengthening or vitalization, which means acting against those forces that would cause decay. But if strengthening is understood simply in terms of being antithetical to decline, then we would merely have a negative or reactionary determination of spirit, spirit qua non-decline.

Fortunately, Heidegger provides a narrower determination of spirit, which he approvingly cites from his 1933 rectoral address: spirit is the “originally attuned, knowing resolution to the essence of being” (GA 40: 37-38/52). At first glance, “spirit” appears to name Dasein’s intimation of the truth of being. In terms *Being and Time*, it is resonant with Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of being, which makes the question of being possible. However, according to Sam Richards, spirit needs to be distinguished from Dasein, “by noting that spirit displays both attunement (*Gestimmtheit*) and resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) toward being. These are success words for Heidegger and imply that Dasein genuinely exhibits spirit only when it fully endorses its position as an entity that can inquire about the nature of being.”¹⁵⁶ Spirit is not just the subtle attunement to being as such, but in being resolved towards the essence of being. In other words, spirit knows and affirms its attunement to being. Spiritual decline is then measured by both a lesser degree of attunement and the inability to resolve itself to asking

¹⁵⁶ Sam Richards, “Spirit,” *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*, Ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 694.

after the essence of being. Without this attuned resolve, human beings only encounter beings, which they interpret according to a model of utilization according to pre-determined formulas (i.e., techno-scientific reasoning). This is perhaps why the possibility of free creativity is not only diminished but despised and treated with suspicion, a kind of suspicion that would also treat the possibility of another beginning with hostility.

Heidegger follows this negative picture of decline with a call of urgency to the German people:

All this implies that this people, as a historical people, must transpose itself – and with it the history of the West – from the center of their future happening into the originary realm of the power 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 (GA 40: 29/41).

Avoiding decline requires the fostering of the historical spirit of the German people. A year earlier, this task is explicitly identified with National Socialism: “The essence of the national socialist revolution exists therein that Adolf Hitler has raised the new spirit of the community and enforced into the creative power the new ordering of a people” (GA 16: 9). In conjunction with the state and university system, the Führer guides the spirit of the people into being.

Heidegger’s fight against decline is coexistence with his early affirmation of National Socialist politics. The reduction of people to atomized and isolated subjects in liberalism and the massification of people in communism make them political subjects that are not only incapable of stopping decline but are symptomatic of it.

Curiously, these comments in favor of the task of National Socialism occur after Heidegger had already left his position as the rector of Freiburg University and began to

privately express misgivings about the party. In 1933, the same year that Hitler ascended to power, Heidegger assumed the role of rector. In his first public address, Heidegger extolled the “spiritual mission” that the university would assume under National Socialism (GA 16: 108). However, he would resign from the position less than a year later, disillusioned by the incapacity of the Nazi state to realize his desired reforms. As he retrospectively explained in 1945, he saw an “insurmountable split [*unüberwindlicher Zwiespalt*]” between his and the National Socialist conception of the university (GA 16: 388). How do we reconcile Heidegger’s continued affirmation of National Socialism even after splitting with the movement? This reconciled precisely through his use of the word “spirit.” Although he is critical of the specific practices of the National Socialist party, he still affirmed the essential spirit of the movement. Indeed, in his *Black Notebooks* written around the end of the rectorship, Heidegger laments his failed project, but nonetheless expresses his commitment to the German spirit underlying the university: “We will remain in the invisible front [*unsichtbaren Front*] of the secret [*geheimen*] spiritual Germany” (GA 94: 155/114).

That Heidegger’s political turn is marked by his use of the word “spirit” (*Geist*) already gives an indication of the specific role of Hegel’s political philosophy. As Jacques Derrida notes, although Heidegger had criticized Hegel’s concept of spirit in *Being and Time*, by the early 30s he starts to earnestly use the term.¹⁵⁷ The sudden appearance of spirit in Heidegger’s corpus indicates his Hegelian approach to National Socialism. However, Hegel’s spirit is distinct from Heidegger’s use of the term. Hegel’s defines spirit as the unity of substance and subject, where his system of pure reason becomes certain of itself as absolute, i.e., where its content (substance)

¹⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and The Question*, Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 83.

is identical with thought (subject). He writes, “That the true is only actual as a system, or, that substance is essentially subject, is expressed in the representation that expresses the absolute as *spirit*... The spiritual alone is the *actual*; it is the essence, or, *exists-in-itself*” (GW 9: 22/16). The phenomenology of spirit precisely describes the process whereby absolute spirit is determined. Rather than rendering spirit synonymous with consciousness, Heidegger designates spirit as the attunement to beings as a whole, which would make possible the very question of being (GA 40: 38/52). While different from Hegelian spirit, Heidegger’s use of the term is nevertheless influenced by Hegel. This is evident from Heidegger’s 1933 summer semester, where his proposed task of thinking the conditions for the actualization of the spirit of National Socialism is accompanied by a reflection on Hegel’s philosophy of history (GA 36/37).

I present these details regarding Heidegger’s ambiguous relationship to National Socialism and his use of the term spirit in order to properly account for his seminar on Hegel’s *Element of the Philosophy of Right*. Having defined National Socialism in terms of the formation of a people through the state and university system and having become skeptical of the party’s ability to accomplish this task, Heidegger sets out to better understand the nature of both the people and the state. The projected result of this will be to better prepare the way for realizing the spirit of National Socialism and to reform university system. To do this, however, Heidegger adds another category in need of explication: the political. Failing in his first foray into political life, Heidegger seeks to determine the meaning of this concept. To this end, Heidegger chooses to confront the writings of the legal theorist and dissident Nazi, Carl Schmitt.

Carl Schmitt and the Concept of the Apolitical

Carl Schmitt is often presented as the “crown jurist [*Kronjurist*]” of the Nazi regime.¹⁵⁸ However, this picture is flawed. While it acknowledges Schmitt’s active desire to politically legitimize National Socialism, it ignores his public denunciation of the party prior to 1933, which resulted in him being blacklisted later. Aside from his critical remarks of National Socialism, the party apparatus treated him with suspicion due to the perception that his work was neo-Hegelian in orientation. This opinion was the result of Schmitt’s affirmation of the institution of the state and his view that the people are fundamentally “apolitical,” i.e., they need the combination of state and political movement to render the people into political subjects.¹⁵⁹ For our purposes, I will flesh out these two aspects of Schmitt’s political thought in order to demonstrate that Heidegger himself expresses similar criticisms, revealing the presence of National Socialistic orthodoxy in his account of the political. While Schmitt dismisses the political value of the people, Heidegger identifies the political itself with the very formation of a people.

Schmitt officially joined the party on May 1, 1933 and would be appointed a Prussian state councilor by Hermann Göring.¹⁶⁰ Schmitt was appointed to that position due to both his prominence as a jurist and the intellectual merit of his work for the Nazi party. Schmitt justified the use of article 48 of the Weimar constitution, which would be used to suspend constitutional rights in a state of emergency, a political move that Hitler himself would perform as chancellor. However, Schmitt did not present this argument to undermine the Weimar constitution. Rather he thought that it was necessary to use this article to defend the constitution from hostile political

¹⁵⁸ This designation comes from Carl Schmitt’s former student Waldemar Gurian, who would become a significant writer on totalitarianism and political Catholicism in the United States. See Joseph W. Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for The Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 225.

¹⁵⁹ Schmitt, *State, Movement, People*, 12.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

parties. In his 1932 text *Legality and Legitimacy*, Schmitt criticizes the liberal principles of “neutrality” and “equal chance,” which claim that political parties should have an equal chance to acquire political representation. According to these principles, the state should act neutrally towards all parties. But Schmitt warned that such neutrality would allow anti-constitutional parties, such as the Nazi and communist parties, to acquire power and alter the constitution in accordance with their political aims.¹⁶¹ This explicit argument against the party would haunt Schmitt’s attempts to ingratiate himself to the regime.

In 1936, Schmitt was accused in the SS publication *Das schwarze Korps* of being a political opportunist, a charge that would follow from his earlier criticisms of National Socialism. Furthermore, he was accused of being a neo-Hegelian, Catholic, and not actually antisemitic.¹⁶² The particular assertion that Schmitt was a neo-Hegelian was not a new charge. It appears two years earlier in a speech given to the Kant Society by Otto Koellreutter, entitled “People and State in the Worldview of National Socialism.” In this speech, Koellreutter criticizes Schmitt for rendering “the people” into a fundamentally apolitical entity, which has its identity only through being represented by the state.¹⁶³ This implicitly expresses Hegel’s account of the state and the people.

Hegel’s political philosophy hinges primarily around the state. As discussed above, Hegel’s dialectical account of history results in the concretization of absolute knowledge. In his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, this is also rendered as the absolutization of the free will, or

¹⁶¹ Carl Schmitt, *Legality and Legitimacy*, Trans. Jeffrey Seitzer (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 48.

¹⁶² Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich*, 238; Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, xx.

¹⁶³ Otto Koellreutter, *Volk und Staat in der Weltanschauung des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Buchhandel RM, 1934), 11.

simply freedom. Like the self-certainty of absolute knowledge, an absolutely free will has absolved itself of external constraint. As Hegel describes: “In the free will, the truly infinite has actuality and presence [*Gegenwart*] – the will itself is the idea [*Idee*] which is present within itself” (GW 14.1: 42/54). However, without first dialectically resolving the concrete constraints that negate the freedom of the will, free will remains merely abstract rather than actual. Hegel claims that freedom only concretely exists, in the sense that it is empirically meaningful, as right, i.e., the political entitlement to exercise the idea of freedom (GW 14.1: 45/58). Hegel’s political philosophy primarily consists of dialectically accounting for proper conditions under which absolute freedom qua right is actualized, which would also coincide with the concretization of absolute knowledge as well. One of the most important conditions is the existence of a rational state, or a state that accords with Hegel’s system of pure reason.

Hegel’s view of the state is contrary to liberal contract theorists, who claim that humans possess natural rights that simultaneously authorize and limit the power of the state. According to this picture, the state exists to protect the exercise of natural liberty. Hegel maintains the inverse position that neither individual nor communal freedom exist independent of the state. “The state in and for itself is the ethical whole [*das sittliche Ganze*], the actualization [*die Verwirklichung*] of freedom and, it is the absolute end of reason that freedom should be actual” (GW 26.3: 1405/279 A). Reason seeks to actualize the idea of reason; this only concretely occurs with the existence of a state. While the state includes specific institutions, e.g., military, police, and justice system, Hegel emphasizes that the state is organized around a constitution, which determines the various functions of the state that renders it sovereign relative to other nations. The state does not simply posit a constitution, rather the latter “preserves [*erhält*]” the former as a legitimate force of authority (GW 26.3: 1413/290 A). It is only under a constitution bound state

that a people can be said to be free, i.e., able to exercise rights, which are constitutionally enshrined and protected through the activity of the state. Without the state, the people are not able to exercise freedom, nor are they even recognized as free subjects.

The most extreme consequence of this position, from the position of contract theory, is not only that the people do not form the state, but they are also denied the freedom to leave the state. “It is the rational destiny [*Die vernünftige Bestimmung*] of human beings to live within a state, and even if no state is yet present, reason requires that one be established. The state must give permission for individual to enter or leave it, so that this does not depend on the arbitrary will of the individual concerned” (GW 26.2: 838/106 A). Hegel necessarily tethers the very nature of humans as rational animal to an existence within some kind of state. There is no state of nature that can be appealed to as a source of state legitimacy. And even if a people are unhappy with their current constitution, then they do not have the freedom to leave without the consent of the state. According to Hegel, to allow people this freedom, would deny them their rational state, which in turn would actually amount of un-freedom or the exercise of an arbitrary and undisciplined will.

Yet Hegel does not merely posit that the people are unfree independent of a state. He maintains that they are a “formless mass [*formlose Masse*]” without the state and monarch to articulate their identity *as* a people (GW 14.1: 254/319).¹⁶⁴ From a Hegelian perspective, the people are initially a passive mass that requires an external force to give it a stable and active identity. As a mass, they are not free because they do not possess any protected rights guaranteed

¹⁶⁴ Hegel advocates for a constitutional monarchy. In order for the state to act as a self-determined person, it requires a figure to embody its “personality,” which Hegel identifies with monarch: “The personality of the state has actuality only as a person, as the monarch” (GW 14.1: 233/317). Although the state is composed of a differentiated constitution, it acquires unity through the singular decision making of the monarch.

by the constitution and they are also not subject to guiding social principles that would give meaning and direction to their actions. To this passive understanding of the people, Hegel also adds an abstractly negative and destructive account.

The constitution is essentially a system of mediation. In despotic states, where there are only rulers and people, the people function – if they function at all – merely as a destructive mass [*als zerstörende Masse*] opposed to all organization. But when it becomes part of the organism, the mass attains its interests in a legitimate and orderly manner. If, however, such means are not available, the masses will always express themselves in a barbarous manner (GW 26.2: 1028/343 A).

Without the state and constitution, the people *qua* masses act as a destructive force against all possible organization.

Hegel's denigration of the people as a formless and destructive mass, as well as his admiration of the state as a force for unity, was seen as antithetical to National Socialist ideology.¹⁶⁵ As Adolf Hitler himself expresses: "The *Volk* (people) is primary. Party, state, army, economy, law, etc., are secondary manifestations and methods for the purpose of preserving this *Volk*."¹⁶⁶ National Socialism is rooted in the people; it is the organization of society according to the people. Every possible institution is judged relative to preserving the people as a political

¹⁶⁵ National Socialist ideology was largely hostile to Hegelianism for a myriad of other reasons, e.g., its commitment to idealism, its influence on Marx, and its affirmation of a universal history. Although not entirely blacklisted, Hegelian thought was subject to significant criticism by many of the most prominent party ideologues, including Alfred Rosenberg, Franz Böhme, and Alfred Bäumler. For example, in his text *The Myth of the 20th Century*, Rosenberg claims that Hegel's political philosophy was "a theory of power foreign to our (German) blood." See Sylvie Hürstel, *Au nom de Hegel: Les Juristes Néo-Hégéliens et la Philosophie du Droit de la République de Weimar au Troisième Reich* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010), 62-65.

¹⁶⁶ Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt: Theorist of the Reich*, 221-222.

body, including the state as such. Any view contrary to this was immediately cited as against party orthodoxy, which included the thought of Carl Schmitt.

Schmitt's passive and apolitical construction of the people appears in his two most influential texts from the 1930s: *On the Concept of the Political* (1932) and *State, Movement, People* (1933). The former is where Schmitt presents his account of the political as the friend-enemy distinction; the latter, is where he sets out to construct a theory of the political consistent with National Socialism. Schmitt argues that most theories of the state lack a coherent concept of the political. As such, there is an unclear distinction between what constitutes the activities of the state and civil society. This is especially the case after the rise of modern "total state," which unilaterally applies state power to societal ills, e.g., welfare programs to alleviate the poverty produced by private companies.¹⁶⁷ As a result, the specific function of the state becomes increasingly unclear. Schmitt sets out to determine this function by means of a proper concept of the political, which the operation of the state presupposes. Noting that other spheres of human life possess defining binary oppositions (morality = good and evil; aesthetics = beautiful and ugly; economics = profitable and unprofitable), Schmitt proposes that the political is defined by the friend and enemy distinction. "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motivated can be reduced is that between friend and enemy."¹⁶⁸ The political is defined by the determination of a human community (friends) in opposition to antagonistic others (enemies). The Germans, for example, have historically defined themselves in opposition to the French. However, it is not the people themselves who determine their enemy and friends. Rather, this is the unique task for the state: "In its entirety the state as an organized political entity decides for

¹⁶⁷ Schmitt, *On the Concept of the Political*, 25.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

itself the friend-enemy distinction.”¹⁶⁹ The sovereign decision on the part of the state is to delimit its territory from another sovereign state, i.e., an enemy.

From this concept of the political, Schmitt defends the power granted to the state. The friend/enemy distinction is not a mere symbol or metaphor, it is “concrete and existential.”¹⁷⁰ An enemy concretely exists, and for this reason, so do friends. According to this construction, the enemy is an existential threat to friends. This grants the state the legitimate power to wage war. He writes, “The state as the decisive political entity possesses an enormous power: the possibility of waging war and thereby publicly disposing of the lives of men.”¹⁷¹ The possibility of waging war demonstrates that the primary function of the state is to protect its citizens (friends), even if this means letting them die in combat with enemies. It might be objected that an enemy is not essential for a political community to exist, so neither the state nor war are necessary either. For Schmitt, however, the existence of enemy is so essential to political unity, i.e., the identification of people with itself, that in the absence of a foreign enemy, the state would simply find or construct a “domestic” one.¹⁷² According to Schmitt, liberalism is fundamentally oriented around concealing the tacit violence of the political by reducing the people to a mass of individuals without group identifications.¹⁷³ However, liberalism fails to keep this sense of the political contained. Despite its best intents, group antagonisms emerge which are not only antagonistic to each other, but to the very idea of liberalism. In order to avoid the abolition of the constitutional order by liberalism itself, Schmitt advocates not only for the necessity of sovereign decisions by the state to suspend constitutional rights, but also for the establishment of an “ethic of the state,”

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 70-73.

which obliges a specific duty to the state. In theory, this ethic would curb the enmity between hostile parties and groups, who would at least believe in the validity of the state.¹⁷⁴

With the rise of Nazi regime, Schmitt alters his position, arguing that the regime inaugurated a triadic structure of the political, where the movement leads the state and the people: “In this way, the state may be regarded strictly as the politically static part; the movement, as the dynamic political element, and the people, as the apolitical side, growing under the protection and in the shade of the political decisions.”¹⁷⁵ State is superseded by the National Socialist movement. Regardless, Schmitt continues to render the people into the lowest element of political life. Without the state or movement, the people are apolitical and, like Hegel says, formless. According to him, the benefit of this new political arrangement is that it finally decides the relationship between the people and the state. While liberalism had posited an opposition of the state and people, such that the latter was simply a necessary evil to protect civil rights, National Socialism unifies and leads the people and state. Schmitt writes, “In the National-Socialist state, the leading political body (the movement/party), carrying state and people, has the task to prevent and become all the antitheses (e.g., state and people, people and government) of this kind.”¹⁷⁶ One can hypothesize from this description, that movement fosters the ethic of state, while nonetheless de-powering the state by rendering it static rather than active. The movement activates the people into a people.

¹⁷⁴ Schmitt writes in 1930: “If the state then becomes a pluralistic party state, the unity of the state can be maintained only as long as two or more parties agree to recognize common premises. That unity then rests in particular on the constitution recognized by all parties, which must be respected without qualification as the common foundation. The ethic of state then amounts to a constitutional ethic.” See Carl Schmitt, “Ethic of State and Pluralistic State,” *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, Trans. David Dyzenhaus (London: Verso, 1999), 107.

¹⁷⁵ Schmitt, *State, Movement, People*, 12.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

Despite toeing the party line by affirming the “ethnic identity” of the people as the “foundation” of “political leadership,” Schmitt’s denigration of the people as both apolitical and conditioned upon the existence of an enemy, led him to be scrutinized by the party.¹⁷⁷ For example, according to Koellreutter, Schmitt not only makes the people apolitical, but also “a-völkish.”¹⁷⁸ He criticizes that Schmitt’s “friend” is merely the “not-enemy [*Nicht-Feind*],” and for this reason Schmitt’s political community is something “foreign to community [*gemeinschaftsfremd*] and in this sense a-völkish.”¹⁷⁹ Carl Schmitt’s people are not actually a people since they have no positive identity without the existence of another, hostile people.

Heidegger’s Concept of the Political: Care and Self-assertion

In Heidegger’s seminar on Hegel *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, he makes a similar critique as Koellreutter. According to the seminar protocol, Heidegger says: “If presently the essence of the political is spoken as the friend-enemy-relationship, therefore merely the consequence of the cause has been erected: the political as the friend-enemy-relationship appears first upon the ground of the self-assertion [*Selbstbehauptung*] of the historical Dasein of a people” (GA 86: 655). Thus, for Heidegger, Schmitt’s concept of the political is secondary, grounded upon the self-assertion of a people. A people have enemies, because it is a people, not vice-versa. Indeed, Heidegger goes so far as to argue that Schmitt thinks “liberally,” since he fails to attend to the essential being of the people (GA 86: 174/186). Rejecting Schmitt’s claim that Hegel’s philosophy of the state had “died,” Heidegger turns to give an extended account of

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 48.

¹⁷⁸ I am not translating this word precisely because no English equivalent captures its meaning. “A-völkish” could be translated as “a-populist” or “a-national,” but I want to emphasize the translation of the “Volk” as “people.” “A-völkish” refers something that undermines the identity of a people.

¹⁷⁹ Koellreutter, *Volk und Staat in der Weltanschauung des Nationalsozialismus*, 8.

that theory in order to demonstrate the living kernel of Hegel's thought, which will express a more complicated relationship between the state and people. To this end, Heidegger presents his own concept of the political: self-assertion and care of the people through the state, upon which the secondary category of an enemy could be posited.

The first Hegelian element in Heidegger's concept of the political is the value that he places on the state. By the state, Heidegger does not mean a legal apparatus. "The state is not a mechanical legal apparatus [*mechanischer Gesetzesapparat*]; besides the establishment of economy, art, science and religion, the state means the living order [*lebednige...Ordnung*], permeated by mutual trust and responsibility, in which and through which the people realize their historical existence [Dasein]" (GA 16: 302). This identification of the state with a living order, echoes Hegel's claim that the state is an "organism [*Organismus*]," vitally expressed in a holistic constitution (GW 26.3: 1412-1413/290 A). Hence, Heidegger's task of constructing an account of the "National Socialist Revolution," consists in rendering it amenable to an organic image of the state. Furthermore, Heidegger also accepts the Hegelian position that a people recognizes itself, as such, through the state (GA 86: 627).

But what is the value of interpreting the state according to the image of an organism, rather than a legal mechanical instrument? If the relationship is defined in terms of a legal mechanism, then it is understood as a system of rules that regulate behavior, rendering the state as an external authority that is imposed upon the people, who are tasked with following these rules or suffer the mechanism of punishment, e.g., fines or imprisonment. Such interpretation fosters the view that the people and state are either in opposition to each other or, at the very least, that the state is a necessary evil for regulating its citizens. In either case, the unity between the people and state are fractured, introducing disunity and discontent within the system.

Understanding the state in terms of a living organism, means viewing it as a system of parts that are determined and organized by the whole, which in turn become the means by which the whole can continue to exist; a problem with the part can seriously damage the whole, e.g., removing the heart kills the organism. Politically, this view recognizes that the state is composed of the people and requires their “mutual trust and responsibility” in order for it to exist. If the people are tasked with taking responsibility for the state, then they are no longer in an antagonistic relationship to it, promoting unity and contentment. Thus, like Hegel, Heidegger seeks an organic unity between the people and state, where the people are formed through the state and are then held responsible for the state’s existence.

In order to more fully account for the power of the state to form a people, Heidegger also appeals to another key Hegelian concept: mutual recognition (*wechselseitigen Anerkennung*). As stated in the seminar protocol: “In this occurrence of mutual recognition also occurs right. This self-standing being with – and against another is freedom. And the complete recognition [*vollendete Anerkennung*] occurs in the state, in which a people comes to be itself” (GA 86: 627). Mutual recognition is a crucial concept for understanding Hegel’s view of the state. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel famously presents his master-servant dialectic, which accounts for the origin of self-consciousness (*Selbstbewusstsein*).

In brief, in the encounter with another consciousness, the conscious subject seeks recognition of itself as self-conscious. According to Hegel, this desire is initially expressed violently, i.e., seeking to destroy the other consciousness that threatens its singular self-identity. Hegel writes: “The relation of both self-consciousnesses is thus determined in such a way that it is through a life and death struggle [*Kampf auf Leben und Tod*] that each proves its worth to itself, and that both prove their worth to each other” (GW 9: 111/111). However, the death of the

other leaves this desire unsatisfied, since there is no longer a consciousness available for recognition. To resolve this problem, the conscious subject seeks to render servile the other, leaving them on hand for recognition of itself as master, which is to say a free or self-sufficient (*Selbständig*), self-conscious being. But even this solution ultimately fails. The dialectical negation occurs where the master becomes dependent upon the labor of the slave, who in turn becomes more independent through said labor (GW 9: 114/114-115). Self-sufficiency is accorded to the slave and lost for the master.

The speculative resolution occurs through the introduction of a third term, mutual recognition. In such a condition, both self-consciousnesses would recognize each other such, without giving way to violence or subordination: “They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other” (GW 9: 111/110). In such a condition, not only would subjects recognize each other as self-consciousnesses, they would also recognize each other as free or self-sufficient. In connecting freedom with recognition, Hegel intimates the political implications of mutual recognition and the specific role that the state plays therein.

In the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel continues his discussion of mutual recognition in explicitly political terms. This takes shape in two ways. First, recognition is understood as a condition for right to own property. One cannot simply will or assert that something belongs to them, it has to also be “recognizable by others [*für Andere erkennbar*]” (GW 26.2: 820/81 A; GW 26.3: 1130/81 A). This recognition is the necessary condition for a social contract, which in this instance means the existence of a “community [*Gemeinsamkeit*]” who mutually recognize each other’s property rights (GW 26.2: 836-837/103). Personhood as property bearing requires mutual recognition in a community, which primarily means the existence of a state. It is for this very reason that Hegel rejects the traditional contract theory

which posits that people enter into a contract, which then forms a state. Recognition as free, rights bearing persons is conditioned upon by the state. As referenced above, Heidegger also agrees with this account of recognition. He approvingly writes that “mutual recognition” occurs *as* “right” and this occurs in “the state,” through which the people come to be (GA 86: 627). Thus, Heidegger’s account of National Socialism is consistent with Hegelian mutual recognition, both of which center the power of the state to form a people.

The second way that mutual recognition is presented by Hegel’s political theory takes shape in his discussion of international politics, where he defends the absolute sovereignty of “the people as state [*das Volk als Staat*],” which needs to be recognized by other sovereign nations. Hegel writes: “The state has a primary and absolute entitlement to be a sovereign and independent power in the eyes of others, i.e., to be recognized by them” (GW 14.1: 269/366-367). Just as people can only be free, or sovereign, over themselves, through the existence of the state, so too can a state only be sovereign through being recognized by other states. Thus, the unity of the people and state are conditioned upon the recognition by another political body.

That Heidegger takes up this international account of mutual recognition into his broader philosophical project is evident from a contemporaneous talk entitled, “The Present Situation and the Prospective Task of German Philosophy” (GA 16: 316-334). What starts as a meditation on the contemporary state of German philosophy ends in a political commentary on the necessity of recognition. In line with his other writings from around the same time period, Heidegger articulates his belief that the West is in a form of decline (*Untergang*), which it needs to be overcome. To this end, he calls for the emergence of a historical consciousness that would allow for the reflection on the “Dasein” of the German people. In order to understand the historical crisis facing them, the German people must recognize their existence as historical. Only then can

they be free to properly respond to this crisis. However, this is not the sole task of the German people. Just as in Hegel's account international relations, the German people can only recognize themselves as a people through mutually recognizing others. Heidegger argues that a community of mutually recognizing people is necessary, which is of course facilitated through the state, but this is not to be identified with an organized legal body of nation states. He writes:

This true historical freedom as the self-standing recognition of the people to the people does not require the organized pseudo-community [*Scheingemeinschaft*] of a "league of nations [*Liga der Nationen*]." But the liberation of a people to itself occurs through the state... A state *is* only in that it *becomes, becoming the historical being* of beings, called the *people*. Thus, the true historical freedom of the European peoples, however, is the requirement that the West once again spiritually-historically come to itself and that its fate in the great decision of the earth against the Asiatic [*Asiatische*] be self-positing (GA 16: 333).

Mutual recognition, then, becomes a crucial concept for understanding Heidegger's account of the political and his political project in the early 1930s, i.e., overcoming the decline of the West/Europe. The peoples of the West have to come together against what is perceived as non-Western and threatening, the Asiatic.¹⁸⁰ In a somewhat similar fashion to Schmitt, in order to defend itself against a perceived enemy, the German people must recognize itself as a historical people, who exist in relation to other Western/European peoples. In doing so, the German people become free, or able to properly respond to the spiritual-historical moment.

¹⁸⁰ What Heidegger means by "Asiatic" is not clear in this text. At its most anodyne, it means that which is eastern, or that which is categorically considered non-Western. However, given the common identification of the Soviet Union as eastern and Asian, then this term could also refer to the potential threat posed by Russia.

This entangled relationship of a people to others, be they European or Asiatic, friend or foe, is evident at very end of Heidegger's seminar on Hegel *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Heidegger's concludes his long reflection on Hegel's account of the state with the question of what belongs to the essence of the political: "*Die Fragen nach dem Wesen des Politischen*" (GA 16: 652). At this point, Heidegger explicitly confronts Schmitt's concept of the political, the determination of the friend and enemy. He also chooses to explicate the meaning of the political through etymology. The political is course reducible to its Greek term πόλις (GA 86: 654). While the term can be simply translated as "city," "state," or "city-state," Heidegger illustrates the unique sense of πόλις by means of Homer's *Odyssey*: "Around the city he (Odysseus) had drawn a wall, he had built houses and made temples of for the gods and divided the ploughlands."¹⁸¹ The πόλις is the "middle point [*die Mitte*]" of a given territory, where the various functions of human life are oriented, e.g., governance, economics, and the law. Heidegger further emphasizes the significance of the wall. "This centrality in the essence of the πόλις will be known according to the outside through the protective and defiant wall as the boundary against the outside world as its original and natural enemies [*Feinde*]" (GA 86: 654). In this manner, the πόλις appears consistent with Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction. The πόλις is partially defined by its delimitation from what is external to it, i.e., what is other or foreign. However, Heidegger argues that the wall also refers to the essence of the people as such, rendering the determination of the outside, i.e., of the enemy, secondary. The free and self-determined people are those who establish the wall in the first place. Heidegger identifies this act as self-assertion, or *Selbstbehauptung*.

¹⁸¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Trans. A. T. Murray (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), lines 9-10.

This term initially appears in his rectoral address, entitled “The Self-Assertion of the German University [*Die Selbstauptung der Deutschen Universität*]” (GA 16: 107-117). In this address, Heidegger discusses the necessity that the university grasp and will its essence into being. This is the meaning of self-assertion: “The self-assertion of the German university is the originary, common will to its essence” (GA 16: 108). “*Behauptung*” means assertion or claim. Through asserting itself, the German University claims what it *is*, i.e., its essence. In its reflexive-verbal form, “*sich behaupten*,” it also has the sense of standing one’s ground. The German University stands its ground against the historical forces that would reduce its function to mere instrument of education or vocational training.

With this in mind, Heidegger credits the university, in conjunction with the state, with the task of forming and asserting the spiritual destiny of the German people as such. “The will to the essence of the German university is the will to science [*Wissenschaft*] as will to the historical spiritual mission of the German people as those who in its state is a self-knowing people [*sich selbst wissenden Volkes*]. Specifically, Science and German destiny must come in the essential will to power [*Wesenwillen zur Macht*]” (GA 16: 108). The German people are defined by their intimate self-knowledge, i.e., their unique destiny, which is articulated as a project of scientific knowledge. The university is the institution that provides this knowledge, informing the people of who they are and what history has tasked them with achieving. Because, as mentioned above, Heidegger defines National Socialism as the project of educating the people into the people through the state, then this project is dominated largely by the university system: “*Such* education into the highest knowledge” – knowledge of the people as people – “is the task of the new university” (GA 16: 307).

In the Hegel seminar, Heidegger redeploys “self-assertion” to mean the act whereby πόλις and its people assert their freedom and *autonomy* from their “original and natural enemies” (GA 86: 654). By freedom, Heidegger evokes the Greek word ἐλευθερία, which he takes to mean freedom from outside forces. By autonomy, Heidegger uses the Greek word αὐτονομία, which refers to the freedom of the πόλις to establish and make use of its own laws and customs (νόμος). In accord with his interpretation of Hegel’s political philosophy, Heidegger describes αὐτονομία by use of the term self-sufficiency or *Selbstständigkeit*. For Heidegger, self-assertion brings together these two variations of freedom necessary for the πόλις. “The comprehensive unity of ἐλευθερία and αὐτονομία constitutes the essence of the πόλις and lets itself be condensed in: *self-assertion*” (GA 86: 655). We can take this to mean, then, that self-assertion constitutes the essence of the πόλις and is therefore an essential determination of the political. To the extent that the contemporary German state corresponds to the Greek πόλις, it should be obvious why the state would play such an important role in Hegel’s political philosophy. Only through the self-assertion of the university and state can the people exist as a free and autonomous being.

The self-assertion of the people through the walls of the πόλις determines the inside and outside, the friendly and hostile. This would appear to be consistent with Schmitt’s definition of the political as the friend-enemy distinction. However, like Koellruetter, Heidegger criticizes Schmitt for rendering the friend as an effect of the enemy. It confuses the consequence for the cause and violates the autonomy of the people to determine themselves through the state. As such, the friend is left indeterminate, a mere “not-enemy.” For Heidegger, the self-assertion of the people is an act of freedom and autonomy, one that is not determined from or conditioned by the outside; it is the friend who determines the enemy. Returning to the quote from above: “If contemporary essence of the political is spoken as the friend-enemy-relationship, so is therefore

only the consequence of the cause has been erected: the political as friend-enemy relationship appears first from the ground of the self-assertion of the historical Dasein of a people” (GA 86: 655). Thus, Heidegger inverts Schmitt’s position in order to grant autonomy to the people. Nevertheless, like Schmitt, he still affirms the essential role of the state, or πόλις, in the forming of the people. Heidegger certainly does not render the people into an apolitical entity, but he does think that the people needs the state in order to concretely exist. It is the activity of the state that renders the people into a people in the first place (GA 16: 307). It is in this manner that Heidegger carries with political Hegelianism, even if it is contrary to National Socialist orthodoxy. Indeed, in his notes for the seminar, he approvingly identifies the state with the “being of the people” (GA 86: 82/117).

But he also adds a further determination of the state, which becomes his second concept of the political. The state is also the being of “care [*Sorge*].” State is the care of a people; which Heidegger later identifies with the political itself: “The political (that is) being = care of the people (not ‘for’ the people) and here now the appearing possibilities” (GA 86: 174/187). He distinguishes “of” from “for” in order to emphasize that the political is as an activity *of* the people, as opposed to something done *for* the people, i.e., through the state understood as an independent apparatus. In this determination, Heidegger tacitly separates himself from Schmitt, whose mistrust of popular sovereignty leads him to affirm the power of the state over and above the people.

Care is certainly not an arbitrary term for Heidegger. Rather it is essential concept of his broader philosophical project, i.e., re-raising the question of being. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger identifies “care” as the structure of Dasein’s being as a whole. Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of being means that it is fundamentally concerned about its existence.

Dasein does not simply exist, it is invested in its existence. For this same reason, it encounters other entities in the world in terms of this concern. For example, I register a dark cloudy sky as a sign for rain, which results in my choosing to commute by a ride share, rather than walk. This existential concern that organizes one's world defines care. Heidegger writes, "the being of Dasein means being-ahead-of-oneself-already-in (the world) as being-together-with (innerworldly beings encountered). This being fills in the significance of the term *care*, which is used in a purely ontological and existential way" (SZ: 192/186). Granted that temporality will be revealed as the ontological ground of Dasein's being, then care will also be structurally reduced to temporality. "The primordial unity of the structure of care lies in temporality" (SZ: 327/312). Care is demonstrated in Dasein's retention of past experiences and the anticipation of futural possibilities. Insofar as *Being and Time* is invested in re-raising the question of being from out of Dasein's temporality, then care emerges as one of its essential conditions of possibility.

Care could be rendered political in *Being and Time*, given that Dasein does not exist in a vacuum, but always historically and in a "community of people" (SZ: 384/366). However, it is not until Heidegger's explicit turn to politics in the early 1930s that this implication is fleshed out. Hence, in his Hegel seminar, the state is defined in terms of care: "State as being of the people; being of care" (GA 86: 82/117). Through the mediation of the state, the people express the fundamental concern for their existence. In this manner, the state allows the people to exist as an identifiable entity. Not surprisingly, given that Heidegger defines the National Socialist revolution as the formation of the people *into* a people through the activity of the state, then caring fundamentally belongs to this revolution as well. Indeed, "care" is precisely what defines the meaning of "socialism" in National Socialism. Heidegger says in 1934:

The new spirit of the German people is not unfettered, domineering and warmonger nationalism, rather national *socialism*. However, socialism does not mean a mere alteration of economic mentality; nor a bleak leveling down and glorification of poverty; nor does it not also mean the choiceless management of an aimless common good – rather: socialism is the care around the inner order [*die innere Ordnung*] of the community of the people. Socialism therefore wants hierarchy [*Rangordnung*] according to calling and work, it wants the dignity of every work and sacrosanct honor [*Ehre*] of the historical Dasein of the people (GA 16: 304).

According to Heidegger, nationalism without socialism is violent and oppressive; socialism gives nationalism a concerned approach to the people. But it also is distinguished from the modes of socialism that are oriented around economic redistribution. National socialism is not care regarding a class of people, but the people as a whole and according to an “inner order.” By positing such an inherent order, Heidegger emphasizes that National Socialism is necessarily hierarchical, it allocates each person their calling and work according to the necessary and internal order of the community.

It can be concluded that Heidegger’s early search for the key categories of the political – self-assertion and care – was oriented around articulating the spirit of National Socialism. Heidegger already had in mind the proper form of governance and sought to articulate its political character. Hence, Heidegger’s attempt at articulating a concept of the political is inextricable from his task of understanding the spirit of the National Socialist revolution, if not the ontic practices of the party itself. Regardless of his shifting views of self-assertion and care, and the radical changes in his philosophical project, Heidegger nonetheless remained committed

to one essential facet of this early concept of the political: the formation of a people as people, in and through a πόλις.

Conclusion: Fire, Spirit, and Tragedy

For Heidegger, trying to render the history of being comprehensive in terms of Hegel's history of spirit would be the contradictory equivalent of rendering fire from water. Is it not curious then that Heidegger concludes, in a 1953 piece on Georg Trakl, that spirit is indeed fire: "Spirit is flame [*Flamme*]." ¹⁸² For Derrida, this signifies that spirit is "auto-affective," spirit burns or consumes itself in the very process of its development. ¹⁸³ Is this significantly different than Hegel's account of spirit? Hegelian spirit is also auto-effective, it develops itself according to its determinate negation. After all, the first determinate negations of Hegel's system, i.e., the concepts of becoming and time, are metaphorically expressed by Heraclitus as fire. "Fire is physical time, absolute unrest, absolute disintegration of existence, the passing away of the 'other,' but also of itself; and hence we can understand how Heraclitus, proceeding from his fundamental determination, could quite logically call fire the notion of the process" (LHP I: 287). Fire preserves itself in its very destruction and as soon as it can no longer burn it perishes.

Against Heidegger's own objections, I would argue that the metaphor of spirit and fire is proper way understand Heidegger's history of being. In his 1938-1939 *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger identifies being as such with a "forge [*Esse*]:"

Being – the forge of the glowing fire in whose darkness the creative productive counter gaze of humans and gods finds itself, so as to radiate in the guise of a being in the

¹⁸² Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 84.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 98.

grounded preservation of its truth. But where are the sure blacksmiths [*Schmiede*] who on such a forge hammer the truth of beyng into beings? (GA 95: 205/159).

Just as Heidegger had elsewhere described beyng as the clearing of light which reveals beings, he now describes beyng as the “glowing fire” from which human beings are able to perceive beings while nonetheless preserving the self-concealing light that revealed them in the first place.¹⁸⁴ The light from the fire is not perceived as such, and for that reason is identified with “darkness.” Those future ones who will clear the truth of beyng are now rendered into the “sure blacksmiths.” It is these blacksmiths that will attend to the tragic self-concealment of beyng, its submergence or *Untergang*, and bring about another historical beginning. Given Heidegger’s 1935 view that spirit designates the awareness of beings as a whole, then might not these blacksmiths also be infused with spirit? Is this another instance of Heidegger’s hidden Hegelianism? One might be inclined to say yes. As discussed in the first half of this chapter, Heidegger’s history of beyng affirms Hegel’s history of philosophy to the extent that the emergence (*Aufgang*) of the latter presupposes and preserves the submergence (*Untergang*), of the truth of beyng. Another beginning stands at the doorstep of the first beginning, a beginning expertly described by Hegel’s philosophy of history.

But what of spirit? Heidegger’s middle work expresses a strong ambiguity of the term spirit. As already discussed, his early affirmation of National Socialism was marked by the consistent use of the term spirit, a use that reflected the positive influence of Hegel’s philosophy

¹⁸⁴ It is important to note that in 1942 Heidegger also metaphysically identifies being with the “hearth [*Herd*]” and its fire. Referencing the Pythagorean Philolaos, Heidegger claims that the “hearth” is the “middle [*Mitte*] of beings, to which all beings, because and insofar as they are beings, are drawn in the commencement. The hearth of the middle of beings is being. Being is hearth. For the essence of being for the Greeks is φύσις – that illumination that emerges of its own accord and is meditated by nothing else but is itself the middle” (GA 53: 140/112). The light from the hearth is the concealed middle or means by which beings are unconcealed.

on his own thought. Yet by the late 30s, after Heidegger had begun to express serious criticisms of National Socialism, spirit takes on more negative connotations. For example, Heidegger writes in his 1939-1941 *Black Notebooks*: “Within the machinational domain, where everything becomes an expedient, even the corresponding ‘spiritual’ groundings can accordingly be set up and arranged expediently for the respective attitudes, since ‘spirit’ itself is indeed only an expedient standing in service to the empowerment of machination and receiving its orders” (GA 96: 113/88). On the one hand, “spirit” is now designated as a subsidiary of machinational power. Elsewhere, Heidegger denigrates “spirit” as simply another form of “culture,” something also subject to machination, e.g., the culture industry (GA 96: 89/71). On the other hand, Heidegger use of quotation marks signifies that this might not be the only sense of spirit. “Spirit” is not truly spirit. This is evidenced by his subsequent identification of machination as “spiritless [*geist-losen*] ‘spirit’” (GA 96: 115/90). Aside from denigrated “spirit,” there is another spirit worthy of reverence. But does this spirit resist machination? No, Heidegger claims that the “danger of this spiritless ‘spirit’” is that even “resistance” against machination is just another form of what is “merely machinational” (GA 96: 115/90).

Heidegger’s view of spirit without resistance reveals the tragic character of his politics. With the aim of philosophically grounding the National Socialist revolution, a revolution tasked with avoiding historical decline in Europe, Heidegger constructs an account of the political via the dual influence of Hegel and Schmitt. The political is the self-assertion and care of a people in and through the activity of the state. By the late 30s and early 40s, however, Heidegger rejects the very concept of the political. In his 1942-1943 lecture course on Parmenides, he criticizes the concept because it is tethered to the modern state, which itself is an expression of the metaphysical concept of the will to power (GA 54: 135/91). Along with his criticisms of the

political, Heidegger also expresses a hostility to the very practice of politics: “Politics is the genuine executor [*eigentliche Vollstreckerin*] of the machination of beings and can only be grasped as metaphysics – every other valuation does not reach far enough” (GA 96: 43/34). Politics and the political are phenomena steeped in the nihilism of modernity, rendered consonant with technological ordering that makes historical decisions impossible. But political resistance would be futile, since it would be by definition *political*. Thus, even while Heidegger maintains the need for another beginning, humans still need to carry out the first beginning to its logical conclusion. This means carrying out the necessary political actions as well.

The failure of the political is symptomatic of the failure of spirit. In his essay “The Politics of Spirit and the Self-Destruction of the State to Come,” Andrew J. Mitchell defines Heideggerian spirit as something “ecstatic,” i.e., always tethered to something outside itself, which in turn affects spirit. “Spirit belongs to the world, to the outside, to this ‘medium’ (*Mitte*) and essentially so: it is found in the midst of beings. Spirit is ‘mediated.’”¹⁸⁵ It is important to note, as Mitchell does, that *πόλις* is defined by Heidegger as a “medium [*Mitte*]” (GA 86: 608). The state qua *πόλις* is the medium through which spirit is mediated, i.e., where it transcends itself. In this manner, the state always goes beyond itself, seeking what is coming, including the spirit of the National Socialist state, which is essentially connected with the coming German future. The political project of the forming the people is necessarily incomplete and always arriving for Heidegger. But, according to Mitchell, this is precisely what dooms Heidegger’s positive political project. In order to exist, spirit always seeks an outside, but this ultimately results in its undoing.

¹⁸⁵ Andrew J. Mitchell, “The Politics of Spirit and the Self-destruction of the State to Come: Heidegger’s Rectorate in the Black Notebooks,” *Phenomenology and The Political* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 63.

Reading Heidegger's commentary on his rectorship in his *Black Notebooks*, Mitchell notes that there are three forces that undermine spirit's mediation and the spiritual National Socialism: mediocrity, forgery, and enmity. Mediocrity accepts what is presently the case and denies spirit's mediation towards something futural; forgery appears like it is spiritual but is in fact a fake that hinders further spiritual development. The most essential problem for spirit is enmity. Enmity is a state of feeling opposed to someone or something, which for Schmitt was the essence of the political, i.e., the friend-enemy distinction. While Heidegger was invested in forming a positive account of the people that were not secondary to an enemy, this does not mean that enmity was not crucial for Heidegger's political thinking.

In his 1933-1934 winter lecture course, *On the Essence of Truth*, Heidegger engages in a meditation on Heraclitus' claim that πόλεμος or war (conflict) is the father of all things (GA 36/37: 90/72). In this lecture, Heidegger argues that an "enemy" of Dasein is necessary. In the absence of such an enemy, it is imperative to "find" one, "so that this standing against the enemy may happen and so that Dasein may not lose its edge" (GA 36/37: 91/73). Like spirit, Dasein is ecstatically bound to an enemy that helps give it definition. Even in his later writing on Hegel, Heidegger continues to maintain that the πόλις requires a wall and is therefore always related to an outside and the possibility of invasion by enemies (GA 86: 654). However, in this earlier lecture course, Heidegger does not simply posit that an enemy exists, rather he urges "total annihilation" (GA 36/37: 91/73). This logic intimates the tragic failure of spirit as mediation. In seeking to go beyond itself, to find an enemy, it then sets itself to annihilate that enemy as an external threat. Heideggerian spirit annihilates the outside that is constitutive of its activity. Hence, to the extent that there is spiritual National Socialism, it is undermined by its annihilative relationship to the outside, i.e., to the other. As Mitchell explains: "If enmity is tied to *Widersein*,

to the understanding of Dasein's or a people's identity, then the urge to annihilate the enmity is ultimately an attack on oneself. In the name of spiritual existence, Heidegger attacks spiritual existence."¹⁸⁶ The self-destruction of spirit and consequently the state implicate Heidegger's personal involvement in National Socialism. Despite worrying about this failure, it is "he who works at its destruction, or rather its downfall, *Untergang*."¹⁸⁷ Mitchell notes that throughout the *Black Notebooks*, not only does Heidegger point to the possibility of *Untergang* but urges it on. This was revealed in chapter two to be the primary result of his tragic construction of the history of beyng, which is itself due to the tragedy of beyng itself: beyng is unconcealed only through its submergence (*Untergang*), i.e., self-concealment. Thus, the tragedy of spirit is contextualized by the overall tragic character of beyng.

Heidegger's history of beyng results in a tragic situation where no solution is easy or painless. In the *Black Notebooks*, this situation is rendered as one between "destruction [*Zerstörung*]" or "devastation [*Verwüstung*]." Destruction paves the way for another beginning, while devastation forecloses that possibility once and for all (GA 95: 366/287; GA 96: 3/3). Destruction is therefore justified if it helps people to avoid devastation. Despite criticizing the concept of the political, the modern state and ontic political practices, Heidegger's tragic thinking disallows him from condemning these phenomena since they are necessary for another beginning. Hence, Mitchell notes that Heidegger never really viewed his rectorship as a failure, since it was necessary for another beginning: "Failure shadows the beginning. The failure of the rectorate would thus be no failure at all, but a constitutive part of a 'new beginning.'"¹⁸⁸ This also perhaps explains why Heidegger never fully disavows National Socialism, even while his

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

criticisms become more incisive. Between 1938 and 1939, he writes: “Full insight into my earlier delusion regarding the essence and the essential historical force of National Socialism first resulted in the necessity of affirming National Socialism and indeed on thoughtful grounds” (GA 95: 408/318). As the consummation of modernity, National Socialism fosters the condition for another beginning, and for that reason Heidegger does not deny its necessity. Given his involvement in the party, this tragic mode of thought seems to suggest that Heidegger ultimately absolves himself of culpability and guilt. It was “necessary” for him to affirm National Socialism, and for this reason he is just another tragic actor, i.e., condemned by a fate that he is perhaps responsible for but not morally guilty.

Regardless of how we interpret the morality of Heidegger’s behavior, these thoughts on Heidegger’s early and later account of the political beg the question as to why he so sharply changed his views. Precisely why did his history of being transition from avoiding *Untergang* to affirming it as a tragic necessity? Why did he grow disillusioned with the very concept of the political, even though he maintained its necessity? Likewise, what exactly led to Heidegger’s disillusionment with the political practices of National Socialism? Why did Heidegger’s account of the political become increasingly tragic? The answers lay with his denigration of the political as an instance of the will to power. Heidegger came to identify the very concept of power as a species of the metaphysical forgetting of the truth of being. He develops this view through a confrontation with two consummate figures of the first beginning, those who would go beyond even Hegel’s system: Friedrich Nietzsche and Ernst Jünger.

Chapter Four

Being and Power: Heidegger's Confrontation with Nietzsche and Jünger

Between 1933 and 1935, Heidegger appears to hold fast to the task of recovering the concept of the political in order to salvage the spirit of the National Socialist revolution. By the late 30s, however, he expresses serious misgivings not only about the movement, but also the practice of politics and the very idea of the political itself. In his 1939-1941 *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger criticizes that politics “no longer has anything to do with the πόλις nor with morals and least of all with ‘becoming a people.’” His initial definition of the political – the formation, self-assertion, and care of a people through the state – no longer applies in the contemporary era. Politics now means the “forceful gathering of all means of power and ways of violence” (GA 96: 43/34). This accords with the claim from his 1942-1943 winter lecture course on Parmenides, in which Heidegger rejects the concept of the political because it is consistent with the modern state and the final form of metaphysical thought, i.e., the will to power (GA 54: 134/90). National Socialism itself also becomes symptomatic of a metaphysics of power insofar as it is now rendered into the consummation of modernity (GA 95: 408/318). What accounts for this radical change in Heidegger's political opinions? The broad argument of this chapter is that this transition occurs through his confrontation with the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche and Ernst Jünger, who are themselves rendered into the consummate thinkers of modernity and nihilism.

Through this confrontation, Heidegger also stages a tacit confrontation with National Socialism. Heidegger states as much in his interview with *Der Spiegel* in 1966: “The Nietzsche-lectures began in 1936. Everyone able to hear, heard that this was a confrontation with National Socialism” (GA 16: 664). But what does this mean? Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will to power and the eternal recurrence of the same, further expressed in Jünger's description of the

modern world, exposes the essence of National Socialism, i.e., as a political force predicated on sheer power and violence. According to Heidegger's retrospective self-assessment, as early as 1933 he set as his task to "engage [*begegnen*]" with what was negative in the "party apparatus [*Parteiapparates*]" and to "save [*retten*], purify [*läutern*], and to strengthen [*festigen*] what was positive" (GA 16: 374, 486). To do this, Heidegger began a small reading circle to discuss the recently published writings of Ernst Jünger, which according to him expressed Nietzsche's metaphysics in concrete terms. Heidegger writes:

In the small circle I discussed these writings with my assistant Brock, and I tried to show how they express an essential understanding of Nietzsche's metaphysics, insofar as in the horizon of this metaphysics the history and present state of the west is seen and anticipated. Thinking from these writings and more essentially from their foundation [*Grundlagen*], we thought what was coming [*Kommende*], i.e., we attempted to engage [*zu begegnen*] with it at the same time in the confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*] with it (GA 16: 375).

Thus, a confrontation with National Socialism required an understanding of the historical moment, which is reflected above all in Nietzsche and Jünger's work.

In this chapter, I will argue that Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche and Jünger led him to reject his original theory of the political. Nietzsche and Jünger articulated the final shape of the forgetting of the truth of being by conceptually rendering beings as a whole into the will to power and the eternal recurrence of the same. Hence, according to the tragic construction of the history of being, the submergence (*Untergang*) of being is both concealed and preserved by the will to power. This means that the opportunity to appropriate the truth of being and thereby inaugurate another beginning requires confronting Nietzsche and Jünger. Insofar as this

confrontation also reveals that National Socialism is predicated on the will to power, then the other beginning also consists in confronting and overcoming the political movement itself.

This chapter will be primarily structured around three moments of Heidegger's confrontation with Jünger and, by extension, Nietzsche. In the first moment (1933-1943), Heidegger confronts Jünger and Nietzsche in order to properly account for the political character of National Socialism. National Socialism is rendered into a "work-state," which politically realizes the Nietzschean will to power via Jünger's theory of total mobilization and the *Gestalt* of the worker.¹⁸⁹ In the second moment (1935-1940), as Heidegger formulates his history of being, Jünger and Nietzsche are rendered into the consummate figures of the nihilistic forgetting of being and, thus, the conditional thinkers for appropriating the event that will inaugurate another beginning. Within this moment, Heidegger calls for the overcoming of not only Jünger and Nietzsche, but also National Socialism itself. In the third moment (1945-1960), Heidegger continues to engage with Jünger with the aim of confronting metaphysics. However, this moment is also marked by a noticeable shift in Heidegger's writing. In contrast to his emphasis on historical decision and transition in his poetic writings, Heidegger embraces a form of active passivity, a rejection of the will as such, in favor of a form of letting beings be, what he calls *Gelassenheit* or releasement. Furthermore, I will show how Heidegger's second formulation of the essence of technology, i.e., *Ge-Stell*, continues to reflect the influence of Jünger while nonetheless moving beyond his metaphysical reflections on technology, i.e., technology and *Gestalt*. I will conclude with a reflection on politics and power in Heidegger's history of being. The transition to the other beginning requires a critical rejection of politics as such, which is

¹⁸⁹ For this essay, I leave *Gestalt* untranslated in order to account for Heidegger and Jünger's unique use of the term. It is most often translated as "form," "figure," or "shape."

intrinsically tethered to the will to power, reflected in the National Socialist state. However, this conclusion does not foreclose further reflection on the political. Rather, it invites us to speculate about another formulation of the political, or perhaps a formulation that is “pre-political [*Vorpolitische*],” which is intimated in Heidegger’s confrontation with the tragedies of Sophocles (GA 53: 102/82).

First Moment (1933-1935): Jünger, National Socialism, and The Work-State

As discussed in chapter two, Heidegger’s early concept of the political contains two determinations: self-assertion and care. With regard to care, he adds the further determination of work, or *Arbeit* (GA 86: 161/175). Caring is not abstract and passive, rather it is a concrete activity, intrinsically connected to ideas of labor and production. To care for something, one has to provide what is necessary for its continued existence, this of course requires some degree of labor. The state coordinates the labor of a given community, effectively producing and re-producing the people. But this is not necessarily an entirely top down phenomenon. As those who labor, the people are also involved in the continued existence of the state. Hence, Heidegger says in his 1934 lecture entitled, “The German University:” “work is every scientific deed and action done from the care of the people in the readiness for the will of the state [*Staatswillen*]” (GA 16: 303). He makes this theoretical connection between, the people, work and the state more forcefully in a 1933 speech for matriculating students entitled, “The German Student as Worker.” In this speech, Heidegger defines the National Socialist state in terms of work. “*In the work and as the work, this formative structure of the people’s Dasein [völkischen Daseins] is the state. The National Socialist state is the work-state [Arbeitsstaat]*” (GA 16: 205-206). The existence of the German people as a people occurs in and through the work of the National Socialist state. National Socialism is therefore defined by this work. Given that work as *Arbeit*

does not appear in Heidegger's earlier texts, what accounts for the sudden appearance of work as a philosophical and political concept? The answer lies in Heidegger's confrontation with the writings of Ernst Jünger.

As mentioned above, Heidegger claimed to have begun reading and discussing Jünger's work in 1933 in an attempt to confront not only the contemporary political reality, but what was "coming [*das Kommende*]" (GA 16: 375). This claim is corroborated by Heidegger's 1933 speech to matriculating students: "From a creative understanding of Nietzsche and from the ground of the experience of attrition warfare [*Materialschlacht*] in the world war, *Ernst Jünger* recently interpreted the coming way of being [*die heraufkommende Seinsart*] of humanity in the next era, *through* the *Gestalt* of the worker [*Gestalt des Arbeiters*] as such" (GA 16: 205). He was convinced that Jünger's account of work and the *Gestalt* of the worker anticipates future developments of the world, developments that are reflected in the project of the National Socialist state *qua* work-state.

While Heidegger retrospectively defends that his tenor as rector and engagement with Jünger were meant to confront the party apparatus and the coming political reality, it appears that at that time he was invested in affirming National Socialism through the idea of the worker, rather than criticizing it (GA 16: 375). Heidegger's early identification of National Socialism with the work-state does not serve as a point of criticism. I argue that Heidegger's initial formulation of the political and his task of accounting for the spirit of National Socialism led him to uncritically affirm Jünger's description of the world. But with the development of his history of being and his rupture with National Socialism, Heidegger's confrontation with Jünger becomes more critical. It would no longer be a matter of simply understanding Jünger, but of overcoming him. This marks the transition from the first moment of Heidegger's confrontation

with Jünger to the second. However, in order to make this transition, it is first necessary to understand who exactly Ernst Jünger is and why he had such a decisive influence on Heidegger.

Jünger first gained public notoriety with the publication in 1920 of his memoir *Storm of Steel (In Stahlgewittern)*, which documented his experiences of trench warfare in the First World War. He would quickly translate this celebrity into a career as a far-right political writer. During the Weimar era, Jünger published in a multitude of far-right publications, including *Arminius* and *Der Vormarsch*. Jünger published most extensively in *Die Standarte*, which served as the literary wing of the far-right paramilitary organization *Der Stahlhelm* (The Steel Helmet).¹⁹⁰ Jünger also published in the Nazi journal, *Völkischer Beobachter*; embracing the party early on as a vehicle for nationalist revolution.¹⁹¹ However, he would later become critical of the party for its parliamentary aspirations, its appeal to the middle-class, and its anti-Semitism. In 1929, he was explicitly criticized as a “renegade” by Joseph Goebbels newspaper, *Der Angriff*.¹⁹²

Through such publications, Jünger quickly became the preeminent representative of the German Conservative Revolution. As Roger Woods explains: “In the Weimar period, Jünger was the most significant representative of that branch of Conservative Revolution known as soldierly or new nationalism, which sought to carry forward military values and structures into peacetime society, and which redefined socialism in terms of the community of front-line soldiers.”¹⁹³ Hence, Jünger, and other conservative revolutionaries, sought to synthesize nationalism and socialism according to a military model that first found expression during World War One. The

¹⁹⁰ Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic*, 3.

¹⁹¹ Thomas Nevin, *Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 81.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁹³ Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic*, 9.

common experience of trench warfare among German men facilitated the belief in an organic solidarity that could become a source for revolutionary action, i.e., revolting against the Weimar liberal democracy, which was dominated by the bourgeois elite who were seen to have abandoned the war effort. Jünger extensively theorized this military model of nationalist socialism in his early 1930s writings, which would become a significant influence on Heidegger's thought.

In these writings, Jünger described a dialectic, whereby the bourgeoisie had provided the military, economic, and social conditions for the First World War, which ultimately resulted in the formation of a new historical subject, the worker (SW 7: 128/128). In dialectical form, the worker acts as an antithetical force to bourgeois liberalism. The work-state is the speculative third term that sublimates this antithesis, politically concretizing the revolution by the workers against the bourgeoisie. Jünger names this dialectical process "total mobilization" (*Totale Mobilmachung*), which is the state mobilization and synchronization of the entire population and distinct social spheres (economic, medical, educational, etc.), according to a military model. Through this process, the totality of life had become saturated by a "martial energy [*kriegerischen Energie*]" which can neither be stopped nor rendered partial (SW 7: 126-127). Indeed, mobilization continued even after the war had concluded, resulting in a greater synchronization of the state and economy, reflected, for example, in the "planned economy [*Planwirtschaft*]" of the Soviet Union (SW 7: 127/128).

However, encompassing a multitude of social spheres, total mobilization should not be reduced to a military phenomenon. For Jünger, the concept more broadly means a "mode of organizational thinking," which synthetically organized all spheres of life (SW 7: 135/134). But even this term is misleading because total mobilization is not a product of a thinking subject. As

a historical force, total mobilization *necessitates* organizational thought. In order to deal with the realities of modern life, workers, soldiers, statesmen, scientists, and engineers have to carry out mobilization. Hence, Jünger writes: “Total mobilization is far less consummated than it consummates itself [*selbst vollzieht*]; in war and peace, it expresses the secret and inexorable claim to which our life in the age of masses and machines subjects us” (SW 7: 128/128). Thus, the true agent of historical change is total mobilization itself.

In his 1932 book, *The Worker: Dominion and Form* (*Die Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt*), total mobilization takes on an explicitly metaphysical register, naming an ontological activity whereby life is reduced to sheer energy, which is ontically manifest in the technologies of industry and warfare. Jünger writes: “The task of total mobilization is the conversion of life itself into energy [*Lebens in Energie*], manifesting itself through business, technology, and transport, in the whirring of wheels, or in fire and movement on the battlefield” (SW 8: 136/224). For example, the life of the individual gunner is reduced and integrated into the total kinetic output of a machine gun; the output is then further integrated in the output of a battalion of machine guns, the battlefield, and, ultimately, the totality of the war itself, including the industrial manufacture of arms and goods.

For Jünger, the socio-historical consequence of such energetic reduction is the formation of a new historical subject, the worker. The worker is not the discrete bourgeois individual. Rather it is a subject intrinsically integrated into the force of total mobilization. The worker is simply another source of energetic output, which is precisely what determines its value. That the “worker” is not the name for an individual is indicated by Jünger’s use of the term “type (*typus*).” Rather than referring to the specific activity of an individual, i.e., someone who works,

the worker instead refers to a new “type [*Typus*]” of human being (SW 8: 125/75).¹⁹⁴ As a type, the worker is not even a mass of individuals, since through class hierarchical and function-based organizing, the mass achieves a “crystallin structure [*organische Konstruktion*],” or *Gestalt* (SW 8: 147/89). The emergence of this new type of human has two world-historical consequences. First, the life of the individual is eroded, in favor of the “life of the worker” (SW 7: 128/128). Second, as the object of labor, the earth as a whole begins to appear as a gigantic “workshop-landscape [*Werkstättenlandschaft*]” (SW 8: 107/176).

Instead of bemoaning the end of the liberal individualism, Jünger chooses to affirm total mobilization. Because this historical process is necessary and inevitable, it makes no sense to fight it. Jünger seeks to articulate the revolutionary potential of total mobilization, which will help overcome the various crises of the post-war era. With regard to the Weimar Republic in general, Jünger sees people who are committed to direct revolutionary action, but lack discipline. What is needed is to give this revolutionary potential a “*Gestalt*,” i.e., shape or form (SW 7: 135/133). Jünger pursues this task in *The Worker*, claiming that the text will render the “*Gestalt* of the worker visible” (SW 8: 13/xxx). The hope is that by doing so a “new rise for Germany” will be possible (SW 8: 13/14). In brief, Jünger hoped that the worker would be able to synthesize leftist appeals to labor power with the rightist appeal to national solidarity.

But what this looks like in practice remains abstract. Jünger certainly believed that the worker should acquire political “*Herrschaft*,” or dominion, and that they would abandon the values of liberalism. But what this concretely looks like is not fleshed out by Jünger. Indeed, he

¹⁹⁴ Jünger presumably acquires this term from Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power*, where the latter argues that human beings as a “species” are not “progressing.” For this reason, “higher types” of human beings are needed (KSA 13: 14[133]/§684). Jünger anticipates that this new type is the worker.

implies that this was intentional in an interview from the 1980s: “The important thing in *The Worker* is vision. The gist is a grandeur that is neither economic nor political, but quasi-mythological: the age of the gods is over, and we are entering the age of the titans.”¹⁹⁵ Rather than proposing an economic or political platform, and corresponding valuations, Jünger argues that the dominion of the worker is oriented around the sheer pursuit and actualization of power itself, i.e., power as value.

Near the end of *The Worker*, Jünger claims that the “goal” is “planetary dominion as the highest symbol of the new *Gestalt* (of the worker)” (SW 8: 310/187). The goal is dominion itself, which Jünger also identifies as the “legitimized will to power [*legitimierten Willen zur Macht*]” (SW 8: 83/47). Nietzsche had earlier identified the will to power as the fundamental drive of life and, later on, as the essence of being as such (KSA 5: 208/§259; KSA 13: 14[80] and 14[121]/§692-693). Beings as a whole seek to empower themselves and express said power. Jünger appropriates this insight but renders it into an historical task. While Nietzsche had pursued the critical project of the revaluation of all values, Jünger argues that this project is unnecessary and that it is “sufficient to see the new and to take part in it” (SW 8: 60/32). The will to power needs to be concretely actualized through the worker.¹⁹⁶ A clear political program is unnecessary to break the deadlock of bourgeois liberalism; what is needed is the will to power to decide in favor of power itself, rather than debate and deliberate about the political direction of Germany.

¹⁹⁵ Hervier, *The Details of Time*, 69.

¹⁹⁶ Although it is not verified that Jünger read this passage, Nietzsche appears to anticipate the latter’s account of the worker in *The Will to Power*. Nietzsche claims that workers should learn to feel like soldiers and that future workers will be defined by their raw “possession of power [*im Besitz der Macht*]” (KSA 12: 9[34]/§763; KSA 10: 9[47]/§764; KSA 10: 16[30]/§764; KSA 11: 39[22]/§764).

Heidegger accepted Jünger's interpretation of Nietzsche and his political project. But unlike Jünger, who remained steadfastly critical of National Socialism, Heidegger sought to render compatible the insights of *The Worker* and the party. Hence, Heidegger designates the National Socialist state the "work-state," or the state oriented according to the form of the worker (GA 16: 206). As mentioned, this relationship between the work and the National Socialist state is made most forcefully in his speech on the German University. It is argued here that work is the activity by which the people are coordinated with the will of the state. This defines the "socialism" that belongs to National Socialism.

Like Jünger, Heidegger criticizes the Marxist socialist conception of work, because it reduces labor to an exploited commodity (GA 16: 303). Even if Marx sought to de-alienate labor for the proletariat, he nonetheless still thinks of work in economic terms. Heidegger values the National Socialist conception of work because it concerns the very production of the people as such. This is what connects care and work in the National Socialist revolution. Heidegger writes:

The new spirit of the German people is not an unfettered, domineering and warmongering nationalism, rather national socialism [*nationaler Sozialismus*]. However, socialism does not mean a mere alteration of economic mentality, nor a bleak levelling down and glorification of poverty; nor does it mean the choiceless management of an aimless common good – rather: socialism is the care around the inner order [innere Ordnung] of the community of the people (GA 16: 304).

Through caring as work, the German people are properly ordered, constituting the very essence of National Socialism. National Socialism does not reduce the people down to a common denominator of labor, but hierarchically organizes the people into a political body. This forms

the second element of the Heideggerian concept of the political, the care and work through which the self-assertion of the people is institutionally constituted and maintained.

In accord with the view that this self-assertion is properly coordinated in and through the university system, Heidegger proposes a new vision of the university that would render students into Jüngerian workers (GA 16: 206). Heidegger explicitly claims that this view of the student was obtained through his reading of Jünger and, by extension, Nietzsche (GA 16: 205). For Jünger, “work” is neither a moral, economic, nor technical concept. Rather he defines work ontologically: “Work is thus not mere activity, but the expression of a specific being, seeking to fulfill its space, its time, its lawfulness [*seine Gesetzmäßigkeit*]” (SW 8: 95/56). Work is the activity by which the essence, or *Gestalt*, of the worker is expressed. Through such expression, the worker labors on the world, rendering it into a work, i.e., in complete correspondence with the will to power of the worker. Hence, the world becomes a work-world.

Heidegger also renders work itself ontological. Work is the manner by which humans “place” themselves “in confrontation with beings as a whole” (GA 16: 206). Work discloses the world and the things therein as objects of labor, i.e., things to be transformed and rendered meaningful for humans. For example, through making a garden, we encounter the soil, worms, plants, sunshine, seasons, etc. We render explicit our being-in-the-world, transforming not only that world, but ourselves as well, e.g., the human becomes “gardener.”

What world does the student as worker reveal? The work of students is to disclose the knowledge of the world that will make the people as a whole historical. Heidegger writes:

Because the new student himself is getting ready for the implementation of the national knowledge-claim [*völkischen Wissenanspruch*], *he is therefore a worker*. The previous student is only worker, because and insofar as he ‘studies.’ But, the new student ‘studies,’

because he is a worker. And ‘study’ now means: unfolding the will to become knowing, in order to consolidate [*festigen*] and improve [*steigern*] *that* knowledge, so that the force [*Kraft*] of our people will be historical (GA 16: 206).

As work, “study” signifies the will to develop the knowledge that will render the people historical, fulfilling the task of the National Socialist revolution. The people will understand themselves as a people and will be able to assert themselves as a world-historical entity. In Nietzschean-Jüngerian terms, the student as worker provides the epistemic conditions for the people to express and enhance their will to power. In the context of Heidegger’s early project of articulating the political and spiritual conditions for another historical beginning, in and through National Socialism, then understanding students as workers, rather than scholars, is necessary. To borrow from Marx, students are not just interpreting the world, they are changing it.

We can now better understand the meaning of the Heideggerian work-state. The work-state forms and renders powerful the people. Only by doing so can this people become a world-historical force, bearing the activity of the National Socialist revolution. Using Jünger’s term, in this way the student as worker achieves dominion. Thus, instead of veterans, for Heidegger, it is the students who are properly revolutionary. The National Socialist work-state begins and ends in the university, i.e., its self-assertion and care. However, as discussed in chapter two and three, Heidegger’s historical affirmation of National Socialism ultimately shifts with the historical destiny of being itself. By the later 1930s, Heidegger comes to not only critically confront National Socialism, but also Jünger’s account of the worker and Nietzsche’s will to power.

Second Moment (1939-1940): Nietzsche and Jünger

The second moment of Heidegger’s confrontation with Jünger, and by extension Nietzsche, takes place in the winter of 1939-1940, the result being a collection of notes and

commentaries, entitled, *Zu Ernst Jünger* (GA 90). Here, Heidegger presents Jünger as a misunderstood figure, assuming one does not think beyng-historically.

His [Jünger] fundamental position [*Grundstellung*] is – particularly if one is unable to experience it from Nietzsche’s fundamental metaphysical position and if one cannot, in turn, experience this as the consummation of western “metaphysics” and if one cannot experience this once more from out of the history of beyng – thoroughly “provocative” – “one-sided,” in many respects inadequate and in the fundamentals, not well thought out and established [*begründet*] (GA 90: 213).

Like the first moment of the confrontation, Heidegger still posits an essential relationship between Nietzsche and Jünger’s thought. But this relationship is changed in response to Heidegger’s formulation of the history of beyng. Nietzsche’s metaphysical position posits the will to power as the being of beings and the eternal recurrence as beings as a whole. This position consummates the history of western metaphysics, or the first beginning. Hence, accounting for the possibility of another beginning, requires a fundamental a confrontation with Nietzsche. Alongside this task, Heidegger posits the additional necessity of confronting Jünger. Unlike other commentators, Jünger was able to present the “actuality [*Wirklichkeit*]” of Nietzschean metaphysics, manifest in total mobilization and the figure of the worker (GA 90: 214). The second moment consists in demonstrating that Jünger is a metaphysical thinker, who furthered the consummation of the first beginning of philosophy, which opens up the possibility of grasping the truth of beyng and thereby inaugurating another historical beginning.

In order to properly frame Jünger’s fundamental position, I will first outline Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s metaphysical position. This interpretation is primarily fleshed out in Heidegger’s four volume commentary on Nietzsche, written as lecture courses and treatises

taking place between 1936-1946, and his poetic writings on the history of being. Although Jünger is not directly mentioned in Heidegger's Nietzsche courses, he does play a more explicit role in the latter writings. For example, alongside Spengler, Jünger is deemed the only thinker to develop western metaphysics beyond Nietzsche (GA 66: 27; GA 71: 116/99). He writes in *The Event*, that "the will to willing," or the will to power, as the "extreme essence of beingness," can only be properly experienced in the "transition" to the other beginning. But the occurrence of this essence can be "indicated," albeit "mediately," through certain interpretations of Nietzsche. In this case, Heidegger privileges Spengler's *Decline of the West* and Jünger's *The Worker* and his shorter text *On Pain* (GA 71: 116/99). Jünger discloses the will to willing as the most extreme and, therefore, culminating formulation of the being of beings.

Rendering the will to willing as the culmination of the first beginning appears inconsistent with Heidegger's earlier assertion that Hegel was the consummate philosopher because he had reduced the truth of being to the absolute idea. By the late 1930s, Heidegger views Nietzsche as someone who had not rejected the core of Hegel's metaphysics, but instead carried it to its logic conclusion. Heidegger defends this position through tethering Hegel's absolute idea and spirit to the faculty of the will, and the will to the will to power. For example, in 1941, Heidegger claims that there are two historical modes of conceiving being: Platonic-Christian and modern. The former posits a higher, causal being as the being of beings, i.e., God or a demiurge. The latter posits subjectivity itself as the being of beings, reducing beings as a whole to representations within cognition. The consummation of metaphysics consists in synthesizing these two functions: rendering the subject into cause, and representation into reality. Curiously, the primary faculty of such a synthesis is the will, the being that wills itself into being. This consummation is apparent regardless if one conceives of this will as the "will of spirit as

reason,” “the will of love,” or “the will to power” (GA 70). Hence, Hegel and Nietzsche are both consummate thinkers because they grasp the centrality of the will.

According to Heidegger, Hegel’s system is to be understood as the “metaphysics of absolute subjectivity of self-knowing will; that is, spirit” (GA 6.2: 178; Vol. 4: 147). Spirit is defined by the fact that it knows itself as free and this is a function of its will. This follows from Hegel’s connection of spirit with freedom; freedom is a mere abstraction without the will to actualize it. Hegel writes, “Will without freedom is an empty word, just as freedom is actual only as will or as subject” (GW 26.2: 777/35 A; GW 26.3: 1066/35). Hegel’s philosophy of right consists in revealing concrete conditions under which this will can be realized; this condition proves to be none other than the state. However, despite philosophically centering the will and its relationship to the state, Hegel insufficiently addresses the meaning of power. For Heidegger, this is precisely how Nietzsche’s account of the will moves beyond Hegel.

For Heidegger, Nietzsche’s metaphysics is also a form of absolute subjectivity, but one that understands the will in terms of power (GA 6.2: 177; Vol. 4: 147). Heidegger comprehensively explains the nature of this concept in the first volume of his Nietzsche writings, “The Will to Power as Art.” He initially clarifies that the “will to power is will to will, which is to say, willing is self-willing [*sich selbst wollen*]” (GA 6.1: 33; Vol. 1: 37). But this is not all that distinct from the self-willing that belongs to Hegelian spirit. Furthermore, willing defined as the will to will is circular and determines nothing about it. Hegel himself suggests the same criticism, when he points out that such a formulation would be abstract (GW 14.1: 44-45/57). Nietzsche avoids “vacuity” by conjoining the will and power: “Every willing is a willing to be more. Power itself only is as much as, and as long as, it remains a willing to be more power

[*Merh-Macht-sein-wollen*]” (GA 6.1: 56-57; Vol. 1: 60). Power provides “actuality” to the will, a will that is concrete (GA 6.1: 57: Vol. 1: 63).

But what Nietzsche means exactly by power is by no means obvious. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche identifies the will to power with life itself (KSA 5: 208/§259). Life does not passively exist, rather it wills itself to continue to exist by expanding and enhancing its power, i.e., its capacity to be. This claim is expanded upon significantly in his collection of posthumous notes, *The Will to Power*. Nietzsche writes: “what man wants, what every smallest part of living organism wants, is an increase in power [*ein Plus von Macht*],” which is further defined as the “original will to become stronger” (KSA 13: 14[175]/§702). Life wants to be stronger in order to better exercise its power. But importantly for Heidegger, Nietzsche also questions the sheer identification of life with will to power, by rendering the latter ontological; the will to power is called the “innermost essence of being [*das innerste Wesen des Seines*]” (KSA 13: 14[121] and 14[80]/§692-693). All beings exist, persist, and enhance themselves by virtue of the will to power.

This rendering of the will to power into a metaphysical principle is made even more forcefully in a note written sometime between 1883-1885: “To impose [*aufzuprägen*] upon becoming the character of being – that is the supreme will to power” (KSA 12: 7[54]/§617). For Nietzsche, the world is fundamentally an indefinite flux of perceptions and perspectives – i.e., becoming – which achieve representable stability through positing being via the will to power. The ascription of *a priori*, eternal valuations enhance power, presenting a stable world upon which power can be adequately expressed and secured. However, it is still unclear how Nietzsche can reconcile the identification of the will to power as both an enhancement of power, i.e., something that becomes, and as something that is fixed and stable, i.e., being as such. For

Heidegger, this requires understanding that the will to power is inseparable from Nietzsche's other metaphysical principle: the eternal recurrence of the same.

One of the primary claims of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche as metaphysician is that the will to power and eternal recurrence are co-belonging.¹⁹⁷ Heidegger writes in 1939: "Both thoughts – will to power and eternal recurrence of the same – say the same and think the same fundamental characteristic of beings as a whole" (GA 6.1: 432-433/Vol. 3: 10). What evidence does Heidegger have for positing this claim? The most prominent example of evidence is found in *The Will to Power*: "That everything recurs [*Das Alles wiederkehrt*] is the closest approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being: - high point of the meditation" (KSA 12: 7[54]/§617). The will to power imposes being upon becoming by affirming the eternal recurrence of beings as a whole. But what exactly is meant by eternal recurrence? What specific role does it play in Nietzsche's thought?

Nietzsche first mentions eternal recurrence in his 1882 text, *The Gay Science*. He presents a hypothetical narrative where someone is visited by a demon, who tells the former that they will eternally re-experience their life (KSA 3: 570/§341). This news serves as a measure of how we live our lives. If we respond to this demon with hatred and anger, calling this demon a devil, then we are living a terrible life. But if we respond with joy, calling this demon a God, then we are living a life worth living, i.e., a life worth affirming eternally. This concept reappears later as a metaphysical claim, rather than a thought experiment. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, for

¹⁹⁷ This interpretation of Nietzsche is explicitly posited in opposition to Alfred Baeumler and Karl Jaspers. On the one hand, Baeumler argues that eternal recurrence is in opposition to the will to power and argues that, in order for Nietzschean thought to be politically viable, recurrence must be rejected in favor of the will to power. On the other, Jaspers discusses recurrence extensively but fails to adequately attend to the will to power; both fail to realize that the two concepts are inseparable (GA 6.1: 18-20; Vol. 1: 21-23).

example, Nietzsche speaks of the “eternal recurrence of all things,” rather than only the individual person. Furthermore, he adds the causal assertion that a “knot of causes” will re-create the subject of the book, Zarathustra (KSA 4: 276/178). In Heideggerian terms, the causality of beings as a whole is such that they recur eternally, i.e., they always are.

For Heidegger, eternal recurrence is consistent with his broad identification of metaphysics as a mode of thinking that deals with what is constantly present-at-hand, i.e., the eternal. Recurrence mediates becoming and presence, by making it so that that which becomes, is, and that which is, becomes. Heidegger writes:

“Recurrence [*Wiederkehr*]” thinks the permanentizing of what becomes, thinks it to the point where the becoming of what becomes is secured in the duration of its becoming. The “eternal” thinks the permanentizing of such constancy in the direction of its circling back into itself and forward toward itself.. The presence of the one identical element, a presence that comes to be, is thought in the same. Nietzsche’s thought thinks the constant permanentizing of the becoming of whatever becomes into the only kind of presence there is – the self-recapitulation of the identical [*des Identischen*] (GA 6.2: 5; Vol 3: 164-165).

Thus, recurrence is eternal, permanent, self-identical and present, and describes beings as a whole, which recur along with the subject.

Having clarified Nietzsche’s fundamental metaphysical position and its connection to Hegelian metaphysics, it must be asked in what way does it consummate the history of metaphysics, i.e., the first beginning. Recall that this history begins with the concealment of being in favor of the unconcealment of beings as a whole by the ancient Greeks and concludes with the tacit revelation of this concealment, marked by modern nihilism. If Nietzsche

consummates this history, then his metaphysics must also be another form of nihilism. Nietzsche himself admits as much; he proposes a form of “active nihilism [*der aktive Nihilismus*]” whereby one affirms nihilism in order to overcome (KSA 12: 9[35]/§22). By nihilism, Nietzsche means the fact that the “highest values [*die obersten Werthe*],” e.g., transcendent values of goodness and truth, “devalue themselves [*sich entwerthen*]” over time (KSA 12: 9[35]/§2).

Consequently, these values are functionally reduced to nothingness, resulting in the belief that there are no values to ground and guide existence. Active nihilism consists in affirming this result, allowing the subject to become its own source of valuation.

The will to power and eternal recurrence are not contrary to nihilism, but rather carry out its proper essence. The will to power affirms nihilism for the sake of self-valuation. Furthermore, Nietzsche claims that eternal recurrence is fundamentally nihilistic. “Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: the eternal recurrence [*die ewige Wiederkehr*]” (KSA 12: 5[71]/§55). Forced to eternally re-experience life, we are given the choice to either affirm or bemoan this state, to empower or disempower ourselves. The will to power calls us to affirm eternal recurrence and not doing so would consign us to passive nihilism, or the “decline [*Niedergang*] and recession [*Rückung*] of the power of the spirit” (KSA 12: 9[35]/§22).

Nietzsche appears to confirm Heidegger’s interpretation. But Heidegger contests Nietzsche’s project of overcoming nihilism, arguing that “Nietzsche’s metaphysics is not an overcoming of nihilism. It is the ultimate entanglement [*Verstrickung*] in nihilism” (GA 6.2: 306; Vol. 4: 203). This perceived failure lies with Heidegger and Nietzsche’s differing determinations of nihilism. Heidegger designates nihilism as the name for the forgetting and subsequent abandonment by *beyng*. Nietzsche raised nihilism to philosophical reflection but failed to see

that the abandonment of being as the “more original essential determination [*die ursprünglichere Wesenbestimmung*]” of nihilism. For this reason, Nietzsche could not compel us to “meditate [*Besinnung*]” on nihilism (GA 65: 119/95). Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s account of the essential relationship between metaphysics and nihilism gave Heidegger the intellectual insights into thinking the other beginning of philosophy. But this manner of thinking remains incomplete without confronting Jünger, who had best rendered visible the actuality of Nietzsche’s metaphysics, i.e., the concrete manifestations of the will to power and eternal recurrence.

According to Heidegger, the connection between Nietzsche and Jünger is one of interdependence. The former can only be understood through the latter, and vice-versa. In his 1939/40 manuscript, entitled “Zu Ernst Jünger,” Heidegger lauds Jünger as the only “true follower [*echte Nachfolger*]” of Nietzsche, because he did not render the idea of the will to power into a “doctrine [*Lerhmeinung*].” Rather, “With clear and sharp eyes, Jünger sees beings everywhere as the will to power.” Furthermore, Heidegger claims that Jünger does not simply describe the will to power, but rather his thinking “is itself as form of the will to power” and, for that reason, has a “work-character [*Arbeitscharakter*]” (GA 90: 227). Jünger’s task of making visible the *Gestalt* of the worker is itself an expression of the will to power, of work. Hence, Jünger does not theorize the will to power; he enacts it, revealing its actuality.

In a later reflection on Jünger, Heidegger still maintains that he was able to see the actuality of the will to power, which Nietzsche was unable to do so due to the limits of his age, i.e., before the total mobilization of the First World War. However, he also posits that Jünger was not a “thinker” (GA 90: 263). Unlike Nietzsche, he was unable to think the essence of the will to power. For this reason, he could also never reach the conclusion of the history of being, which demonstrates that the will to power is the consummation of the history of metaphysics.

Consequently, Jünger could not think the possibility of “the dawn [*den Anbruch*] of a new time,” i.e., another beginning (GA 90: 264). Hence, thinking the history of being requires a confrontation with both Nietzsche and Jünger. The latter in order to *see* the present actuality of the will to power and the former in order to *think* the essence of the will to power and its position in the history of metaphysics.

Second Moment: Jünger’s Technological Platonism

What does the actuality of the will to power look like? What exactly does Jünger see? Jünger sees total mobilization as the manifestation of the will to power. It is the name for the process whereby “power itself – the will to power – is expressed” (GA 90: 228). As has been discussed, by total mobilization, Jünger generally means the “conversion of life into energy, manifesting itself through business, technology, and transport, in the whirring of wheels, or in the fire and movement on the battlefield” (SW 8: 136/224). In terms of the will to power, total mobilization transforms life into the energy, making it able to do work and further enhance power.

Although encompassing a multitude of phenomena, the most important aspect of total mobilization is technology. Hence, for Jünger, the end or consummation of total mobilization is identified with the “perfection of technology [*Perfektion der Technik*]” (SW 8: 182/110). In so far as Jünger tasks himself with making the form of the worker visible, technology is essential. Technology names the “manner and way [*Art und Weise*]” that the *Gestalt* of the worker “mobilizes [*mobilisiert*]” the earth (SW 8: 160/97). Through technology, workers master the earth, rendering it consistent with work itself, i.e., the earth as work. For example, the Hoover Dam completely altered the natural path of the Colorado River and transformed the river into the

energy sufficient for powering Las Vegas. Metaphysically thought, this feat of engineering expresses the will to power, allowing people to live in the midst of a desert.

Ultimately, the vision that Jünger has for the future is the “planetary dominion” of the *Gestalt* of the worker, a dominion actualized through technology (SW 8: 310/187). Hence, rather than being simply a nationalist project, consistent with other conservative revolutionaries, Jünger sets his goal as articulating the possibility of a work-state that would encompass the entire planet. It might be asked what would legitimize such a state, i.e., allow the worker to possess dominion. To this, Jünger supplies no definite answer. Instead, it is power itself that is legitimate. People will accept the power of the work-state precisely because it *has* power. Thought metaphysically, this means that the will to power cannot be considered illegitimate, since its legitimacy is not conditioned upon other factors. If it were otherwise, then the will to power would not be an unconditional, metaphysical principle. Hence, Jünger identifies the dominion as the “legitimized will to power [*legitimierten Willen zur Macht*]” (SW 8: 83/47). The dominion of the worker expresses power in its purest form, one that is fundamentally uncontestable.

The second moment of Heidegger’s confrontation with Jünger hinges upon this fundamental relationship between the will to power and technology, tethered together in the goal of planetary dominion by the *Gestalt* of the worker. Jünger’s account of technology exposes the actuality of the will to power, that is to say, how it ontically appears. However, despite the modern shape of technology, Heidegger’s beyng-historical thinking reveals that Jünger’s text is actually ancient in orientation. By appealing to the eternal *Gestalt* qua form of the worker, Jünger invokes philosophical Platonism, the metaphysical position that ideals are more objective and real than their sensible referents. As such, Jünger consummates the history of metaphysics by connecting the Nietzschean will to power and Platonic forms, the end and inception of the

first beginning, respectively. Heidegger writes: “In the projective-region of the last metaphysics of the west, Jünger sharply sees the history of the 20th century and the features of its future. In it, the ‘constancy’ of a planetary Chinese-dom coalesces with the ‘constancy’ of western metaphysics, i.e., Platonism and its doctrine of ‘being’” (GA 90: §45). For Heidegger, this is the unique value of Jünger’s work. Jünger anticipates Heidegger’s history of being, demonstrating that even Nietzsche, the avowed anti-Platonist, could not overcome the history of metaphysics; Nietzsche’s fundamental metaphysical position is revealed to be the consummate instance of Platonism.

In order to better account for how Jünger’s vision of the worker reifies Platonism, it is necessary to first give a more sustained account of technology. Although Jünger was able to see the will to power at the heart of modern technology, he was unable to conceive that technology has ontological character, one revealed by the history of being. *The Worker* could clearly see and describe modern technology, but it did not adequately recognize that the meaning of technology is not reducible to “technological things,” e.g., computers, phones, etc. Instead, for Heidegger, technology occurs as “an ultimate and extreme mode of the truth of beingness, namely, the mode of machination [*Machenschaft*]” (GA 96: 212/166). Machination is the ground of technology; it makes the latter essentially comprehensible. It is also this mode of the “truth of beingness” that will make the actuality of the will to power apparent as total mobilization.

What does Heidegger mean by machination? According to Andrew J. Mitchell, machination is a precursor to Heidegger’s later notion “*Ge-stell*,” or “positionality.”¹⁹⁸ Initially introduced in Heidegger’s poetic writings, machination contains two “compatible”

¹⁹⁸ Andrew J. Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 24.

interpretations, one centered around objectivity and the other, representation. Thought together, this means that “the objectivity of machination is carried out through an agenda of representation.”¹⁹⁹ Objectivity is a necessary component of machination; as a mode of the truth of beingness, machination means that humans fundamentally encounter beings as objects. “*Machenschaft*” is rooted in verb “*machen*,” which means to make or do. As a noun, “*Machenschaft*” means that objects are understood primarily as things made or subject to the possibility of use and manipulation. Hence, the noun can also be translated as “manipulability.” As Heidegger helpfully explains, machination “means the essence of beingness that is disposed toward the malleability [*Machsamkeit*] in which everything is made out ahead of time to be ‘do-able’ and altogether at our disposal. Corresponding to this process, representation is the (mis)calculating, securing pacing-off of the horizons that demarcate everything we can perceive along with its explicability and its use” (GA 6.2: 18-19; Vol. 3: 180). This quote is particularly useful because it brings in the second interpretation of machination; the concept also signifies that beings are represented *in advance* as objects. For this reason, machination tends to foreclose other modes of encountering beings. For example, rather than encountering a tract of land as simply a beautiful space, machinational thinking forecloses that possibility by rendering that tract primarily into a resource to be exploited (e.g., lumber to be sold) or as an investment for future financial gain.

As mentioned above, machination is a mode of the truth of beingness, the manner in which beings are represented. But why does this particular mode of beingness become dominant for Heidegger? And how does this mode relate to Jünger’s technological identification with the will to power? For Heidegger, machination is the result of modern nihilism, or the abandonment

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 28.

by beyng (GA 65: 111/88). Abandoned by beyng, “beings are abandoned to themselves.”²⁰⁰ In other words, beings can only be encountered as discrete, representable objects. The that-ness of their being withdraws in favor of their what-ness, i.e., what they can be used for. This manner of being disposed towards beings conveys the will to power; beings are objects of power used for the sake of further empowerment. Hence, according to Heidegger, the totality of beings are understood as means for the “sheer expansion of power [*Machterweiterung*] and are valued purely according to their estimated use-value [*Nutzwert*]” (GA 6.2: 14; Vol. 3: 175). Because of the expansive character of machination qua will to power, the danger is that it bars other ways of relating to beings. Even humans become objects of use. From a Heideggerian perspective, this means that the absolute subjectivity articulated by Hegel and Nietzsche undermines itself; machinational thinking renders the subject into another object among objects.

In his Nietzsche lecture courses, Heidegger explicitly identifies machination with Jünger’s total mobilization. Total mobilization requires that beings as a whole are machinationally thought, i.e., represented as objects used for the sake of further mobilization. In being total, mobilization opposes anything external that might render its process partial. Tethered to the will to power, mobilization necessarily sets out to enhance itself, expanding and totalizing its power. Hence, as Heidegger explains, total mobilization is the “organization of unconditioned meaninglessness by and for the will to power” (GA 6.2: 14; Vol. 3: 175). It is meaningless, precisely because it has no goal outside of itself. In other words, it is power for the sake of power. For this same reason, total mobilization is nihilistic; Heidegger makes this claim in his *Contributions*, where he names total mobilization as the essential consequence of the abandonment by beyng (GA 65: 143/112).

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 27

Jünger also describes the manner in which machination entangles the human being. In *Besinnung*, Heidegger writes that through Jünger and Spengler's respective manner of "unfolding" Nietzsche's metaphysics, "beings as a whole become thought machinationally [*machenschaftlich*] and the human being, as the executor [*Vollstrecker*] of machination, is determined from the essential entanglement [*Verflechtung*] thereof" (GA 66: 28). Through total mobilization, human beings have become inextricably entangled with technology. Hence, Jünger writes that "between man and technology" there is "only an indirect relationship of dependence" (SW 8: 186/112). This view is simplified through his concept of "organic construction [*organische Konstruktion*]," which means the fusion of "organic and mechanical forces" (SW 8: 223/135). In his 1934 text, *On Pain*, Jünger describes this idea with the example of a manned torpedo. Rather than mechanically guiding the torpedo from a distance, this explosive is guided by a human who is inserted into it (SW 7: 160/18). Machination and organic construction both designate that human beings have become indistinguishable from technical objects.

Thus, for Heidegger, Jünger sees and describes the actuality of the will to power through the more tangible concepts of total mobilization and organic construction. Society is being totally mobilized according to a logic of economic-military action. Natural spaces and human beings are being partially constructed through mechanical intervention. These phenomena are symptoms of the completion of metaphysics, i.e., thinking beings as useful objects. But Jünger could not conceive of the metaphysical conditions of total mobilization, i.e., that the will to power qua machination is the necessary result of the metaphysical tradition, as outlined by the history of being. This has significant implications for Jünger's project of rendering visible the *Gestalt* of the worker.

Beyond his political goals, Jünger had more philosophical concerns motivating his work. Like Nietzsche, Jünger was concerned by the problem of nihilism and sought to overcome it. However, he severed this project from Nietzsche's critique of morality. "It is no longer necessary to busy oneself with a revaluation [*Umwertung*] of all values – it is sufficient to see the new and to take part in it" (SW 8: 59/32). The process of total mobilization is inevitable and necessary. We are given little option but to "represent the *Gestalt* of the worker or perish [*unterzugehen*]" (SW 8: 81/46). Jünger foresees that this acceptance and affirmation of the situation will constitute a "new human [*neues Menschentum*]" that is able to master and harness the forces of technology (SW 8: 83/48). He later writes: "It will only be possible to put technology into service truly and without resistance when the form of the worker is represented in the individuals and communities that have control over it" (SW 8: 174/105). Thought metaphysically, the worker is not merely subject to the will to power but will harness it for their own determined ends and goals. In other words, they will give meaning to total mobilization and the will to power, thereby overcoming nihilism.

According to Vincent Blok, this idea of giving meaning to total mobilization is crucial for understanding Jünger's project: "Jünger calls the totally mobilized world meaningless and asks about the hidden meaning of the millions of victims of the First World War... He finds it in that which he calls the "gestalt of the worker."²⁰¹ Jünger believes that total mobilization had destroyed the traditional sources of meaning, i.e., bourgeois values. However, this novel form of nihilism is not the end of the story; rather, the rendering "meaningless" of "old structures" makes possible the "appearance" of "another field of force [*Kraftfeldes*]" (SW 8: 143/86); affirming

²⁰¹ Vincent Blok, *Ernst Jünger's Philosophy of Technology: Heidegger and the Poetics of the Anthropocene* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 6.

meaning is conditioned upon a prior meaninglessness. The source of this meaning is to be found in that which shattered the old categories of valuation, the will to power via total mobilization (SW 8: 74-75/42). However, as already implied, total mobilization is not in itself meaningful. Instead, this historical force needs to be given *Gestalt*. Invoking Heidegger, Blok calls this role of the *Gestalt* of the worker as giving “ontological difference” to “ontological indifference.”²⁰² Because total mobilization reduces all beings to sheer energy, then beings become ontologically undifferentiated; they become matter without corresponding form. The *Gestalt* of the worker differentiates and determines beings, rendering them into a meaningful whole; this is the metaphysical task of Jünger’s project.

Jünger combines two distinct senses of *Gestalt* in his account of the worker: psychological and metaphysical. Psychologically, *Gestalt* refers to the fact that the mind generally perceives things as wholes, rather than a composition of separable parts. For example, the melody of a song transcends the parts that compose it.²⁰³ Metaphysically, *Gestalt* refers to the eternally present idea of something, i.e., its being. This notion of *Gestalt* is indicated by Jünger’s assertion that the *Gestalt* eternally exists and is not subject to temporal changes: “A *Gestalt* is, and no development increases or diminishes it” (SW 8: 86/50). Furthermore, Jünger implies that the *Gestalt* is eternal, since it is “a being not subject to time” (SW 8: 125/75). The *Gestalt* of the worker expresses both of these aspects. First, through being integrated into the *Gestalt*, workers find themselves as a part of a social process that exceeds them (total mobilization). Second, the *Gestalt* of the worker eternally exists above and beyond individual workers, dictating and giving

²⁰² Ibid., 11.

²⁰³ Wolf Kittler, “From Gestalt and Ge-Stell: Martin Heidegger Reads Ernst Jünger,” *Cultural Critique*, No. 69 (2008), 82.

meaning to their respective activity. For Heidegger, this latter sense is most important because it implicates Jünger's Platonism.

For Heidegger, Jünger's "entanglement in metaphysics" follows from his thinking in terms of "*Gestalt*," which is particularly unique given his relationship to Nietzsche, who had sought a "reversal of Platonism" (GA 90: 93-94). Nietzsche presents his thought as an "inverted Platonism" that values "semblance" over "true being" (GA 6.1: 165/ Vol.1: 154). Platonism reduces the apparent world to nothingness, appealing to the supersensuous world as a source of valuations. Hence, it is complicit in nihilism, which Nietzsche seeks to overcome by affirming the world of appearance, semblance, and becoming. However, for Heidegger, this method of overcoming fails precisely insofar as an "inversion" maintains the same transcendent structure intrinsic to metaphysical thought. "But as long as the 'above and below' defines the formal structure of Platonism, Platonism in its essence perdures. This inversion does not achieve what it must, as an overcoming of nihilism, namely, an overcoming of Platonism in its very foundations" (GA 6.1: 204; Vol. 1: 201). Nietzsche remains entrenched in metaphysics even to the point where the will to power just becomes another name for the beingness that determines beings as a whole.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche appears to recognize this failure in *Twilight of the Idols*, claiming that the abolition of the "real world" (the Platonic world) also abolishes the "apparent world" (KSA 6: 80-81/50-51). Without a reference to being, pure becoming cannot be meaningfully spoken about. Perhaps for this reason, Nietzsche later claims that the will to power imposes being upon becoming (KSA 12: 7[54]/§617). In the end, Nietzsche requires beingness. Jünger's attempt at going beyond Nietzsche makes this limitation even more apparent. Presenting the actuality of the will to power leads him back to Platonism. For Heidegger, *Gestalt* is correctly

understood as εἶδος, whereby the essence or beingness of something is “posed and stands” (GA 90: 94). Since this is just another name of the Platonic form, as a consequence of the “reversal of Platonism,” *Gestalt* is “erected” in order to provide something “enduring [*Bleibendes*].”

Heidegger writes, “Thus, indeed, ‘objective’ – Platonic – and therefore ‘eternal’-supertemporal-supersensual! All the accoutrements [*Requisiten*] of Platonism return” (GA 90: 82). Without realizing it, Jünger indirectly reveals the co-belonging of Nietzsche’s metaphysics and Platonism, and therefore the origin of the first beginning. In other words, Jünger conveys the insight of the history of being.

This is the value of reading Jünger’s work, but also its limit. “All the reversals of Jünger do not show the otherness of what is to come [*die Andersartigkeit des Kommenden*], but rather testify to the similarity and consummation of this kind!” (GA 90: 94). Jünger’s task of attending to the coming age of the worker is not actually a transition to something different, since it implicitly returns to the inception of the first beginning, the unconcealment of beings as a whole on the basis of the concealment of the truth of being. After presenting his objections to Jünger’s fundamental position, Heidegger raises the question of how to “transition [*Übergang*]” to another beginning. But his answer remains cryptic: “In general, not history of beings, rather history of being coming to truth! In this demand for grounding [*Gründung*]” (GA 90: 82). What this demand consists in is not clear. It is obviously tethered to the idea that the truth of being needs to be grasped as fundamentally self-concealing. In terms of Jünger’s account of the will to power, Heidegger proposes a negative response; there needs to be an overcoming of power itself, which will amount to a different relationship to the truth of being or will at least prepare the foundation for one (GA 90: 222). Thus, the highest act of power is to let go of power itself. Heidegger will continue to investigate this in his post-war work.

Third Moment (1949-1955): From Machination to *Ge-Stell*

The third moment of Heidegger's confrontation with Jünger formally begins in 1949. In honor of Heidegger's 60th birthday, Jünger wrote an essay for his *Festschrift*, entitled "Across the Line [*Über die Linie*]." The essay grapples with the Nietzschean problem of overcoming nihilism, or rather crossing over the "line" of nihilism. Jünger theorizes that such a crossing would allow for a new relationship to being: "The moment [*Augenblick*] in which the line is passed brings a new turning approach [*neue Zuwendung*] of being, and with this, what is actual [*wirklich*] begins to shine forth [*zu schimmern*]" (SW 7: 267/91). Overcoming nihilism means possessing a new relationship to being, which is understood as actuality. In 1955, Heidegger critically responded with his own essay entitled "Concerning 'The Line' [*Über 'Die Linie'*]," written for Jünger's respective *Festschrift*. It covers many of the same themes as the second confrontation, such as Jünger metaphysical prejudices and his entrenchment in technological thinking. But it focuses on this question of crossing over nihilism, asking "about [*Über*]" the "line" itself. Ultimately, Heidegger concludes that such crossing is structurally impossible, because the crosser, i.e., the human being, is identified with the line itself (GA 9: 412/311). Human beings are defined by their open relationship to being itself, which is fundamentally self-concealing. Heidegger now expresses this essential self-concealment, or withdrawal, on the part of being by crossing it out: "~~being~~" (GA 9: 411/310). Crossing out conveys the ambiguous co-belonging of presence and absence. On the one hand being is present, i.e., it is. On the other hand, it is not an actual entity, and therefore is not. Crossing out shows this by negating "being" while nonetheless leaving the word inscribed below the cross. Playing with the ideas of crossing out and crossing over, Heidegger argues that the line of nihilism cannot be crossed over into a new relationship to being, because ~~being~~ is already crossed out. Consequently, given the

essential entanglement between human being, *being*, and nihilism, crossing is definitively ruled out. Rather than crossing, what is needed is a new understanding of the relationship between human beings and *being*.

This new relationship to *being* is accompanied by a rethinking of technology. Technology remains intrinsically connected to the consummation of metaphysics, but in place of machination, Heidegger now posits that the essence of technology is *Ge-Stell* (positionality) (GA 7: 21/325; GA 79: 33/31). Heidegger defines *Ge-Stell* as the “self-gathered collection [*gesammelte Versammlung*] of positioning [*das Stellens*], wherein everything orderable essences in the standing reserve [*Bestand*]” (GA 79: 32/31). Rather than making or manipulation, technology is now tethered to how the totality of beings is positioned and ordered, both of which are determined by how they can be on hand, i.e., standing reserve. Technology obviously still involves usage, but use is secondary to how beings are positioned within the world. Hence, Mitchell translates *Ge-Stell* as “positionality,” or the act of positioning and being positioned. If *Ge-Stell* displaces machination, and machination is adequately described by Jünger’s account of total mobilization, then does *Ge-Stell* also displace total mobilization? Does Jünger’s theory of technology and his account of the *Gestalt* of the worker apply to Heidegger’s turn to *Ge-Stell*? If so, what are the consequences for Heidegger’s project of articulating a new relationship between human beings, nihilism, and *being*? Heidegger himself appears to be invested in these questions, asking “does the essence of *Gestalt* spring in its provenance from the realm of what I call *Ge-Stell*... or is *Ge-Stell* only a function of the *Gestalt* of a particular humankind” (GA 9: 401/303). Is the *Gestalt* of the worker grounded in *Ge-Stell*, or the converse? Heidegger believes that the history of modern thought had tacitly answered by siding with the latter, including Jünger

himself. However, rather than continuing to reflect on these questions specifically, Heidegger sets them aside as “peculiar considerations” and “precursory” in nature (GA 9: 401/303).

In what follows I will attempt to answer this question, arguing that *Gestalt* is a derivative effect of *Ge-Stell*, which is also to say that the *Gestalt* of the worker is an effect of the essence of technology. This effectively reverses Jünger’s position that technology is the means by which the *Gestalt* of the worker mobilizes the world (SW 8: 160/97). Instead, *Gestalt* is determined by the essence of technology. This has important consequences for understanding Heidegger’s confrontation with Jünger. Firstly, Jünger’s attempt at crossing the line of nihilism was meant as a mild amendment to his earlier fatalism; he sought to establish the conditions whereby the worker could have a free relationship to technology. However, he identified freedom with “mastery [*Meisterung*]” (SW 8: 83/47). For Heidegger, mastery could never be a way of freeing oneself from technology, since this mode of thinking and acting is consistent with the will to power, i.e., the same metaphysics that resulted in *Ge-Stell*. The only way to have a free relationship to technology is to release oneself from the will, a mode of comportment that Heidegger calls “releasement [*Gelassneheit*]” (GA 16: 527/54). Secondly, insofar as *Ge-Stell* is the ultimate shape of the forgetting of being, then it is also precisely what preserves or saves it from being rendered into an entity. I will show that *Ge-Stell* is what allows human beings to grasp their relationship to being, but this can only occur through a free relationship. In brief, releasing the will allows for the unconcealment of being in its very self-concealment. Thus, Heidegger’s project of questioning after being as such will be tethered to the fate of the will, a position that he could only have acquired through a critical confrontation with Jünger. But, before we can arrive at these conclusions, it is necessary to do the leg work of fleshing out the

meaning of *Ge-Stell*, how it conceptually derives and departs from machination, and how *Ge-Stell* figures into Heidegger's reflections on the will.

"*Ge-Stell*" is perhaps the most difficult concept to understand in Heidegger's oeuvre, since its meaning is not at all obvious from the word alone. Conventionally, the word can be translated as "framework," "frame," "rack," etc. In his translation of Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology," William Lovitt uses, "enframing." The essence of technology is thereby rendered into a kind of framework or structure. However, Mitchell rejects this translation in favor of "positionality." Playing off its root "stellen," a verb that means "to place" or "to position," and its noun form "Stellen," which means "placing" or "positioning," *Ge-Stell* is the manner in which things are positioned or placed. Hence, rather than enframing, *Ge-Stell* is better understood as an open process of ordering and placing beings or things. Mitchell explains: "The spread of positionality is thus not a framework that surrounds from without, but, in part, a process of conscription that adopts and compels whatever it encounters into the order of standing reserve" (GA 79: xi). Instead of enclosing, *Ge-Stell* as positionality expands and conscripts more beings into its positioning. Hence, rather than being concerned with specific human instruments and ends, modern technology is oriented around the total positioning of beings, e.g., the computer technology that manages and orders supply chains. But what does Heidegger mean by "standing reserve?" Why does technology as *Ge-Stell* render things into standing reserve?

Mitchell argues that the transition from thinking technology in terms of machination into *Ge-Stell* was motivated by Heidegger's experience of the Second World War.²⁰⁴ The war exposed the middle term between machination and *Ge-Stell: Bestand*, or "standing reserve."²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 33.

²⁰⁵ *Bestand* is a difficult term to translate. At its most general, it can mean "existence" or "continuance." Narrowly, it is a commercial term that can be translated as "inventory" or

From the perspective modern technology, beings are encountered and understood as a standing reserve of things to be used and consumed; it encounters, for example, the dead sea as a reserve of potash, rather than a religious site. Thus, while *Ge-Stell* names the essence of modern technology, “standing reserve” names the manner in which beings as a whole appear, according to this essence. In other words, *Ge-Stell* positions and orders beings into a standing reserve.

If *Ge-Stell* consists in rendering beings into things to be used, then how is it any different from machination? The difference lies in the way that standing reserve is defined. Machination sees beings according to the will to power, i.e., as objects represented by the absolute subject. Contrary to machination, standing reserve is not an object and *Ge-Stell* is not the ordering of objects. “Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over us as object” (GA 7: 17/322). Nothing standing reserve is a discrete object represented by a subject. Heidegger makes this clear with his description of an airliner. An airliner is not primarily encountered as an object, rather it is encountered as something ready to fly, in relation to other things that facilitate this flight, like other airliners, the air traffic control tower, and even the runway itself.²⁰⁶ This invites to understand the relational nature of modern technology and beings as a whole; beings are not discrete and separable, but are rather defined by their relations to each other. For this reason, Mitchell highlights two entangled elements of *Ge-Stell*: “circulative replacement.”²⁰⁷ *Ge-Stell* endlessly circulates the standing-reserve, and by being circulative it is also replaceable. Hence, airliners are constantly circulated across airports and are ever replaced by newer models.

“stock.” Heidegger combines these two senses in order to render the term into an ontological category, beings’ presence or appear as a continually standing reserve.

²⁰⁶ Mitchell presents three determinations of the standing-reserve: availability, immediacy, and orderability. Using the airliner example, it is encountered in terms of its availability to fly, its immediacy relative to other airliners, and its order therein, i.e., when it is scheduled to take flight. *Ibid.*, 38-49.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

At its most abstract, however, the standing reserve is reduced to sheer energy. In his essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger argues that modern technology is oriented around demanding that nature “supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such” (GA 7: 15/320). To be maximally available for consumption and use, modern technology as *Ge-Stell* positions and orders nature into a circuit of potential and kinetic energy. Reduced to sheer energy, *Ge-Stell* and the standing-reserve are marked by “objectlessness [Gegenstandlose]” (GA 7: 19/324). Energy is not an object or thing; it is the capacity to do work. But if there is no object, then there must not be a subject as well. Where then is the human positioned within positionality?

Heidegger’s thoughts on the relationship between humans and technology are complicated. Through machinational thinking even the thinkers themselves – human beings – become cogs in the total mobilization of technology. This technological tendency becomes for more pronounced with Heidegger’s account of *Ge-Stell*, which he also defines as the “challenging claim [*herausfordernden Anspruch*] that gathers [*versammelt*] man with a view to ordering [*zu bestellen*] the self-revealing [*Sichentbergende*] as standing reserve” (GA 7: 20/324). Human beings do not dictate *Ge-Stell*, but are rather taken up into its ordering, and are thereby challenged to render beings into standing reserve. In other words, modern technology demands that humans render beings into more readily available sources of energy, which forecloses other possible ways of relating to beings, like as things of beauty. Thus, through *Ge-Stell*, human beings are increasingly forced to accept technological rationality as the singular form of unconcealing the world.

Although Heidegger categorically states that human beings will never become standing-reserve, his experiences of the destruction during Second World War appeared to indicate this

very possibility (GA 7: 19/323). Most controversially, given his membership in the Nazi party and refusal to apologize for his actions, this transformation was exemplified by the concentration camps. In a 1949 lecture in Bremen, his first public speaking engagement since the end of the war, Heidegger rhetorically asks: “Hundreds of thousands die in masses. Do they die? They perish. They are put down. Do they die? They become pieces of inventory of a standing reserve [*eines Bestandes*] for the fabrication of corpses. Do they die? They are unobtrusively liquidated in annihilation camps (GA 79: 56/53). Human beings are not simply tools within a larger machine; they are resources to be used up and eliminated. However, even this situation is not the highest danger associated with the essence of modern technology, a danger that will reveal the essential relationship between *Ge-Stell* and being as such.

Like machination, *Ge-Stell* is rendered into the culmination of metaphysics and the forgetting of the truth of being; it is the “being of beings in its most extreme and presumably completed destiny” (GA 79: 51/49). Beings as a whole presence as standing reserve, as constantly present and available resources. The danger is that this formulation of the being of beings will foreclose other possible ways of being, completely forgetting the truth of being (GA 79: 55/51). But this is only the first danger. What is “most dangerous [*Der Gefährlichste*]” is that this danger might conceal itself as dangerous (GA 79: 54/42). In other words, the danger is that human beings will lose sight of this very danger, making it impossible to subject *Ge-Stell* to scrutiny. Curiously, this danger is only possible because being is self-concealing. Being can only be forgotten because it is fundamentally concealed. Hence, the danger actually belongs to being itself (GA 79: 54/51).

This brings us to the relational ambiguity of *Ge-Stell*. *Ge-Stell* is not foreign to being; the forgetting of being consistent with technology in fact preserves being in its essence, i.e., in its

self-concealment. Hence, invoking Hölderlin's hymn "Patmos," Heidegger claims that where there is the danger of modern technology, there also grows what "saves" (*Rettende*) (GA 79: 72/68). Heidegger identifies this possible salvation with "grace [Gunst]." He explains:

In the essence of danger there essences and dwells a grace, namely the grace of the turn of the forgetting of beyng into the truth of beyng. In the essence of danger, where it is as the danger, there is the turn to guardianship, there is this guardianship itself, there is that which saves of beyng [*das Rettende des Seyns*] (GA 79: 73/69).

The danger and saving of beyng are necessarily entangled. In order to harness this guardianship, Heidegger proposes that a new relationship between humans and modern technology needs to be formed. Specifically, a "conversion [*Verwindung*] of the essence of technology" needs to happen, which requires precisely grasping its essence as *Ge-Stell* (GA 79: 71/67). Thus, understanding modern technology as *Ge-Stell* creates the conditions for a new relationship to beyng. Yet what Heidegger means by this remains opaque. How does the recognition that *Ge-Stell* saves beyng make possible a new relationship between humans and beyng?

Heidegger better explains this in his 1957 lecture, "Basic Principles of Thinking." Recall that Heidegger's middle period partially revolved around the demonstration that the transition from the first to another beginning would consist in the event of appropriating the truth of beyng from out of this first beginning. Heidegger holds onto this form of eventual thinking in his later work. But now the event of appropriation is described as the co-appropriation of human beings and being, which is made possible by the unique positionality of modern technology, i.e., *Ge-Stell*.

Event of appropriation [*Er-ignis*] names the letting belong [*Gehörenlassen*] that is to be thought from it, and thus the authentic letting belong that brings the human and being into

the ownership of each other. In positionality [*Ge-Stell*], what we experience as the essence of this constellation in the modern technological world is a prelude to what is called the event of appropriation... in the event of appropriation, the possibility arises that the event as the sheer reign of positionality is converted into a more inceptual appropriating. One such conversion of positionality from the event of appropriation – something never accomplished by humans alone – would result in the appropriative retraction of the technological world from its position of mastery [*Herrschaft*] into one of servitude [*Dienstschaft*] within a realm where the human more authentically reaches into the event of appropriation (GA 79: 125/118).

In this dense quotation it is revealed that the event of appropriation appropriates humans and being such that they are said to belong together. To be human, means to be in relationship to being as such. This belonging together is prepared by *Ge-Stell* by making relationality itself explicit. *Ge-Stell* absolves human beings of subjectivity and reveals beings not as objects, but as things positioned in *relation* to other things. Properly thought, *Ge-Stell* makes it impossible to conceive being as such as an object or entity. Thus, while consummating the history of metaphysics, *Ge-Stell* nonetheless opens up another way of thinking that is beyond the idea of beingness. Instead, being is relational event that appropriates human beings, and vice-versa.

Curiously, in the quotation above, Heidegger hypothesizes that the event of appropriation would convert *Ge-Stell*, transitioning the “technological world” from a position of “mastery” to one of “servitude.” In other words, the event of appropriation that would bring together human beings and being would also allow a free relationship to technology. Furthermore, given his use of the term “*Herrschaft*,” Heidegger is indirectly referring to Jünger’s account of technology.

Thus, properly conceiving the domination of *Ge-Stell* makes possible a free relationship to technology that Jünger could not theoretically provide.

While proposing the possibility of servitude, Heidegger nonetheless claims that modern technology cannot be “mastered [*meistern*]” by humans. This is because *Ge-Stell* is an effect of *beyng*; human beings cannot master something that is fundamentally self-concealing, since to do so would unconceal it, violating its essence. Heidegger explains: “Technology, whose essence is being itself, can never be overcome by the human. That would indeed mean that the human would be the master [*Herr*] of being” (GA 79: 69/65). But humans are also not “powerless [*ohnmächtig*]” against technology (GA 79: 68/64). Instead, humans can become guardians of *beyng*. It is in this sense that human beings have freedom relative to modern technology and its essence.

In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger briefly discusses human freedom, which elsewhere he presents as something fundamentally tethered to truth or unconcealment. For Heidegger, human beings are free insofar as they are able to unconceal beings, freeing or “letting beings be” what they are (GA 9: 188-189/144). Likewise, with regard to technology, human beings can acquire a free relationship to it, by letting its essence be: “when we once upon ourselves to the essence of technology we find ourselves unexpectedly taken into a freeing claim” (GA 7: 26/330-331). Recognizing that modern technology reduces all beings to standing reserve and challenges humans to perform this task, gives human beings the insight to take part in technology on their own terms. In other words, by freeing *Ge-Stell*, human beings can take part in positioning. Applied to his observations regarding the event of appropriation, freeing *Ge-Stell* brings humans and being together. Heidegger expands upon this idea of freedom in his account of releasement.

In a 1955 speech, Heidegger points out that technology is a dangerous, but nonetheless an essential part of human life. Instead of doing away with it, Heidegger proposes that we adopt a new mode of comportment that says both “yes” and “no” to technology, a modality that Heidegger calls “releasement” (GA 16: 527/54). Rather than trying to dominate technology, one freely releases oneself to its essence. By doing so, this comportment allows one “to keep open the meaning hidden in technology, openness [*Offenheit*] to the mystery [*Geheimnis*]” (GA 16: 528/54). One recalls Heidegger’s identification of the mystery with the “concealment of concealment,” or that concealment is forgotten (GA 9: 89/148). This is another way of saying the essence or truth of being. Thus, Heidegger appears to believe that releasement allows human beings to be open to both the self-concealment of being and to the essence of technology, which is precisely what conceals and thereby also safeguards being.

Bret W. Davis claims that through *Gelassenheit*, “human being properly corresponds to, and participates in, this *Seinlassen* of being itself.”²⁰⁸ The comportment of releasement allows human beings to participate in letting beings and being itself be. *Gelassenheit* and *Seinlassen* share the verb *lassen*, which means to let or allow. In letting be, human freedom is thereby functionally synonymous with *Gelassenheit*. This is thoroughly removed from any notion of freedom of the will, and therefore from the Nietzschean and Jüngerian will to power. Hence, Heidegger argues that releasement is a mode “non-willing [*das Nicht-Wollen*]” that requires relinquishing the will itself (GA 13: 38/59). Paradoxically, one wills non-willing.²⁰⁹ With this clarification of releasement, Heidegger stakes out move beyond the will to power. In order to

²⁰⁸ Bret W. Davis, “Will and *Gelassenheit*,” *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, Ed. Bret W. Davis (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2010), 178.

²⁰⁹ Davis handles this paradox by dividing releasement into two forms: an initial form which wills non-willing, and a second authentic form that is completely outside the concept of the will. See *ibid.*, 176-177

freely relate to modern technology, we have avoid thinking in terms of both willing and power. At best, the will is the initial means to release the will itself.

Thus, with releasement, Heidegger provides the key to both articulating a free relationship to technology and a way of conceiving the relationship between humans and being as such, *beyng*, or *being*. The event of appropriation requires that human beings let being be, and vice-versa. Only a released mode of comportment can make this possible. Such letting-be does not compel being to take on the appearance of an entity, but let its self-concealment and withdrawal be. Such a position requires a corresponding letting-go of the will as a means of forcing the appearance of being. For this reason, as I will demonstrate, Jünger's attempt to overcome nihilism by means of the will to power and a notion of freedom qua mastery ultimately fails. Furthermore, by being essentially tethered to metaphysics, *Gestalt* cannot provide a freeing relationship to modern technology, i.e., *Ge-Stell*. With this in mind, we return to the question of the relationship between *Ge-Stell* and *Gestalt*. Which one provides the foundation for the other?

Third Moment (1949-1955): *Gestalt* and *Ge-Stell*

Although we can speculate from the outset that *Gestalt* would not be more originary than *Ge-Stell*, given that the former is identified with metaphysics and the latter with possibility of a new relationship to being as such, the exact relationship between these terms is by no means obvious in Heidegger's work. But an analysis of the words themselves can be instructive. Both words are almost etymologically identical; both are rooted in the past participle of *stellen*. Hence, *Gestalt* is also related to placing, positing, and positioning. But whereas *Ge-Stell* is constructed as the noun form of the verbal act of positioning as such, i.e., positionality, *Gestalt* is used to refer to something that is already placed and positioned. *Stellen* also means to "to set" and "to stand." In setting something up, it possesses a specific "form," "cast," "shape," or "figure."

Hence, *Gestalt* is that which is set up as a specific form. But what is meant by a “form?” Form is the visible shape or configuration of something. For something to be configured, its parts must be arranged and therefore set up in a specific manner. In its psychological sense, *Gestalt* means a form that is an arranged whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Herein lies the fundamental relationship between *Ge-Stell* and *Gestalt*; the latter sets up or positions the former, such that positionality is itself positioned. However, this violates the essence of positionality, its openness to positioning. Hence, any attempt at fixing *Ge-Stell* through *Gestalt* will inevitably fail. Nevertheless, *Gestalt* thinking would be a danger to *Ge-Stell*; it is the arraignment of the standing reserve through modern technology, such that *Ge-Stell* and the truth of being remains concealed. But, as mentioned, this is also the saving grace. Hence, like in Heidegger’s middle period, Jünger description of the *Gestalt* of the worker both consummates modernity and would also have to provide the conditions for a new relationship to being.

Heidegger appears to confirm this interpretation in a series of notes dated from 1954. Asking where and how “*Gestalt*” emerges, he responds thusly: “metaphysically [*metaphysisch*]” and “*Ge-Stell* as concealed anticipation [*verborgener Vorschein*] of events [*Ereignisses*]” (GA 90: 294).²¹⁰ *Gestalt* is a metaphysical concept that is rooted in *Ge-Stell*. In the following note, Heidegger asks this question again, but frames it differently. Asking where *Gestalt* as the means to see the “new actuality [*neue Wirklichkeit*]” comes from, Heidegger answers from an “interpretation [*Auslegung*]” of “being.” Below Heidegger writes “(*Ge-Stell*),” implying that this is the novel interpretation of being (GA 90: 295). Hence, *Gestalt* comes from the interpretation of being as *Ge-Stell* and, by extension, standing reserve as beings as a whole. However, Jünger

²¹⁰ Heidegger adds to this determination of *Ge-Stell*, that it is also “the granting – so as ‘bidding [*Geheiß*]’ – nevertheless representable without the occurring [*Ereignende*] of the gathering of the fourfold [*Gevierts*]” (GA 90: 204).

did not recognize this essence and therefore failed to overcome nihilism and freely relate to technology. In order to explain this failure, it is necessary to clarify what he means by freedom.

The subject of freedom occupies Jünger's essay "*Über die Linie*." While *The Worker* concerns what is "super-personal/necessary," Jünger claims that "*Über die Linie*" "clarifies the behavior of the individual and new kind of freedom to which it corresponds" (C: 12). *The Worker* describes total mobilization as a necessary and world-historical phenomenon that transcends the individual. Rather than speaking in terms of individuals, Jünger speaks with an eye towards a coming empire: "Nevertheless, the age of the masses and machines constitutes the gigantic forge for the arsenal of an approaching empire, from whose perspective each downfall appears as willed, as preparatory" (SW 8: 83/47). Similarly, Jünger calls the project of representing the *Gestalt* of the worker, one of "planetary-imperial proportions [*planetarisch-imperialen Ausmaßen*]" (SW 8: 216/131). Representing the *Gestalt* is not a matter of free choice, but of necessity. Indeed, as has been mentioned, Jünger claims that contemporary humans are tasked with the highly constrained choice of either taking part in the *Gestalt* or perish (SW 8: 81/46). "*Über die Linie*" attempts to counter this necessity by positing the conditions for freedom, which in this case can be understood as the freedom to give meaning to total mobilization.

The question of freedom is also a necessary component of the essay's main problem of overcoming nihilism, since one must be free to overcome. But this is obviously difficult to do, especially given how entrenched nihilism is in the contemporary world. This entrenchment follows from Jünger's identification of nihilism with the expansion of the will to power; it is not just total mobilization that expands its space, but nihilism as well. But why is total mobilization nihilistic for Jünger? In this essay, Jünger defines nihilism in terms of "reduction [*Reduktion*],"

writing that the “nihilistic world is in its essence a reduced and increasingly self-reductive world, which necessarily corresponds to the movement to the null point [*Nullpunkt*]” (SW 7: 257/83). It is world that is reduced to a “common denominator” (SW 7: 257/84). This corresponds to Jünger description of total mobilization, which is marked by the reduction of life itself and all aspects of it into energy, i.e., ontological indifference (SW 8: 136/224). This nihilism is unavoidable since it is historically necessary; it develops according to its own logic. But despite this deterministic image, Jünger still thinks that there is space for freedom.

According to Jünger, technology can only be put into “service [*Dienst*] truly and without resistance” when the *Gestalt* of the worker is represented in and through the “individuals and communities that have control of it” (SW 8: 174/105). This kind of freedom is understood as a form of “mastery [*Meisterung*]” over technology, which is in turn a “sign” of the “dominion [*Herrschaft*]” of the *Gestalt* of the worker (SW 8: 83/47). If the worker has dominion, then, they would have power over technology, i.e., the will to power. Going back to the term *Gestalt* itself, by representing the *Gestalt* of the worker, technology takes on the form or arrangement of a human work. Technology is no longer something other than human beings. Thus construed, human willing merges with the necessary development of technology, i.e., total mobilization. Consequently, human beings qua workers are free. But how does this aspect of representing actually occur? How can human beings actually become free? The answer lies in another form of work: the work of art.

For Jünger, freedom and the work of art are “inseparably bound together; it blossoms where the relation between inner and outer freedom is favorable” (SW 7: 275/98). In other words, through the creation of the work of art, one’s inner sense of freedom accords with their external circumstances. This is consistent with Jünger’s earlier identification of mastery with art

(SW 8: 190/115). But it is important to note that Jünger expands this notion of art beyond the traditional mediums, e.g., canvas. Indeed, art encompasses the very transformation of natural landscapes through technology, rendering the former into something totally structured, durable, and predictable, i.e., into a work (SW 8: 190/115). This point is made further in the text, where Jünger claims that the “artistic will [*künstlerischen Willen*]” is expressed in the “forming of the landscape [*Landschaftsgestaltung*],” which is a “feature of every age that exercised an undeniable and incontestable dominion [*Herrschaft*]” (SW 8: 225/136). Through such artistic will, nature itself will reflect the *Gestalt* of the worker, meaning that the worker will have given it form. In this way the earth/nature will not challenge the will to power of the worker, resulting in the actualization of freedom. In “*Über die Linie*,” Jünger carries this position further, arguing that art is not only a source of freedom, but the means for overcoming the nihilism of technology.²¹¹

Ernst Jünger argues that through the artwork, the “world of machines” receives meaning. He writes:

Spiritual overcoming and command over the age will not reveal itself in the fact that perfect machines crown progress, but rather that the age gains a form in the work of art [*Kunstwerk Form*]. In this way, the age is redeemed [*erlöst*]. Now it is true that the machine can in no way become a work of art, but the metaphysical impulse

²¹¹ Although not necessary for this essay, it is important to note that Heidegger also has a distinct understanding of art, which can also be understood in connection to freedom. For Heidegger, art is not primarily about beauty, but rather truth. Truth “happens” through art (GA 5: 59/44). Art unconceals a world. For example, as Heidegger notes, a Greek temple, as an artwork, reveals the world of the Greeks, i.e., their beliefs, values, and identities (GA 5: 28/21). The unconcealed world, however, depends on the concealment of the material basis of the work of art, i.e., the earth. Unlike the world, the earth is “self-sheltering” (GA 5: 35/26). Earth appears to indirectly refer to the self-concealment of being. In any case, by referring to truth, art has to be related to freedom for Heidegger. Freedom is freeing or letting-beings be, which is to say unconcealing them. Thus, through the artwork, human freedom aids in the unconcealment of the world and the self-concealment of being itself.

[*metaphysische Antrieb*] which animates the entire world of machines can receive in the work of art the highest meaning and in this way introduce rest [*Ruhe*] into the world. This is an important distinction. Rest resides in form [*Gestalt*], even in the form of the worker [*Gestalt der Arbeiters*] (SW 7: 275-276/98-99).

In itself, the world of the machine (the world of total mobilization) is meaningless. It is a reduced world that exists to facilitate the production of power. However, through the artwork, this world acquires form and meaning; giving form is identical with creating meaning, since something formless lacks definition. But unlike his account of art in *The Worker*, the world does thereby not become a work of art. Rather than work allows the individual to understand the world, allowing for individual freedom relative to technical necessity. Consistent with *The Worker*, this form that the artwork gives includes the *Gestalt* of the worker. This *Gestalt* enables meaning and freedom to be discovered in the fundamentally nihilistic world of machines. Hence, Jünger believes that through *Gestalt* the line of nihilism can be definitely crossed, resulting a new relationship to being, a possibility that Heidegger contests.

Specifically, in “*Über ‘die Linie,’*” Heidegger contests Jünger’s attempt at overcoming nihilism because he remains entrenched in the “language of metaphysics” (GA 9: 405/306). On Jünger’s own terms, this entrenchment is explicit: the total mobilization of technology is viewed as a “metaphysical impulse” (SW 7: 275/99); there is a “metaphysics of the work world” (SW 8: 273/165); Jünger speaks of a “metaphysical relationship to technology” (SW 8: 277/167); the overcoming of nihilism results in a new relationship to being as such (SW 7: 267/91). Jünger’s project is therefore metaphysical in orientation. As has been discussed, from a distinctly Heideggerian perspective, this is most evident from Jünger’s appeal to the will to power, i.e., the culminating determination of the being of beings, and *Gestalt* as a remnant of Platonism. Jünger

remains “housed within metaphysics” because *Gestalt* echoes the eternal ideals, but also because it “constitutes the most extreme subjectivity, which comes to the fore in the consummation of modern metaphysics and is presented through its thinking” (GA 9: 396/299). In the language of Heidegger’s middle period, the *Gestalt* of the worker synthesizes both the inception and conclusion of the first beginning, ancient and modern metaphysics. It is within this sense that Jünger thinks crossing is possible; human beings as absolute subjects overcome metaphysics by means of the will to cross over into a new relationship to being as actuality. For Heidegger, however, this rests on the fundamental misunderstanding that being is itself a being.

There is no crossing over from nihilism to being, because the former intrinsically belongs to the latter. Heidegger writes: “In the phase of consummate nihilism, it looks as though there were no such thing as the *being of beings*, as though there were nothing (in the sense of a negative nothing). It conceals itself. It maintains itself in a concealment that conceals itself” (GA 9: 415/313). Heidegger crosses out *being*, in order to safeguard the essential concealment of *being*, in order to avoid thinking *being* in terms of beings and the being of beings (GA 9: 411/310). But not only is being crossed out, but the human being is identified with the line of nihilism. Insofar as human beings are defined by their open relationship to *being*, then there is no crossing over nihilism (GA 9: 412/311). If we are to acquire a new relationship to being, it cannot be done according to a model of metaphysical representation (representing the being of beings) nor can it be a matter of passing over nihilism, since it conceals *being* in its self-concealment. Contrary to his middle project of overcoming metaphysics, Heidegger now advocates for a “conversion [*Verwindung*] of metaphysics” (GA 9: 414/313).²¹² By doing so one

²¹² William McNeill translates “*Verwindung*” with “recovery,” but it can also be a “twisting,” torsion,” or “distortion.” In any case, it is a matter of bending metaphysics into a new shape; it does not outright negate nor alter its essence.

turns into the essence of metaphysics, which is the “oblivion of being,” i.e., its concealment through and as nihilism (GA 9: 416/314). Rather than overcoming nihilism, we need an even greater investigation of the concept. He writes: “Instead of wanting to overcome nihilism, we must attempt to first turn in toward its essence. Turning in into its essence is the first step through which we may leave nihilism behind us” (GA 9: 422/319). Paradoxically, we leave nihilism behind precisely by attending to it more closely. Jünger could not see this because he attempted to will beyond nihilism, and instead became further oblivious to it.

For this reason, going beyond Heidegger’s specific objections, it can be argued that Jünger could not actually account for human freedom. His attempt at giving meaning to technological nihilism, only furthered nihilism. Hence, rather than trying to think of a way of relating to technology that was generally free, i.e., released from it, Jünger sought to master and dominate it. But such mastery is dependent upon the existence of technology. Workers are only workers insofar as they are engaged in the mobilization of the world through *Gestalt*. Rather than freely determining technology, they simply reified its essence. In this way, the worker is no different from the way that Heidegger’s describes how humans are dominated and challenged by the essence of technology, i.e., *Ge-Stell*. The worker is precisely the human subject that is tasked with the rendering of beings as a whole into standing-reserve. Thus, while Jünger seeks freedom through the will to power, Heidegger seeks freedom through the relinquishing of the will. It is only through the latter that freedom is actually possible. In other words, Heidegger attempts to free human beings from the dominion of technology, while Jünger attempts to acquire such dominion for human beings through the *Gestalt*. However, *Gestalt* remains contingent upon *Ge-Stell* and being, which Jünger mistakenly renders into another actual being.

Conclusion: Politics without Power?

This chapter has set out to demonstrate basis behind the radical shift in Heidegger's account of the political over the course of a decade. In the early 1930s, he sought to provide the political foundation of National Socialism, which he identified as the self-assertion and care of the people in and through the state. Heidegger makes this argument by criticizing that Schmitt's friend/enemy definition of the political as secondary to the self-assertion people. By defending the centrality of the state, Heidegger defends Hegel's political philosophy from orthodox Nazism. Furthermore, Heidegger also appeals to Jünger's account of the worker and presents the proper National Socialist state as a work-state; the self-assertion and care of a people is also an activity of labor or work. However, Heidegger's early interest in Jünger's writings would ultimately undermine his affirmation of not only National Socialism, but also the very practice of politics as such. Heidegger's gradual formulation of the history of being resulted in the image of Nietzsche as the consummate thinker, and Jünger as the consummate visionary, of metaphysics. Nietzsche enabled Heidegger to think that the will to power and eternal recurrence were the final nihilistic shape of metaphysics. Although not as insightful as Nietzsche, Jünger nonetheless made this shape manifest; the historical process of total mobilization, which takes shape through the *Gestalt* of the worker, is the visible confirmation of the will to power. Accordingly, if there is to be another beginning for philosophy, then it must go beyond the will to power. In his confrontation with Jünger, Heidegger advocates that we attempt to "overcome" power in order to bring about the truth of being, or "at least prepare the truth in its foundation" (GA 90: 222). Even if Heidegger comes to avoid the language of overcoming in his post-war work, this theme of moving beyond power is evident in his appeal to releasement as will to non-willing. In any case, this transition in Heidegger's thought accounts for his radical break with politics.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Heidegger becomes increasingly critical of National Socialism, which he ultimately deems the “consummation of modernity” (GA 95: 408/318). This is also to say that National Socialism is the consummation of the metaphysical determination of the being of beings as the will to power. It is conceivable that Heidegger would agree with his earlier view that the National Socialist state is the work-state. However, while this was presented as a positive account, it would now be meant critically, i.e., as symptomatic of the forgetting of the truth of being. Hence, Jünger’s frank description of the *Gestalt* of the worker provided Heidegger the proper view of the end of the first beginning and therefore the insight into conceiving the other. Rather than being the source for transitioning from the first to the other beginning, National Socialism is the merely consummate formation of the first.

It might be asked, then, what exactly is the political shape of the other beginning. But the answer can only be negative in construction. In his winter 1942-43 lecture course on Parmenides, Heidegger criticizes both the modern state and the very idea of the political because they are intrinsically bound to the will to power (GA 54: 135/91). Moreover, Heidegger sides against other forms of political organization. Citing the planetary character of the Jünger account of the worker and its expression of the actuality of the will to power, Heidegger claims that this actuality is manifest in not only “fascism,” but “communism” and “democracy” (GA 16: 375). Within the constraints of his history of being, Heidegger perceives the totality of political phenomena in terms of the will to power, including the very practice of politics. Hence, in the *Black Notebooks* from 1939-1941, he calls “politics” the “genuine executor of the machination of beings and can only be grasped metaphysically” (GA 96: 43/34). Through politics, humans produce and organize beings according to the will to power, e.g., the state management of the economy under communism.

While Heidegger possesses insights regarding the essential relationship between power and politics, as well as indicating certain affinities between democracy, liberalism, nationalism, socialism, fascism, and communism due to modernization, his account of the political and the practice of politics remains shallow. Reducing all politics to the will to power, Heidegger is unable to mark distinctions between different political regimes. As Richard Polt explains in his book *Time and Trauma*: “To Heidegger’s credit, he saw through and passed beyond Nazi ideology and the metaphysics of struggle and power. But in doing so, he also overlooked all concrete struggle and powers. He passed through the political and never returned.”²¹³

Heidegger’s disillusionment with politics and power leads him to not only distance himself from National Socialism, but to pass through the political as such. He abandons politics, power, and the will in favor of an account of the truth of being that relinquishes the will and affirms powerlessness. Being is “powerless [*Machtlose*],” understood as “beyond power [*Macht*] and the lack of power [*Unmacht*]” (GA 66: 187). In order to grasp the truth of being, one must withdraw themselves from thinking in terms of power and willing, which includes politics.

If there is a political philosophy that can be derived from Heidegger’s thought, what does it look like after he has categorically abandoned the political and the practice of politics? Criticizing the concept of the political, Heidegger remains committed to the idea of the Greek city-state, the πόλις. “No modern concept of ‘the political’ will ever permit anyone to grasp the essence of the πόλις” (GA 54: 91). The Greek πόλις is antithetical to the concept of the political, which in this case presumably includes not only Schmitt’s concept, but Heidegger’s early formulation as well. Nevertheless, Heidegger does seem to equate the πόλις with the idea of people formation. He bemoans in his *Black Notebooks* that politics “no longer has anything to do

²¹³ Richard Polt, *Time and Trauma*, 182.

with the πόλις, nor with morals and least of all with ‘becoming a people’” (GA 96: 43/34). These two quotes permit us to hypothesize a later account of the political in Heidegger’s work.

Heidegger suggests as much by placing quotation marks around the “modern” concept of “the political.” Thus, there is a proper account of the political that is non-modern, belonging to the essence of the Greek πόλις, not tethered to the will to power, and concerned with the formation and becoming of a people. Heidegger formulates this position through a confrontation with Greek tragedy.

Part Three

Πόλις and Identity

I argue that while Heidegger seeks to distinguish the modern concept of the political from the ancient Greek πόλις, his tragic account of history nonetheless leaves these concepts fundamentally entangled. Unlike the concept of the political, which is necessarily tethered to power and violence, Heidegger presents an an-archic approach to the πόλις, which is characterized as open, abyssal, question-worthy, and, by extension, submergent. Hence, the an-archic πόλις will serve as the site for the possible intimation of the truth of being and the inauguration of another beginning. However, in chapter five, I will also argue that the tragedy of being means that the grasping of the πόλις requires the institution of the political and working through its various ontic consequences. If another beginning requires the consummation and exhaustion of the first beginning, then the political is in fact the condition of the πόλις. Consequently, Heidegger's theory of history renders political violence necessary. In the conclusion, I return to the influence of Heidegger on Identitarianism. I explain how Heidegger's account of planetarity and *Ge-Stell* is taken up by identitarians in order to philosophically ground their objections to globalization. I also explain how they deploy *Dasein* as a political subject. Although I argue that the identitarian commitment to identity is incongruous with Heidegger's an-archic conception of the πόλις and, for this reason, Identitarianism remains just as entrenched in modern nihilism, I will ultimately conclude that the tragic logic at the heart of the history of being means that Heidegger would have to affirm these groups as further steps in on the path towards another beginning. I thereby problematize the a-morality of Heidegger's philosophical project, which the tragedy of being sanctions.

Chapter Five

The Tragedy of the Political: On Heidegger's An-archic πόλις

Through a confrontation with Hegel, Jünger, Nietzsche, Schmitt, and Spengler, Heidegger had determined that the possibility of another beginning had to be located beyond the metaphysics of power. This revelation was accompanied by his passing through the concept of the political. While he had initially sought to affirm a conception of the political that was consistent with National Socialism, Heidegger ultimately came to reject the political, as well as the very practice of politics, as consummate form of metaphysical comportment. Politics is nothing but the naked exercise of power and violence (GA 96: 43/34). Thus, the inauguration of another beginning has to be post-political. And yet, Heidegger remained committed to the idea of the ancient Greek πόλις. The πόλις is the site for unconcealment of beings as a whole for humans: “Because the πόλις lets the totality of beings come in this or that way into the unconcealedness [*das Unverborgene*] of its condition [*Bewandtnis*], the πόλις is therefore essentially related to the being of beings. Between the πόλις and ‘Being’ there is an inceptual relationship [*anfänglicher Bezug*]” (GA 54: 133/90). However, precisely because the πόλις conditions such unconcealment, it also the site for the concealment of being itself. Within the πόλις human beings mistake beings for nonbeings, and vice-versa (GA 53: 108/87). As such, the πόλις is the site for the tragic and errant forgetting and submergence (*Untergang*) of the truth of being, as discussed in chapter two. It is not coincidental, then, that Heidegger chooses to move away from the concept of the political in favor of the πόλις, as presented in two Sophoclean tragedies: *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex*. Thus, through Greek tragedy, Heidegger constructs a tragic reading of the political.

But is this not contradictory? On the one hand, Heidegger wishes to renounce the political by means of the πόλις, claiming that the latter is separated from the former by an “abyss

[*Abgrund*]" (GA 53: 106/86). On the other, the political is conditioned by the πόλις, since the latter makes possible the unconcealment of beings as a whole that the political qua will to power is exercised upon. Hence, Heidegger also calls the πόλις "pre-political [*Vor-politische*]," since it conditions "everything political in the originary and derivative sense" (GA 53: 102/82).

Curiously, Heidegger vacillates on his derogatory views of the political, indicating that there is both an originary and derivative sense. In this chapter, I argue that this ambiguity follows from the more *essential* ambiguity of the history of being.

As discussed in chapters two, three, and four, in order to conceive of the possibility for another beginning, the first beginning had to realize its consummate form, initially the Jüngerian will to power as machination and later *Ge-Stell*. As such, Heidegger fatalistically accepts the ontic consequences of history of being as historically necessary. Hence, the history of being is indeed tragic. I argue that this also applies to the concept of the political. In order to overcome or let go of the political, Heidegger requires that we first realize and affirm it. Thus, while providing criticisms of politics and the political, i.e., their entrenchment in violence and power, Heidegger does not actually provide intellectual means to avoid these phenomena. Even releasement does not necessarily oppose nihilism, since it lets it be. Although critical of conservative revolutionaries, like Spengler, Schmitt, and Jünger, Heidegger's revolutionary desire for another beginning nonetheless conserves the symptoms of the first beginning. Thus, insofar as there exists a political theory within Heidegger's post-rectorate body of work, it is a tragedy that seeks to paradoxically overcome political violence by affirming it as necessary.

Foundational Violence: Heidegger's Early Account of the Πόλις

In chapter three, I discussed how Heidegger sought to construct an account of the political consistent with the spirit of National Socialism, which was conceptually oriented around

self-assertion and care. In chapter four, these two concepts were supplemented by work. It was also demonstrated that Heidegger was committed to the will to power, due to his positive reading of both Nietzsche and Jünger, a commitment that he would later subject to beyng-historical critique; the will to power became the consummate determination of beingness that fostered the nihilistic forgetting of the truth of beyng. Hence, Heidegger's early account of the political and the ancient Greek πόλις was essentially tethered to a metaphysics of power that he would come to reject. In this section, I will explain why the πόλις and its corresponding sense of the political were expressions of an underlying will to power. Furthermore, I will explain why power is inextricable from violence. With this framework, I will argue that Heidegger's early account of the πόλις rests on the necessity of foundational violence; there is no political founding without violence.

The subject of chapter three, Heidegger's early articulation of the πόλις was conceptually "condensed" in the idea of *Selbstbehauptung*, or self-assertion (GA 86: 655). Citing Homer's *Odyssey*, Heidegger identifies the πόλις as the "middle point" (*die Mitte*) of a human territory, which serves as the orienting center for all facets of human life, e.g., commerce and law. This middle point is known through the boundary wall that serves to separate those people who belong to the πόλις, i.e., friends, from external peoples, enemies (GA 86: 654). The wall serves as the physical representation of the self-assertion of the people. Thus, through the πόλις, a people found and assert their existence, which they then oppose to those who are considered other by means of a wall. In a reversal of Carl Schmitt's interpretation of the political, which claims that a people define itself in opposition to an enemy, Heidegger maintains that this opposition is secondary, rooted in the initial assertion of a people. Conflict for Heidegger is necessary, but not sufficient for a people's existence.

That self-assertion should be understood as a form of violence follows from Heidegger's later critical reflections on the will to power and the concept of the political. Recall that "self-assertion" appeared in Heidegger's rectoral address, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," where the concept was defined in terms of the university's will to its own essence (GA 16: 108). The will is then identified as the "essential will to power [*Wesenwillen zur Macht*]" (GA 16: 108). Thought together, then, self-assertion should be understood as a species of the will to power. But just because self-assertion is power, does it follow that it is also violent? Why are violence and power co-belonging? In his 1938-1940 poetic text, *The History of Being*, Heidegger claims that power requires violence. He writes: "Power requires power as a means [*als eines Mittels*], in order to be power. When power puts itself to use and has to use itself up, then power becomes violence [*zur Gewalt*]" (GA 69: 75/64). According to Heidegger's later perspective, then, the political self-assertion of the people through *πόλις* requires at least the tacit possibility of violence. This is more explicitly reflected in his following 1935 lecture course, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, where Heidegger continues to insist on the conflictual nature of the *πόλις* but intensifies it by arguing that political founding's are essentially violent.

Heidegger derives this reading of the *πόλις* through a reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*. In this play, Sophocles describes the tragic conflict between Antigone and Creon. After Oedipus' downfall, Thebes is set into a civil war between his two sons, Polynices and Eteocles, resulting in the death of both. Creon assumes the throne and orders that Polynices' body not be buried. Refusing to leave her brother's body to rot outside the city walls, Antigone accepts her divine duty to bury his body; this sets Antigone and Creon into an essential conflict, with the former representing the laws of the family and the divine and the latter, human laws and customs. According to this tragic logic, both Antigone and Creon are in the wrong. Antigone breaks the

laws of the city, is forcibly entombed, and chooses to commit suicide; Creon violates the laws of the Gods and loses his son, who commits suicide after discovering Antigone's body. For Heidegger, this tragic conflict defines the very meaning of the πόλις, which he renders into the site for the conflict between human contrivance (τέχνη) and divine justice (δίκη).

Heidegger's interpretation of the play revolves primarily around the first choral ode of the second act, where Sophocles presents his general account of the human condition and its relationship to political life. In brief, the ode presents a brief synopsis of the tragic worldview that characterized ancient Greece. The ode begins with the assertion that human beings are the uncanniest of beings: "Manifold is the uncanny [τὰ δεινά] [*das Unheimliche*], yet nothing / uncannier [δεινότερον] [*Unheimlicheres*] than man bestirs itself [*sich ragend*], rising up beyond him" (GA 40: 158/158).). For the ancient Greeks, δεινόν is determinative of beings as a whole; all beings are uncanny. But what is meant by uncanny is not altogether clear. For Heidegger, there are three possible translations of δεινόν: "terrible [*das Furchtbare*]," "overwhelming [*das Überwältigende*]," and "violent [*das Gewaltige*]" (GA 40: 158-159/159-160). Hence, beings as a whole are not simply there for human beings, rather they are fundamentally experienced as something terribly overwhelming and violent, e.g., hurricanes and draughts. In order to survive, humans are compelled to tame beings and render them amenable to their existence. But this very act of rendering the uncanniness of beings canny, or existing according to human demands, is what makes human beings most uncanny. "The human being is τὸ δεινοτάτον, the uncanniest of the uncanny [*das Unheimlichste des Unheimlichen*]" (GA 40: 158/159).

Ironically, fearful of the terrible, overwhelming, and violent nature of beings as a whole, human beings become themselves the most terrible, overwhelming and violent of beings. Heidegger writes: "Humanity is violence-doing [*der Gewalt-tätigkeit*] not in addition to and

aside from other qualities but solely in the sense that from the ground up and in its doing violence, it uses violence against the over-whelming. Because it is doubly δεινόν in an originally united sense, it is το δεινοτατον, the most violent: violence-doing in the mist of the overwhelming” (GA 40: 159/160). Thus, human beings are fundamentally caught up in a double relationship to beings as a whole; they are subject to violence, which is then countered by their own form of violence. But what exactly is this form of violence? Even though both beings as a whole and humans are violent, are those forms of violence indistinguishable?

Heidegger designates this form of human violence, τέχνη. As the etymological origin of the word “technology,” τέχνη refers to the knowledge consistent with the creation of crafts. For this reason, τέχνη is closely related to the work of art. Heidegger expands these senses of τέχνη into an ontological direction: τέχνη is taken as the knowledge through which being is put to work in beings (GA 40: 168/170). Through crafting, human beings do not merely attend to what is, but instantiate their tacit understanding of being as such. For example, in the craft sense, a human might create a jug in order to contain water and annul their anxiety of dehydration. Regarding the artistic sense, a mural of the gods can serve to articulate the values that structure human existence. While these activities might appear innocent, Heidegger is insistent that they are also uncanny (δεινόν), i.e., forms of violence. He writes: “Thus τέχνη characterizes the δεινόν, the violence-doing, in its decisive basic trait; for to do violence is to need to use violence against the over-whelming: the knowing struggle [*das wissende Erkämpfen*] to set being, which was formerly closed off, into what appears as beings” (GA 40: 170-171). Thus, τέχνη is the activity by which humans struggle against beings as a whole and sets to work being as such. Hence, in order to make a jug or a mural, human beings must set themselves against natural forces and entities, re-arranging them according to human need.

In the choral ode, τέχνη is rendered opposed to δίκη, which is often translated as “justice.” Heidegger translates: “Clever [*Gewitziges*] indeed, for he (the human beings) masters / Skills [τέχνας] [*Könnens*] devices beyond expectation, / now he falls prey to wickedness, / yet again valor succeeds for him. / Between the ordinance [*Satzung*] of the earth and gods’ sworn dispensation [*Fug*] [δίκαν] he fares” (GA 40: 156-157/157). Human beings are caught between the earth that they skillfully harness and the dispensations of the gods, who can bestow a blessed or tragic destiny. Rather than “justice,” which is a “juridical-moral” concept, Heidegger chooses the word *Fug*, which can be translated as “fitting,” i.e., what is destined to human beings is fitting to them.²¹⁴ As fitting, something is also uncanny, i.e., overwhelming. Hence, we cannot escape death which is fitted to our being. According to this picture, then, the ancient Greeks understood human beings as using τέχνη in order to overcome the δίκη of beings as a whole.

But, as a tragic twist of fate, both τέχνη and δίκη are species of δεινόν and for this reason overcoming is in fact impossible. Τέχνη is fitting to human beings, it is their δίκη. As such, humans are always under the purview of the gods. Indeed, to view oneself as above the δίκη of beings as a whole, is an act of hubris that befits tragic downfall. In the case of *Antigone*, Creon experiences the tragedy of his son’s death because he refuses to acknowledge Antigone’s divine duty to bury her brother; he places the τέχνη of his rules over the commands of the gods, i.e., δίκη, and suffers for this act of profound hubris. Heidegger explains:

Thus, the δεινόν as the overwhelming (δίκη) and the δεινόν as the violence-doing (τέχνη) stand over against each other, although not as two present-at-hand things. This over-against consists, instead, in the fact that τέχνη breaks out against δίκη, which for its part, as fittingness [*verfügt*], has all τέχνη at its disposal. The reciprocal over-against is.

²¹⁴ “Justice” in the juridical-moral sense is often termed in German, *Gerechtigkeit*.

Thus, within this construction, tragedy is characterized by the conflict between δίκη and τέχνη, which cannot be overcome because they are both reducible to uncanny violence, i.e., δεινόν.

Yet for Heidegger it is clear that this tragic conflict is not a momentary event within human existence. Rather it is reflective of human history as such. He adds to the preceding quote, “It is (the conflict between δίκη and τέχνη), only insofar as the uncanniest, being-human, happens – insofar as humanity essentially unfolds as history (GA 40: 169/171). Human beings first become historical by doing violence against the fitting or natural order of beings as a whole, which itself is an expression of what is fitting to human beings, i.e., the being capable of τέχνη. In more conventional language, history begins with the confrontation of humans against nature through technology. But this is a double bind, precisely because technical activity is just humanity’s form of fittingness. In other words, technology is natural to human beings. Thus, attempting to overcome nature by means of technology, only further entangles human beings in nature. But this also means that it is natural for human beings to be subject to natural violence in light of the use of technical instruments. For example, in order to provide regular sustenance human beings clear forests and create farmland. But deforestation also causes draughts and therefore famines. Thus, human violence is tragically met by natural violence, an inextricable facet of human history, insofar as human history has been centered around rendering nature (beings as a whole) tamed and calculable according to human ends.

But what does this account of δεινόν have to do with politics or the πόλις? We often tend to think of justice as a matter of political philosophy, but what about δίκη as Heidegger describes it? The answer lies in the preceding lines of choral ode. After pointing to the conflict between the “ordinances of the earth” (τέχνη) and the “dispensation” of the gods (δίκη), Heidegger translates: “Rising high over [*Hochüberragend*] the site [*die Stätte*], losing the site is he for

whom what is not [*das Unseiende*], is, always, for the sake of daring [*der Wagnis*]” (GA 40: 157/157). According to Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, this is more conventionally translated as “he is high in the city, but he is cast out from the city if he dwells with dishonor for the sake of daring” (GA 40: 157/157, English translation footnote). Heidegger substitutes “site” for “πόλις.” The passage is normally taken to mean that if human beings follow both customary human laws and the justice of the gods, then they have a high standing in the πόλις. If they do not, then they are cast out for their “daring,” i.e., hubris. Refusing to obey what is fitting for both, results in a tragic downfall, which in this case means being rendered city-less, e.g., Antigone’s death or Oedipus’ exile. In any case, what is revealed here is that the πόλις is precisely the *place* in which the strife between τέχνη and δίκη take shape and where δεινόν as such is manifest. Insofar as these are the sources of historical events, then the πόλις is also the site in which history occurs.

Seeking to distance the idea of the πόλις from conventional historical notion of the “city-state” or the contemporary notion of the “state,” Heidegger chooses to instead designate the πόλις a “site” where history happens: “... the πόλις is the name for the site [*die Stätte*], the here [*das Da*], within which and as which being-here [*Da-sein*] is historically. The πόλις is the site of history, the here, *in* which, *out of* which and *for* which history happens” (GA 40: 161/162-163). Humans are historical insofar as they belong to the site of the πόλις; they take on their respective roles (poets, rulers, soldiers), have political discourse, engage in festivities, worship their gods, and even seek to go beyond the πόλις in order to encounter other people, for the sake of either trade or warfare. Furthermore, the πόλις exists for the sake of history, meaning that historical events are enacted on the basis of the πόλις; there are no historical events independent of a πόλις, since this is the site of conflict between τέχνη and δίκη. But when does a πόλις begin? According

to this picture, history only happens on the basis of the existence of a πόλις. But what about the creation of the πόλις, is that not also an historical event?

Heidegger's answer is equivocal and places human beings in a double bind. Richard Polt argues that Heidegger appeals to the story of *Antigone*, one of the founding tales Thebes, in order to develop "a conception of founding as the violent creation of a site where the creators themselves cannot belong."²¹⁵ The act of founding is an instance of uncanny violence that is both pre-historical and the initial condition of history. For as soon as the act occurs, the founder or creator is already rendered beyond the πόλις and thus beyond history itself. It is for this reason, that these foundational myths often describe the exile or death on the part of the protagonist. Heidegger explains:

.... Use violence as violence-doers and become those who rise high in historical being as creators [*als Schaffende*], as doers [*als Täter*]. Rising high in the site of history, they also become ἀπόλις, without city and site, lonesome, un-canny, with no way out amidst beings as a whole, and at the same time without ordinances and limit, without structure [*Bau*] and fittingness [*Fug*], because they *as* creators must first ground all this in each case" (GA 40: 162/163).

Creators precede and transcend history by existing both inside and outside the πόλις, enacting the foundational violence that created the city, but which ultimately leaves them homeless. For example, Oedipus' inquisitiveness saves Thebes from destruction by the sphinx, but this same faculty also led him to discover the horror of his parentage, which resulted in his exile.

Thus, Heidegger's early reflections on the πόλις are constructed according to a model of foundational violence and power. First, in order for a people to exist, they must assert themselves

²¹⁵ Polt, *Time and Trauma*, 89.

as a πόλις in opposition to external enemies. Second, leaving aside the language of self-assertion, Heidegger heightens the necessity of foundational violence. While the first instance implies violence by means of the boundary wall, in the second, Heidegger affirms it as a necessary component of human existence. The πόλις is the site of violent strife between δίκη and τέχνη. Deriving from the uncanniness of human existence, this conflict does not result in canny dwelling on the part of humans, but rather on their expulsion from the political community. Human violence remains a condition for political life that it cannot overcome.

Heidegger's Critique of the Political: Power, Certainty, and Historiography

As discussed in chapter four, in his poetic texts and his lecture courses on Nietzsche, Heidegger reconstructs his history of being to claim that the will to power was the consummate form of beingness and thus the final nihilistic formulation of the forgetting of the truth of being. Additionally, Jünger and Spengler are presented as the last true heirs to Nietzsche's metaphysical project; they provide ontic visions of the will to power, exposed in the total mobilization and planetary spread of technology. For Heidegger, this technological reading of Nietzsche is accounted for by his concept of machination. Machinational thinking means that human beings only encounter beings as representable objects, things subject to human manipulation. In brief, the will to power as metaphysical principle is accompanied by the machinational manner of relating to the totality of beings, i.e., objects are manipulated according to the demand of power. Due to machinational thinking, human beings are limited to understanding beingness only in terms of objectivity and subjective use. For this reason, they lose further sight of the sheer thatness of being. Hence, machination is predicated upon the nihilistic abandonment of beings by being. Heidegger writes in *The History of Being*, "Machination, as the beingness of beings, is of the essence of being, its being cast away into the forgotten and ungrounded truth, that is, the

unquestionable character of being and of the ‘is’” (GA 69: 46/42). However, machination does more than simply continue to conceal the truth of being through enabling the ontic manifestations of the will to power, i.e., actualizing power; it also enhances and expands the will to power. Hence: “Machination empowers [*ermächtigt*] power into its essence. This essence, however, is overpowering [*Übermächtigung*]” (GA 69: 48/43). Power is not static, but actively self-enhancing; power overpowers itself for the sake of power, a process that ceaselessly furthers the concealment of the truth of being.

These abstract claims regarding the metaphysical essence of power take on a particularly disturbing register when applied to political life. While in his early account of the political, Heidegger had affirmed power for the sake of harnessing and developing the spirit of National Socialism, even to the point of affirming the necessity of foundational violence for the πόλις, Heidegger’s confrontation with Nietzsche and Jünger marked a critical turn from the political, which is then reinterpreted as a key concept in the nihilistic conclusion of the history of being. Hence, as has been mentioned, in the winter semester of 1942-1943, Heidegger will claim that the “modern concept of the political” and the corresponding modern idea of the state are antithetical to the ancient πόλις because they, unlike the latter, pertain to the “essence of power.” Through this critical gesture against power, Heidegger repudiates his earlier thesis that the political can be understood in terms of the πόλις. Instead, Heidegger separates the πόλις from both the political and the essence of power, which he claims are “foreign [*fremd*]” to the πόλις (GA 54: 135/91).

This critical identification of the political and power has a cascading effect on Heidegger’s opinion regarding the very practice of politics. Hence, in the 1939-1941 *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger writes: “‘Politics’ is of a modern essence and as such is always power

politics [*Machtpolitik*], i.e., the carrying out and instituting of the empowerment of power in the beings overpowered by this politics” (GA 96: 260/206). Politics consists in the institution of power itself, which is further reflected in Heidegger’s identification of politics with machinational activity and his claim that politics is the “forceful gathering of all means of power and ways of violence” (GA 96: 43/34). Thus, if the culmination of the history of being consists in the rendering beingness into power and machinational thinking, then this point in history would also have to be reflected in the ontic developments of the political and politics. Heidegger implies as much in his 1940 essay, *Koinón: Out of the History of Being*:

...one would like to find the essence of power and thereby power’s empowering directly and most assuredly within the ‘realm [im Raum]’ of the ‘political,’ especially if ‘politics’ is no longer an isolated domain of human action, but has rather assumed the all-determinative control and provisions for a particular humankind amid beings. Political planning and action indeed show power relations and power struggles in a particular light. However, the essence of power in the sense of power’s becoming empowered into its unconditional aspect [*in ihr Unbedingtes*] becomes visible here only if the political itself is already experienced in terms of beings as such and the humankind that belongs to them” (GA 69: 188/160).

The essence of power becomes visible in political life when the totality of beings, including human beings, are experienced in terms of the political, e.g., political planning. This is of course uniquely possible only in the modern state, which has the capacity to render all previously autonomous aspects of human society, like the church or educational institutions, into political entities. But, in turn, this form of political life was only possible on the condition that human beings already related to beings as a whole in terms of machination and the will to power. Hence,

the political does not constitute the essence of power, but is rather constituted by it. Nevertheless, the political and politics are especially important because they render such essence visible. It is this aspect that I will reflect on. What exactly does the political make evident regarding the essence of power? How does the political ontically further entrench power? By answering these questions, I will provide a foundation for turning towards Heidegger's later conception of the *πόλις*, which, in being foreign to the essence of power, is strictly separated from the modern concept of the political. At most, Heidegger will claim that the *πόλις* is "pre-political" (GA 53: 102/82).

As mentioned above, the political and politics ontically expose the essence of power (overpowering). Insofar as machination mobilizes and empowers this essence, i.e., facilitates overpowering, then political would also have to involve machination. Hence, Heidegger claims that "politics" is the "genuine executor of the machination of beings" and that "politics requires power in order to be directed by it to the empowerment of the machination of beings" (GA 96: 43/34). Politics executes or carries out the machination of beings, i.e., rendering beings into representable objects. But politics also "requires" power, which in turn direct it towards empowering machination. Thus, Heidegger constructs a somewhat convoluted relationship between power, machination, and politics (the political). By constituting objects, machination also creates subjects who implement those objects for the sake of empowerment. Thus, machination is a means for the will to power. However, politics is the ontic means by which machination is actually carried out. Thus, politics consists in both objectification and subjectification. But what does this look like in slightly more conventional political terminology?

According to Heidegger, the political is a thoroughly modern concept (GA 54: 135/91). This is consistent with its intimate relationship with machination. Hence, in his 1938-1939 *Black*

Notebooks, Heidegger states that “modernity [*Neuzeit*]” has a “machinational being [*machenschaftlichen Seins*]” (GA 95: 383/300). The modern world was defined by the transformation of beings into objects and the corresponding appearance of the thinking subject, i.e., the Cartesian Cogito. Politically, this was reflected in the formation of the “modern state.” Heidegger gestures towards this Cartesian foundation of the modern state in his *Parmenides* lecture course: “The essence of power, as meant in modern thinking about the state, is founded in the metaphysical presupposition that the essence of truth had been transformed into certitude, i.e., into the self-certitude of the human being in his self-positing, and that this latter is based on the subjectivity of consciousness” (GA 54: 135/91). However, Heidegger does not sufficiently expand upon what this means. It is clear that the self-certitude constituted a thinking subject that reduced the totality of beings to consciousness, viewing them as representable objects that can be subject to machination: made or manipulated. By why does certainty relate to power?

The modern subject empowers itself by claiming certain knowledge, a kind of unconditional knowledge from which causes and effects can be more accurately calculated and planned out. From such calculation, consciousness derives better ways to secure its existence and enhance its power, an operation that is in fact not reducible to the subject, but to the very essence of the will to power. Transiting from Cartesian certitude to Nietzschean perspectivism, then, what is certain or true is only that which accords with power (GA 69: 80/68). Heidegger provides more content to this tacitly political claim in his lecture course on Hölderlin’s “*Der Ister*.”

As self-consciousness... such consciousness is intent on being unconditionally certain of itself and thereby of all beings that can be experienced. The fundamental guise of such certainty that provides its measure is the surveyability [*die Übersehbarkeit*] and indubitability [*Unbezweifelbarkeit*] of everything that can be calculated [*Berechenbaren*]

and planned [*Planbaren*]... The fundamental modern form in which the specifically modern, self-framing self-consciousness of human beings order all beings is the state (GA 53: 117/94).

The state is the space in which the totality of self-conscious subjects set about to order all beings, allowing them to be deployed as objects of use, a use which is calculated and planned according to the certain demands of power. Through this operation, human beings are more powerful and secure in their existence. Hence, one of the historical ends of the state is security. According to Heidegger, then, the metaphysical operation of machination was ontically realized in the capacity of the state to arrange and secure the power of human subjects, a capacity that is predicated on the reduction of beings as a whole to objects that can be represented, and therefore, fit into a calculable logic of planning.

This machinational account of the political, politics, and the state has especially important implications when connected with Heidegger's historical project. Early on, Heidegger had rendered the state into the "living order" whereby the people realize their "historical Dasein" (GA 16: 302). Heidegger continues to essentially tether the state to history, but now gives the state a distinctly historiographical character. Recall that I concluded chapter two by arguing that modern machination relates to history historiographically, that is, as an object to be produced and manipulated according to present concerns. As co-belonging with technology, historiography consists in the "arraignment of the present as object and condition" (GA 66: 183). Thus, modern historiography gives way to presentism, which in turn forecloses thinking of the future as something other, i.e., the possibility of another beginning. The decision necessary for another beginning required thinking historically, towards the open future, rather the languishing in a calculable present. By turning the state and the political into the fundamental executors of

machination, Heidegger's transforms these forces into historiographical means for the taming history itself. Expanding on his 1942 comments regarding self-consciousness and the state, Heidegger writes:

That consciousness wishes to be certain of history must therefore be a consciousness that plans and acts... For this reason, the 'political' becomes the definite self-certainty of historiographical consciousness. The political is determined in terms of history grasped according to consciousness, that is, experienced in a 'technical manner [*technisch*].' The 'political' is the way in which history is accomplished [*der Vollzug*]. Because the political is thus the technical and historiographical fundamental certainty [*die technisch-historische Grundgewißheit*] of all action, the 'political' is marked by an unconditional failure to question [*die unbedingte Fraglosigkeit*] itself. The failure to question the 'political' belongs together with its totality [*seine Totalität*] (GA 53: 117-118/94).

Within this dense passage, Heidegger explicitly summarizes the previously speculative thesis regarding the historiographical quality of the political. The political accomplishes history by making it certain, i.e., by thinking it in technical terms. By objectifying the totality of beings according to explicitly political concerns, that is, concerns regarding the maintenance and enhancement of a people, the political and the practice of politics via the state make history into a certain process. For example, Schmitt's determination of the political as the friend/enemy distinction provides a theoretical basis for realist political practices that treat warfare as a necessary aspect of history. Since there must always be enemies, states must add the possibility of warfare to their foreign policy. By doing so, states attempt to calculate their pathway to further security and power. Thus, for Heidegger, the political serves as a major category for modern historiographical thinking, but this has the effect of potentially foreclosing other possible futures.

Hence, the possibility of another beginning would have to be thought post-politically. But this would be no easy task given, as Heidegger notes, that modernity leaves the political unquestioned, a quality that apparently “belongs” to its totality.

Ultimately, this appeal to a totality will undermine the existence of the discrete nation state and will account for the presence of planetarity in Heidegger’s later critique of the political. As discussed in chapter four, through his confrontation with Jünger, Heidegger saw that the culmination of the first beginning would result in the planetary spread of technology. Insofar as power dominates the earth as a whole, Heidegger argues that this results in a global sameness that not even a global war could contest. As essentially overpowering, power needs to encounter and overpower itself. Hence, from the perspective of the will to power, there is nothing outside of itself. Furthermore, insofar as power forms both subjects and objects, there is no subject who can bear, possess and use power. For Heidegger, no one can ever “‘have’ power because they are ‘had [*gehabt*]’ by it” (GA 69: 64/55). This has disturbing implications when applied to global violence. From Heidegger’s metaphysical viewpoint, “That power seizes power over the play of the world [*des Weltspiels*] is the ground for the ever more unrestrained eruption of the struggle for the possession of ‘world’ power” (GA 69: 182/155). The apparent conflict between different nations (Germany, Italy, the United States, Russia) and worldviews (Nazism, fascism, liberalism, and communism) is in truth the overpowering of power. To fail to see this it to “prevent essential insight into the metaphysical sameness [*die metaphysische... Selbigkeit*] (determined from out of the beingness as such as a whole) of these modern *configurations* of the political implementation of power [*der politischen Machtenffaltung*]” (GA 69: 189/161). By grasping the metaphysical essence of the political, Heidegger believes that he has demonstrated the ontological sameness of all political peoples and regimes. Although he emphasizes that communism and Nazism best

consummate the essence of modernity (GA 69: 191/162; GA 95: 407-408/318), and that “western democracies” impede this historical development, he is insistent that these differences are still reducible to the underlying will to power and machination (GA 95: 406/316).²¹⁶

Thus, Heidegger’s initially affirmative attitude towards the political and state power gives way to a rather cynical worldview. The modern world is now understood as the violent clash between ideologies and peoples, which are revealed to be the result of the same forgetting and submergence of the truth of being through machination and the rise of the will to power as the being of beings. Following from his claim that politics and the political execute machination and that such execution is violent in nature, Heidegger leaves us with the image that the culmination of the first beginning, i.e., modernity, consists the elevation of violence to a metaphysical principle. While implying that this modern situation is historically necessary, Heidegger is nonetheless insistent that there is still the possibility of another beginning, but one that would not hinge around the political. To this end, Heidegger separates the political from the ancient Greek πόλις and sets out to purify and redeem the latter from the metaphysical errancy of the former.

On An-archy: Heidegger’s Later account of the Πόλις

Having posited an essential relationship between the concept of the political and the essence of power, Heidegger claims that power is foreign to the πόλις and, for that very reason, the concept of the political will never allow anyone “to grasp the essence of the πόλις” (GA 54: 135/91). Heidegger makes a similar claim a few months earlier, in the summer of 1942: “The doctrine of the unconditional priority of the political on the one hand, and on other hand the

²¹⁶ This will be a recurring issue in Heidegger’s thought. After the war, for example, he would claim that communism, fascism, and world-democracy were all reflections of the “universal dominion of the will to power within planetary history” (GA 16: 375).

concept of the πόλις as the ground that is worthy of question and as the site of beings, are separated from one another by an abyss [*einen Abgrund*]” (GA 53: 106/86). The πόλις and the political are separated by an abyss that forecloses simply deducing one concept from the other. Instead, if one starts from thinking the political, one must make a leap over the abyss. Specifically, a leap must be made from the certain ground of the political into uncertain ground of the πόλις, i.e., its being “worthy of question.” But if the πόλις is defined by its being worthy of question and therefore open to determination, then perhaps this is because the πόλις is not yet grounded. Unlike the political, which rationally justifies itself according to the demands of security and power, there is no pre-given basis for the πόλις. Heidegger implies as much with his description that the πόλις is an “open site [*die offene Stätte*]” (GA 53: 110/89; 113/91). Elsewhere, he connects the open to “groundlessness [*Boden-losen*],” which leaves us with the implication that the πόλις would have to be groundless, which is another way of saying abyssal (GA 54: 224/150). Hence, the political and the πόλις are separated because the latter is itself abyssal.

In what follows, I will argue that these various characterizations of the πόλις – abyssal, question-worthy, and open – can be summarized under the concept of “an-archy,” that is, without origin, principle, or foundation. Initially coined by Reiner Schürmann, an-archy has become an important concept in Heidegger scholarship.²¹⁷ In place of metaphysical principles that provide a foundation for ontic beings, Heidegger investigates the truth of being, which, as abyssal, eventual, submergent, and self-concealing, cannot act as a rational foundation. In terms of

²¹⁷ See Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, Trans. Christine-Marie Gros (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, “Opening Address to the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political,” *Retreating the Political*, Ed. Simon Sparks (New York: Routledge, 1997); Trawny, *Heidegger’s Anarchy: Freedom to Fail*.

explicitly political scholarship, Heidegger's ontological difference between beings and being, which is reflected in the distinction between the political and the πόλις, introduced a "non-foundational" political theory, a theoretical approach later adopted by such figures as Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricouer, Chantal Mouffe, and Jean-Luc Nancy.²¹⁸ In any case, Heidegger's anarchic or non-foundational account of the πόλις will provide insight into thinking politics without power and violence. Rather than acting as a space for the imposition of machinational order and calculation upon beings as a whole, including human beings, the πόλις is the open site that allows for both the unconcealed questioning of beings and the preservation of the concealment of being itself. In other words, rather than political certainty, the πόλις is sensitive to truth qua ἀλήθεια. In this way, the πόλις will be conceived as the site for the clearing of the truth of being and, therefore, the possibility of another beginning for history. However, for this very same reason, the πόλις will also be the site for the tragic forgetting of being, ultimately problematizing Heidegger's attempt to think post-politically.

Heidegger stages most of his later account of the political and the πόλις in his 1942 summer lecture course on Hölderlin's "*Der Ister*" and his 1942-1943 winter lecture course on Parmenides. Like his 1935 lecture course on metaphysics, Heidegger continues to focus his reading of the πόλις through Sophocles' *Antigone* (with some gestures towards *Oedipus Rex*). Hence, tragic conflict and violence take center stage. But rather than framing the conflict as between τέχνη and δίκη, Heidegger now chooses πόλις and πέλειν.

²¹⁸ Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou, and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

Πέλειν comes from the first choral ode: πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κούδεν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει.²¹⁹ Heidegger translates this passage thusly, “Manifold is the uncanny [*das Unheimliche*], yet nothing more uncanny [*Unheimlicheres*] looms or stirs [*ragend sich regt*] beyond the human being” (GA 53: 71/58). In place of “πέλει,” Heidegger uses “*ragend sich regt* [looms or stirs].” This translation has important implications for Heidegger’s interpretation of the text, reflecting his ontological commitments. Πέλειν comes from the Greek verb πέλω, which can be translated as “to be” or “to become.” As such, πέλειν is another word for being. But it has a much more dynamic sense than beingness. For this reason, Heidegger chooses to define πέλειν as “to emerge and come forth [*auf- und hervorkommen*] of its own accord, and thus to presence [*anwesen*]” (GA 53: 88/71). Hence, πέλειν refers to the way in which beings as a whole come to be. In *Parmenides*, however, Heidegger chooses a slightly different definition of πέλειν, one which tethers it to the question of truth: “to emerge [*aufgehend*], to rise up into the unconcealed [*Unverborgene*]” (GA 54: 133/90). In coming to be, beings as a whole are rendered unconcealed, i.e., truth claims can be made about them.

But Heidegger emphasizes that these truth claims are not primary. The unconcealment of beings as a whole is initially experienced as something uncanny. Πέλειν is understood as the looming and stirring characteristic of the δεινόν (uncanny) (GA 53: 88/71). As δεινόν, beings do not simply presence in the manner of present-at-hand entities, but rather loom over human beings. For this reason, πέλειν is not reducible to unconcealment. Heidegger writes that belonging to πέλειν is both the “concealed presence [*verborgene Anwesen*] of stillness and tranquility” and the “unconcealed [*unverborgenen*] absencing and presencing [*Abwesen und*

²¹⁹ Sophocles, “Antigone,” *Sophocles (Vol. 1): Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone* (New York: William Heinemann Ltd.; Macmillan Company, 1912), line 335.

Anwesen]” which occurs as the “appearing of change [*Erscheinen des Wechsels*]” (GA 53: 88/72). Thus, πέλειν is the interplay of concealment and unconcealment. As uncanny, beings as a whole are not given as such, but are characterized by a degree of concealment, and therefore are fundamentally question worthy; something totally unconcealed is present as an object for self-certain consciousness and are not worthy of further investigation. We might speculate that this uncertainty at the heart of πέλειν is precisely what invokes counter-violence. Reiterating his argument from *Introduction to Metaphysics*, as τό δεινотаτον, humans in turn loom over beings as a whole. Indeed, without encountering beings as overwhelming, humans would not feel the counter-need to overwhelm them. Thus, Heidegger writes that “uncanniness does not first arise as a consequence of humankind; rather, humankind emerges from uncanniness and remains within it – looms out of it and stirs within it” (GA 53: 88/72). But where is the πόλις in this picture of the world? Why would there be a conflict between the πόλις and the looming and stirring of beings as a whole, i.e., πέλειν?

The answer is complicated by the very essence of δεινόν. Unlike *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger proposes an alternate translation of δεινόν. Normally δεινόν is translated in German as “*unheimlich*” (uncanny), but Heidegger chooses “*unheimisch*” in order to invoke the sense of “home.” “We mean the uncanny in the sense of that which is not at home [*nicht daheim*] – not homely in that which is homely. It is only for this reason that the un-homely [*Un-Heimische*] can, as a consequence, also be “uncanny” [*unheimlich*] in the sense of something that has an alienating or “frightening” effect that gives rise to anxiety” (GA 53: 87/71). On the one hand, beings as a whole are un-homely, because they are threatening. On the other, human beings are the most un-homely because they are anxious before beings as a whole and seek to subject them to violence. In this manner, humans are fundamentally not at home in the world.

This relation to the “risk” of other beings “places [*stellt*] human beings and them alone in the open site [*in die offene Stätte*] in the midst of beings, human beings as those who are essentially un-homely are the most uncanny beings [*das unheimlichste Seiende*]” (GA 53: 110/89). This quote allows us to answer the question above. Being un-homely implies that humans occupy no specific place. Humans loom and stir in such a way that leaves them without a space to occupy and find rest; they seem left to nomadically wander amidst beings as a whole. And yet, Heidegger also speaks of an “open site” wherein humans and beings as a whole mutually encounter each other. Although “open,” this space is still a “*Stätte*,” a “site” or “place.” Heidegger will identify this site as the πόλις.

The πόλις is the site in which πέλειν of humans and beings as a whole occur. Heidegger hypothesizes: “Perhaps the πόλις is that realm and locale around which everything question-worthy and uncanny turns in an exceptional sense. The πόλις is πόλος, that is, the pole, the whirl [*Wirbel*] in which and around which everything turns” (GA 53: 100/81). For Heidegger, the πόλις is once again the site in which beings as a whole appear to humans. More concisely, the πόλις is defined as “the site of the abode [*Aufenthaltes*] of human history that belongs to humans in the midst of beings” (GA 53: 101/82). Humans become historical through the πόλις, but not in the manner of the modern state. Rather than being the space that historiographically determines the course of history, i.e., imposing a calculable order on events, the πόλις is site in which history first comes to be. From out of the encounter with beings as a whole, human beings discover themselves in a world and first begin to determine their temporal relationships beings, e.g., anticipating seasonal changes by recording past harvests. Without precedent, however, this initial encounter is fundamentally questionable and uncertain; human beings have yet to determine metaphysical principles that would dispose one way of relating to beings over another. Through

such questionability, Heidegger invites the listener/reader to reflect on the πόλις not in terms of correct or incorrect, i.e., something fixed and determined, but in terms of the essence of truth itself, ἀλήθεια.

As discussed in chapter two, Heidegger turns to ἀλήθεια to account for the fact that beyng cannot be rendered into a present-at-hand entity or object from which incorrect or correct statements can be made. In truth, beyng is the self-concealed basis for unconcealment. As such, beyng would have to be eminently question-worthy, since the question regarding the meaning of beyng itself cannot in fact provide a definite, correct answer. Instead, it is a perennially open question. In being the site for unconcealment of beings as a whole, the πόλις plays a similar structural relationship as beyng. As referenced above, Heidegger makes this connection between the πόλις and beyng/being in his *Parmenides* lecture course: “Because the πόλις lets the totality of beings come in this or that way into the unconcealedness of its condition, the πόλις is therefore essentially related to the being of beings. Between the πόλις and ‘being’ there is an inceptual relationship [*anfänglicher Bezug*]” (GA 54: 133/90). From this quote one can conclude that the site of the event of the truth of beyng is the πόλις and that, as inceptual, the latter also names site for the inception of the first beginning and the possibility for another beginning. The latter assertion is especially important for the purpose of this chapter. As the site for the first beginning, the πόλις was also the condition for the errant forgetting of beyng. Hence, the initial encounter with beings as a whole ultimately gave way to historiographically determining such beings as calculable objects. Thus, the tragedy of beyng also bears an inceptual relationship to the πόλις. However, before this thought can be fully fleshed out, it is necessary to further justify interpreting the πόλις in terms of ἀλήθεια. Currently, this claim remains merely speculative. Being question-worthy and being the site for unconcealment of beings does not prove that the

πόλις is self-concealing in the same manner as beyng. However, this conclusion can be reached through Heidegger's concept of the open, which will also demonstrate why the πόλις should be interpreted an-archically.

Recall that Heidegger refers to the πόλις as an open site, something that is certainly placed, while nonetheless keeping open as to where. Further along in the text, Heidegger explicitly defines this openness in terms of truth.

What is characteristic of human abode [*des Menschen*] is grounded in the fact that being in general has opened itself to humans and is this very open [*Offene*]. As such an open, it receives human beings for itself, and so determines them to be in a site [*Stätte*]. We here speak of the open with regard to what is said in the word and concept ἀλήθεια, unconcealment of beings, when correctly understood. As unconcealed, beings are in the open" (GA 53: 113/91).

When beings are open to humans, either in perception or thought, they are unconcealed. The πόλις is precisely the site where human beings are open to being as such, and thus are unconcealed before beings as a whole. Heidegger makes this relationship between the question of truth and πόλις clearer in his following lecture course: "The πόλις is the abode [*Stätte*], gathered into itself, of the unconcealedness of beings" (GA 54: 133/90). Beings as a whole are revealed to historical humans, who dwell together in a πόλις. It is a site that orients our relationship to beings. From the comforts of human dwelling, beings become less threatening and, for that reason, can be encountered according to meaningful ends, e.g., science and aesthetics.

And yet the open itself is not open, i.e., it is self-concealed. Defined as self-concealing, beyng is groundless, submergent, or abyssal. This is reflected in the relationship between beyng

and the open: “The open, to which every being is liberated as if to its freedom [*Freies*], is being itself. Everything unconcealed is as such secured in the open of being [*Offenen des Seins*], i.e., in the groundlessness [*Boden-losen*]” (GA 54: 224/150). Being itself is the open, because it is the self-concealing source of the unconcealment of beings as a whole. Thus, insofar as both being/beyng and the πόλις are the conditions for this very unconcealment, then they are in an inceptual relationship (GA 54: 133/90). If the πόλις is the open itself, or at the very least the site for openness, then the πόλις would also have to be self-concealing, submergent, or abyssal. But people certainly do attend to the πόλις as an unconcealed entity; this is the comportment of political science, political philosophy, and the practice of politics. However, by accepting this open, question-worthy, and abyssal view of the πόλις, Heidegger invites us to avoid such approaches because they would necessarily fail to attend to the essence of the πόλις.

Instead of a political determination of the πόλις, one that would definitively place it as a site of power and violence, and therefore founded upon the metaphysical principle that is the will to power, Heidegger’s open account forecloses appealing to any metaphysical determination of beingness. As such, Heidegger’s πόλις is without foundation or principle for existing: it *is* by virtue of being open to beyng itself. However, the πόλις is also not sheer anarchy, i.e., either a state of disorder or an organized community without hierarchical government. As Lacoue-Labarthe asserts, “It is the an-archy of the of the *archē* itself.”²²⁰ *Archē* (ἀρχή) is defined as the “origin,” beginning,” “source of action,” “or “first principle.” It is both the first thing to exist and the reason for all existing things. By demonstrating that beings as a whole presuppose beyng, which is not itself an existing entity, Heidegger undermines the very idea of *archē* that

²²⁰ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, “Opening Address to the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political,” *Retreating the Political*, Ed. Simon Sparks (New York: Routledge, 1997), 119.

metaphysical thinking requires. Thus, Heidegger is an an-archic thinker and the πόλις is an an-archic place. But what does this mean in more legible political terms?

Unfortunately, given that he eschews conventional political thinking as antithetical to the πόλις, Heidegger cannot provide an answer to this question. Rather than positive views of the πόλις, Heidegger is more interested in presenting criticisms of the political. At most, Heidegger's an-archic πόλις invites negative assertions. Saying that the πόλις is open, abyssal, question-worthy, and an-archic, are abstract determinations. However, if one attends to how these abstractions are negated by the political, then some indirectly positive claims regarding the πόλις can be posed.

For example, through Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe argues that all political communities do not exist spontaneously but are rather constructed or “fictioned” according to an ideal. As such, there is no essential determination of a community, and any claim to essentialism is bound up with imposition and violence, e.g., the suppression of those deemed inessential. For example, the violence of Nazism was reflected in its attempt to impose a fictional identity, i.e., the Aryans, as the measure for German citizenship.²²¹ This imposition of identity consummated the tradition of metaphysics by expressing a sheer act of metaphysical will, i.e., willing a people into existence according to a model that was itself mythical.²²² Thus, Heidegger's open account of the πόλις prohibits imposing or forcing an essential determination upon a given people, since such acts would be consistent with the political and the will to power.

²²¹ For Lacoue-Labarthe, Heidegger revealed an “entire tradition” of thought that “culminates in Nazism” which will have “thought that the political is the sphere of the fictioning of beings and communities.” Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, Trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), 82.

²²² Lacoue-Labarthe will identify this as the essence of Nazism: “Nazism is the Nazi myth, i.e., the Aryan type, as absolute subject, pure will (of the self) willing itself.” Ibid. 95.

Likewise, Reiner Schürmann will argue that Heidegger's an-archy forecloses the idea that political principles, such as historical progress or divine right, can serve as absolute sources of legitimacy.²²³ If these principles are shown to be illegitimate and are merely maintained through coercion, then this constitutes a "breach" in the prevailing political epoch, consecrating political revolution. Schürmann writes, "These breaks in our history reveal that the origin 'establishes' nothing: the pair of notions *archē-telos* does not comprise the entire phenomenon of origin, for at these reversals of history the decision is made 'to eternalize the absence of final goals' in action."²²⁴ Revolutions are a testament to the fact that neither the reputed origin nor aim of a political principle can serve to legitimize a given regime. Indeed, if this were the case then there would be no reason to appeal to coercion and violence in first place. The an-archy of principles therefore accounts for the possibility of political and historical ruptures that can form a new political origin. However, deconstruction also problematizes a new origin, by demonstrating that no regime can guarantee legitimacy. Radically contingent, there is no necessity upon which a political regime can declare itself absolute; all forms of power are always open to deconstruction. The conclusion of Schürmann's interpretation of the political is not a positive definition of a

²²³ Although applied political, Schürmann develops his notion of an-archy from a deconstruction of the theory/practice distinction, which he claims follows from Heidegger's critique of metaphysics. Schürmann argues that all theories of action (practical philosophy) are reducible to metaphysical principles, origins, or an *archē*. What is considered proper action, appears differently according to the prevailing interpretation of the being of beings. For example, when the existence of God was posited as the principle of beings, proper action was understood to accord with the will of God. The closure of metaphysics and the subsequent deconstruction of its various principles, leaves action without a foundation: "Now, the deconstruction of metaphysics situates historically what has been deemed to be a foundation.... As one of its consequences, deconstruction leaves the discourse on action suspended in a void." Of course, this suspension does not absolve us of action or practical thinking. Rather it reveals that action does not have a principle that can serve validate a given decision. Without an *archē*, Schürmann demonstrates that action is in fact "an-archic." See Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 1-4.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 91

concept. Instead deconstruction demonstrates that any political project is groundless and, for this reason, open to the possibility of revolutionary rupture. Opposed to positing principles of action, which would be in themselves violent gestures, Schürmann affirms an an-archy of action.

Thus, from Lacoue-Labarthe and Schürmann, I propose that an an-archic πόλις, which is defined as open, abyssal, and question-worthy, should be read as antithetical to identitarian determinations of a people or political community, which becomes a condition for the imposition of power and violence. The πόλις does not answer the questions of who we are or how we should relate to beings as a whole, e.g., as objects to be manipulated, as resources to be consumed, or as things to be worshipped, but rather constitutes a relationship between humans and beings from which questions can first be posed. Furthermore, the πόλις is also a site of resistance from political regimes that impose answer, principles, origins, and foundations. As such, the πόλις sanctions revolution. Furthermore, by being open to such radical changes, we can further understand why the πόλις is eminently historical; it provides a space for genuine political events that are unaccountable according to historiographical calculation. Lastly, this πόλις would be a genuine site of freedom. As discussed in chapters two and four, truth as ἀλήθεια does not impose a correct definition. Rather it free or lets beings be. Hence, for Heidegger, freedom is more intimately connected to truth and releasement than the will. Those within the πόλις are free from the will to power. This view corresponds with Hannah Arendt, who claimed that the πόλις was a site of freedom precisely because it served as public space for speech and deliberation, which are antithetical to violence, which effect action through force rather than persuasion.²²⁵ As open to

²²⁵ For Arendt, the πόλις is not defined as a specific place, it rather refers to the public sphere whereby citizens appear to one another and can thereby engage in public debate. Hence, the πόλις is the “space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.” The political is defined by this capacity

question, those within the πόλις are encouraged to discourse with each other about beings and about the πόλις as such.

But while these might be valid inferences to pull from Heidegger's open-ended interpretation of the πόλις, they are speculative and by no means entirely consistent with his own account. What these inferences obscure is the tragic nature of the πόλις. Heidegger set out to articulate a vision of the πόλις that would be opposed to the political, due to the fact that the latter was necessarily tethered to power and violence. But while we find openness from which we might deduce the absence of violence, it is nonetheless the case that the πόλις is still described essentially as a space of "violent activity" (GA 53: 107/87). Hence, describing the transition from Heidegger's earlier to later account of the πόλις, Miguel de Beistegui explains, "the violence that was inherent to the *polis* is not simply dismissed in favor of a more peaceful or less antagonistic conception of the space of originary politics but is ontologized further and fully integrated into the very structure and logic of the truth of being."²²⁶ Rather than overcoming or simply eschewing violence, the πόλις more fully embraces it. But how can we square this claim with Heidegger's insistence that violence is characteristic of the political, which is antithetical to the πόλις? In the following section, I will argue that Heidegger's attempt at theorizing a post-political πόλις fails precisely because his tragic reading of the history of being necessitates errancy, which in this case also means affirming the political as a condition for

for public discourse, which presupposes and phenomenally expresses human freedom. The political is antithetical to violence and force because it relies on the art of persuasion: "To be political, to live in a polis, means that everything was decided through words and persuasion not through force and violence." See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 26, 198.

²²⁶ Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political: Dystopias* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 129.

another beginning. Instead of being radically separated by an abyss, as Heidegger had suggested, the πόλις and the political are tragically entangled.

The Tragic Entanglement of the Πόλις and the Political

The tragic entanglement of the πόλις and the political follows from an apparent contradiction within Heidegger's thought. On the one hand, there is an abyss separating the πόλις and the political (GA 53: 106/86). On the other hand, as pre-political, the πόλις is the condition of possibility for the political, both "in the originary and derivative sense" (GA 53: 102/82). Despite being radically different, the πόλις nevertheless makes the political, and thereby the practice of politics, possible. Obviously, they must be essentially connected in some form. The πόλις conditions the political by serving as the site where human beings first encounter beings as a whole. Beings as a whole are initially experienced as uncanny or un-homely, an experience that compels the equally un-homely human to violently tame beings, rendering them homely. However, fixated on beings as whole, human beings lose sight of beyng itself, effectively concealing beyng on the basis of unconcealing beings. The πόλις marks both the inceptual clearing of being and beings and the subsequent forgetting of the latter, i.e., the first beginning. Such forgetting makes possible the political, understood as the machination of objects according to the will to power. Hence, the political presupposes the unconcealment of beings as a whole in the πόλις. But what exactly makes this entanglement between the πόλις and the political tragic? Following the history of beyng's tragic narrative, I argue that the πόλις needs the political in order to ultimately serve as a site for the submergence and eventual clearing of the truth of beyng. As such, although critical of political violence and power, Heidegger renders them into historical necessities, which we must engage with in order to intimate another beginning. Hence, violence remains an intractable aspect of political life.

In chapter two, I demonstrated that Heidegger's history of being followed a tragic narrative construction. I argued that there were three senses of the tragic in Heidegger's work: (1) human un-homeliness; (2) the Nietzschean affirmation of beings as a whole; and (3) the anteriority of *Untergang*, or the submergence, of being. In Heidegger's lecture course on *The Ister*, all three determinations are present. Antigone is marked by the fact that she is tragically destroyed because she is most un-homely: "It is this One (death) to which Antigone already belongs, and which she knows to belong to being. For this reason, because she is thus becoming homely within being [*heimischwerdend*], she is the most unhomely [*Heimischseinkönnen*] one amid beings" (GA 53: 150/120). In this passage, we can see the first two determinations at work. Antigone is not only un-homeliest, but she affirms it by committing suicide. Yet insofar as Antigone is fitted to this destiny, then she actually affirms what has virtually already happened. In Greek tragedy, nothing happens because it "commences [*fängt*] with the *Untergang*" (GA 53: 128/103). Being itself is tragic, because its unconcealment is predicated on self-concealment, i.e., its submergence (*Untergang*). The truth of Antigone and Creon's situations is present but concealed until it was too late. These determinations of tragedy pertain to the *πόλις* itself.

The *πόλις* is here not some indifferent space that in turn admits of the empty possibilities of 'towering high [*Hochragend*]' and of downfall [*Niedersturzes*]; rather, it is the essence of the *πόλις* to thrust one into excess and to tear one into downfall [*Sturz*], and in such a way that the human being is fitted into both these counterturning possibilities and thus must be these two possibilities themselves (GA 53: 107/86).

The co-belonging of concealment and unconcealment renders the *πόλις* into a space of both towering heights and downfall; the excessive encounter with beings as a whole can render a member of the *πόλις* into someone who is *απόλις*. As he explains in *Parmenides*: "Such is the

rise and fall of man in his historical abode of essence – ὑψίπολις – ἀπόλις – far exceeding abodes, homeless [*verlustig der Stätte*], as Sophocles (Antigone) calls man. It is not by chance that man is spoken of in this way in Greek tragedy. For the possibility, and the necessity, of ‘tragedy’ itself has its single course in the conflictual essence of ἀλήθεια” (GA 54: 134/90). In order to be at home in the world, humans do violence to it. In accord with tragic irony, this violence is in fact what renders them homeless. In ontological terms, by unconcealing beings, human increasingly lose sight of the condition of their existence, that which is most homely, i.e., being as such. It remains self-concealed beneath the violent activity of human beings. Insofar as death is a closer approximation of being as such, i.e., that which is not a being, then it is only at the moment of the downfall that humans become most homely. In order to grasp that being is submergent, humans themselves have to submerge, to go under, *unter gehen*.

That humans have to affirm submergence accounts for the tragedy of the political. As tragic, the history of beyng must be played out to its most extreme point. Initially, this meant that Nietzsche’s will to power had resulted in the objectification of beings as a whole and the nihilistic abandonment of those beings by beyng. And yet nihilism did not impede another beginning, it rather made it possible by further disclosing that beyng could not be understood as a being. Thus, Heidegger’s logic consists in the viewpoint that the greater degree of unconcealment on the part of beings, the better positioned we are to intimate the truth of beyng as self-concealing or submergent. For this reason, Heidegger will imply that the ending of the first beginning should not be “resisted,” since all that matters is the beginning (GA 71: 97/82).

Consequently, given that the political and politics are the culminating expressions of the will to power and machination, i.e., the end of metaphysics, they must be carried out to their most extreme point, a point that, in theory, would give way to the πόλις. But this means that

Heidegger would have to affirm the violent and destructive forces of the political and the corresponding modern state. This interpretation is evident from Heidegger's Manichean conclusion that the decision that human beings are faced with is to either carrying out "the destruction" that intimates a "concealed beginning" or be left with sheer "devastation" (GA 95: 366/287; GA 96: 3/3). Destruction is therefore justified to the extent that it avoids devastation. This decision is especially disturbing when framed in more concrete political terms.

For example, in his 1938-1939 *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger explicitly rejects modern western style democracies as political forms, because they lack the decisiveness necessary for another beginning. Instead of carrying out the essence of modernity, i.e., beingness as will to power, they vacillate through compromise. He writes:

"In the 'Western-democracies,' so-called geographically-politically, for a long time already and specifically in their spoken and unspoken 'metaphysics,' 'modernity' has come to a standstill. The step into the consummation is lacking in force and above all in an essential calling. Everything happening here is compromise – attempt at vindicating and coping, no anticipatory configuring or guiding. From here, no decisions are made – above all, not ones of essential meditation on the inceptual and basic form of another history of being (GA 95: 406/316).

Although Heidegger seeks to determine the conditions for another beginning, one that would go beyond modernity, such conditions require working through the consummate symptoms of the modern metaphysics. Western democracies bring these necessary historical developments to a "standstill" because they rely on deliberation and compromise, rather than sheer decisiveness. In terms of the above distinction between destruction and devastation, democracy belongs to the latter. But what form of politics is consistent with destruction?

Such politics would unilaterally decide destruction by pursuing modernization. For Heidegger, the only form of the political adequate to the task would be a kind of “dictatorship,” although he is insistent that this term should not be taken derogatorily. “Falsely, and only from the arrested standpoint of the democracies, the executors of the consummation of modernity to its highest essence are called ‘dictators’ – ; but their greatness consists in their capacity to be ‘dictative’ – in their sensing the concealed necessity of the machination of being and not letting themselves be drawn off course by any temptation” (GA 95: 404/315-316). A dictator senses the concealed task of history and dictates or decides the necessary course of action to realize that task, this is what constitutes their greatness. However, it is important to note that the dictator does not have an idea of the history of being, they rather have a sense or intimation of it. In any case, according to Heidegger’s tragic construction of the history of being, a dictatorship is rendered into the properly historical subject by exhausting the possibilities of the political and for creating the space for the reappearance of the πόλις, a space released from power and violence. Ironically, then, the possibility of going beyond political violence requires not only affirming it but carrying it out. With this picture in mind, we are now better equipped to understand the problematic character of Heidegger’s history of being and how it informs his personal political decisions.

In light of these comments regarding the value of dictatorship, it is clear why Heidegger would be attracted to fascist politics, especially National Socialism which he maintained was the consummate expression of modernity. Hence, even after expressing disillusionment with the party apparatus, he still affirmed the spirit of the movement and spoke of its historical greatness. Between 1938 and 1939, Heidegger would write: “Full insight into my earlier delusion regarding the essence and the essential historical force of National Socialism first resulted in the necessity

of affirming National Socialism and indeed on thoughtful grounds” (GA 95: 408/318). As the consummation of modernity, National Socialism fosters the condition for another beginning, and for that reason Heidegger does not deny its necessity. From the standpoint of the tragedy of the political, it is consistent then that Heidegger would view the destruction wrought by the Nazi regime – the seizure of state power, the night of long knives, *die Gleichschaltung*, the World War, and the Holocaust – as inevitable and even desirable to the extent that they disclose the truth of *beyng*.²²⁷

Conclusion: Heidegger’s Ethical Abyss

Although proposing an alternative to political violence through the an-archic πόλις, Heidegger nonetheless remains entangled in the political. Rendered historically necessary through his *beyng*-historical narrative, he is compelled to accept the political and its ontic consequences as tragic fate. In this way, Heidegger remains ever the conservative revolutionary. Critical of Schmitt, Spengler, and Jünger, especially the latter due to their insistence that the West would end with Caesarism or a despotic work-state, Heidegger argued that the West was not a concept of closure and endings, but rather beginnings. Yet, his argument nonetheless

²²⁷ In this way, Heidegger mirrored an aesthetic-political trope of National Socialism. Hitler was attracted to the “theory of ruin value,” proposed by Albert Speer. This approach to architectural design aimed at constructing buildings that would make spectacular ruins in the distant future. As such, the Nazi regime recognized its own finitude and prepared the way for a “great” downfall. This logic reflected Hitler’s refusal to surrender even as the war had been clearly lost. He believed that it was better to affirm a tragic downfall than capitulate. Hence, at the moment of the turning of the war, the Nazi regime consistently invoked the great downfalls of ancient Greece and Rome. As the historian Johann Chapoutot concludes: “the examples of antiquity were mobilized to galvanize and radicalize a resistance against an enemy that was designed less to save Germany than to wipe the country off the map, so that the *finis Germaniae* would eclipse even those great civilizational collapse that the tragic history of the Nordic race, since the age of Greece and Rome, had grown accustomed to.” Johann Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans: How the Nazis Usurped Europe’s Classical Past*, Trans. Richard R. Nybakken (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 391.

insisted on the transitional necessity of Spenglerian or Jüngerian dictatorship. The other beginning is not antithetical to dictatorship since it presupposes it. Thus, while seeking a revolutionary return to a concealed origin – the other beginning – Heidegger conserved the fundamental political stances of the conservative revolutionaries. In this manner, Heidegger does indeed have a political stance, but by grounding it on a tragic historical narrative, he absolves himself of political responsibility and moral culpability.

Citing Schürmann's use of "an-archy," Trawny argues that Heidegger's an-archic thinking places himself outside of normative accounts of ethics, from which concepts of responsibility, guilt and culpability would be derived. Specifically, Heidegger constructs an originary ethic that is grounded in an-archic freedom and expressed in the tragic form. Trawny writes: "Our thinking and acting, especially, though not only, in the political community, is exposed to an-archic freedom – 'originary ethics' ... Tragedy gives to his (Heidegger) an-archic freedom its inceptual shape."²²⁸ Human beings err regarding the truth of being, because they are free to err. This form of an-archic freedom is sharply separated from "principled freedom." The latter serves as a "criterion for moral action," whereby human beings are held responsible or guilty for freely violating moral principles. Hence, principled freedom is consistent with systems of morality that provide form for free actions. But if freedom can be free for principles, then it must be free prior to the positing of said principles. Accordingly, the freedom from principles is an-anarchic. "An-archic freedom is an-archy, the inception of a freedom that is nothing besides itself: an 'abyss of freedom,' a freedom of the unanticipatable inception. An inception is always an appropriative event, a rupture, an upheaval. It can open up nothing other than the open

²²⁸ Trawny, *Freedom to Fail*, 41.

itself.”²²⁹ As an-archic, such freedom is necessarily abyssal. Yet, for this very reason, it is also a freedom that is open for what might happen, unlike principled freedom which constrains possible ways of being in advance. Hence, this form of freedom is identified with the open and letting-be.²³⁰ However, it is also an errant form of freedom: in letting-be and being tethered to the open, it preserves the self-concealment of being. Hence, it is a mode of freedom that is tragic, i.e., being free for errancy and the suffering that might arise. This is the kind of freedom that corresponds to the essence of the πόλις.

One of the primary consequences of this interpretation of an-archic freedom is that Trawny is able to account for Heidegger’s ethics and politics, but in such a way that is disappointing from the perspective of normative theory. Specifically, Heidegger’s ethics and politics are tragic: “Tragedy contains an ethics of *aletheia*, an ethics of an-archic freedom. That is ‘originary ethics.’ Because the plot of *aletheia* is tragedy, the ethics of the appropriative event of truth, the ethics of the origin, is a tragic ethics.”²³¹ Heidegger posits no moral principles, but rather advocates for an openness to letting-be what might be. Because this form of freedom is tethered to the essential self-concealment of being, then we can never have a transparent relationship to our thoughts and actions. “We are not in the position to see through all the presuppositions and consequences of our thinking and acting. Concealment always occurs together with openness.”²³² We do not know the consequences or reasons for actions, and therefore are liable to err and suffer disastrous results. This is characteristic of Greek tragedy, where heroes erroneously make decisions that lead to their downfall. And yet, because these

²²⁹ Ibid., 21-22.

²³⁰ Ibid., 27.

²³¹ Ibid., 50.

²³² Ibid., 41.

decisions were also destined, then we do not feel hatred of them, but rather pity. Instead of being invested in principled freedom with its economy of guilt and punishment, Greek tragedy is defined by heroes being punished without guilt, e.g., Oedipus suffers due to a prophecy. The ethical message of tragedy is not to condemn others or ourselves, but to bravely affirm fate.

As interpreters, Heidegger's vision of a political and ethical life that is beyond good and evil, as well as liable to err, puts us in a troubling position. Trawny writes, "An-archic freedom is freedom from responsibility and guilt. Just as Oedipus cannot be guilty of having slept with his mother, the one who errs is not guilty of having founded in the interplay of concealment and openness. In the appropriative event of truth, moral responsibility is merely a phantasm."²³³ With this vision of ethics in mind, it becomes quite clear that Heidegger would never view himself as being guilty or responsible for the actions of National Socialism. Indeed, the movement is rendered into a necessary moment in the history of being. What is disturbing about Heidegger, is that he provides not only little sense of personal moral culpability in his political decisions, but even proposes an originary ethics that renders categories of guilt and responsibility meaningless: "Whoever holds responsibility to be an indispensable element of thinking and acting will find no confirmation in Heidegger's thought. Whoever attempts to inhabit Heidegger's thought must abandon the expectations of responsibility and guilt. This limit has become clear after the publication of the *Schwarze Hefte*."²³⁴

Should we hold Heidegger's morally responsible if he himself did not? I certainly believe so, but not on the basis that I necessarily reject the important distinction between principled and an-archic freedom. Instead, I hypothesize that acting according to one account of freedom or

²³³ Ibid., 52.

²³⁴ Ibid., 74.

another is itself a choice and that this choice could follow from principle. The question is then whether or not Heidegger made a choice and that this choice was principled. Although Heidegger insists that the decision between the first and other beginning is not reduced to human choice, i.e., a will, his use of “decision” nonetheless intimates a choice. Furthermore, while he maintains that this decision will be made over and above human beings and that it is destined, he frequently makes room for human agency. As mentioned above, when discussing carrying out the decisive conclusion of the West, Heidegger urges that the “the end in its demise should not be resisted... we must not impede the demise. We must not claim that the withdrawal into fatalism is an attitude” (GA 71: 97/82). By use of “should [*soll*]” and “must [*dürfen*],” he not only implies a degree of agency on the part of humans, he also renders this choice into a norm; one ought not to impede the submergence of beyng. By positing a norm, Heidegger implies a valuation that it is better for the demise to happen than not, hence he invites thinking in terms of principles. Indeed, this seems to already follow from his distinction between destruction and devastation, whereby the former is more desirable than the latter.

Furthermore, Heidegger also proposes alternative political and social conditions that would be more conducive to realizing another beginning. Perhaps he is a fatalistically disposed to what is, he nonetheless proposes that dictatorship, fascism, National Socialism, and even communism are better conditions than western-style democracies, which Heidegger speaks of in a language that is heavily laced with scorn (a valuation). In principle, Heidegger values decision over indecision, and a decision in favor of another beginning over a mere maintenance of the first. Moreover, as discussed by Andrew Jeffrey Barash, because he proposes conditions better fated to an apparently determined history, Heidegger becomes an historical actor in his own right. “Where the fatalism dictated by his vision of Being ultimately denies any principle of

human responsibility, it runs the risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. To the extent that it is capable of inspiring belief, it only renders more probable the political consequences that follow from its prediction.”²³⁵ Heidegger’s endorsement of certain political forms over others helps further their legitimacy, and thereby grants him a greater degree of historical influence and responsibility. Because he is the partial cause for the consequences of his philosophical thoughts, which, as I have shown, are loaded with valuations, norms, and even a principled stance towards another beginning, then it would seem that Heidegger would have to be held accountable. This appears especially pertinent in light of the recent uptick of Heidegger’s thought by identitarians, who explicitly make use of Heidegger’s valuations in order to philosophically justify concrete political decisions, decisions that are explicitly eliminationism towards the non-European other.

²³⁵Jeffrey Andrew Barash, *Shadows of Being: Encounters with Heidegger in Political Theory and Historical Reflection* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2022), 104.

Conclusion

Identitarianism and the History of Beyng

By reflecting on Heidegger's confrontation with the German conservative revolutionaries – Spengler, Schmitt, and Jünger – I problematized the alleged split between the former's philosophical problematics and his disastrous political decisions. The history of beyng is essentially tethered to the tragic entanglement of the political and the πόλις. Seeking to determine the conditions for another philosophical beginning, Heidegger affirmed the beyng-historical necessity of the first, i.e., the history of metaphysics. Critically appropriating Spengler's tragic account of the *Untergang* of the West, Heidegger viewed going-under or submergence as the condition whereby the West would be reborn, i.e., western universalism. With regards to Schmitt and Jünger, this meant affirming their vision of the political and the subject qua worker, respectively, in order to stake out the limits of modernity. In place of sense of the political that was a calculable expression of the will to power, Heidegger appeals to a pre-political πόλις that both made the first beginning possible while nonetheless providing the open possibility for another beginning. In this manner, Heidegger did indeed attempt to go beyond the political and the practice of politics, both of which he viewed as violent symptoms of nihilism. However, insofar as nihilism provides the very insight into the truth of beyng, then another beginning would have to presuppose the first. Thus, even if he was critical of beyng-historical violence and politics, Heidegger presents these forces as tragic fate; Heidegger's critique is compelling, but it leaves the reader bereft of normative claims that might morally redeem his philosophical project. As a tragic thinker, Heidegger is not a moral thinker. In this way, we see another instance of Heidegger's intellectual affinity for aspects of the German Conservative

Revolution; the intellectual movement eschewed moral judgements in favor of a comportment of decisiveness that willed what was historically necessary.

With this backdrop in mind, I want to return to the contemporary problem of Identitarianism. As discussed in the introduction, in the last couple of decades, Heidegger's thought has become a central influence in far right identitarian groups in Europe and the United States, an influence that can be traced back to French New Right and the German Conservative Revolution. Like Bourdieu and Gadamer, these groups do not hesitate to identify Heidegger as conservative revolutionary, pointing out his early membership and later break with Nazism, as well as his active relationship with figures like Jünger, as evidence. Broadly speaking, this movement, groups, and respective intellectuals view themselves as tasked with bringing about another political, cultural, and spiritual beginning from out of the authoritarian shadow of globalized liberalism. They seek to do this through an embrace of both *Dasein* as a model of political subjectivity and the concept of identity (cultural, spiritual, or racial) as a counter to global homogeneity and liberal individualism. The question for ourselves: where would Heidegger place Identitarianism in the history of being? From a Heideggerian perspective, does the way to another beginning consist in the reification of identity or is this merely another symptom-formation of nihilism? I will argue for that latter. However, I want to stress again that Heidegger's construction of the history of being would also mean that Identitarianism is another necessary step in the right direction, which is precisely why tragedy should be problematized as a political and historical category.

Identitarianism: Globalization, Homogeneity, and Identity

The fundamental contention of Identitarianism is that the globalization of political liberalism and free-market economics results in the destruction of traditional cultural and

ethnic/racial identities. In place of identifiable peoples and cultures, liberalism posits discrete, rights bearing individuals. While in theory this would seem to result in the proliferation of differences, i.e., different lifestyles and ways of thinking, Identitarians maintain that the opposite occurs. Reduced to mass of individuals who can only differentiate themselves through consumption, societies have become increasingly homogenous. In a curious dialectic, Identitarianism operates around the idea that genuine difference can only be reflected in the differences of identities. Hence, in his 1999 manifesto for the New Right, which would also be a foundational text of Identitarianism, Alain de Benoist will affirm both the need for “clear and strong identities” and the “right to difference.”²³⁶ He writes:

The French New Right upholds the cause of peoples, because the right to difference is a principle which has significance only in terms of its generality. One is only justified in defending one’s difference from others if one is also able to defend the difference of others. This means, then, that the right to difference cannot be to exclude others who are different. The French New Right upholds equally ethnic groups, languages, and regional cultures under the threat of extinction, as well as native religions. The French New Right supports peoples struggling against Western imperialism.²³⁷

The New Right maintains the inherent value of different identities and explicitly aims to defend such differences from the “menace of homogenization,” which ultimately results in “pathological identities,” e.g., political tribalism.²³⁸ However, an argument for social pluralism does not follow the right to difference.

²³⁶ Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier, *Manifesto for a European Renaissance* (London: Arktos Media Ltd., 2012), 32-33.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

Maintaining his supposed opposition to racism, Benoist calls his position “differentialist anti-racism.” In principle, however, this position amounts to an endorsement of separating people into races, under the assumption that race is real and different races cannot and should not intermingle with each other. Benoist offsets his claim to accept “the other as Other through a dialogic perspective of mutual enrichment,” by also rejecting both “assimilation” and the idea of the “melting pot.”²³⁹ This point is furthered by Benoist’s opposition to immigration, since the immigrants would violate the cultural and racial identity of the migrated country.²⁴⁰ To this end, Benoist is critical of global economic policies that encourages immigration and argues in favor of people remaining in their countries or regions of historical origin. Accordingly, in connection with the fear concerning the Great Replacement, or the belief that Europeans are being systemically replaced by non-Europeans, Identitarians also call for a “Great Return” or “Remigration,” the systematic return of non-European immigrants back to their respective countries of origin. For example, the French Identitarian group, *Bloc Identitaire*, has as one of its mottos: “In order for Europe to remain European, we demand Remigration.”²⁴¹ While these groups and respective writers are insistent that remigration would not be a form of “ethnic cleansing” and that they do not approach identity as a racist concept, these protestations certainly ring hollow. This is especially clear when one reflects on the writings of Guillaume Faye, one the principle architects of Identitarian ideology.

Although initially a member of the French New Right, Faye left the movement in 1986. After which he would write a series of texts that would serve to articulate an identitarian

²³⁹ Ibid., 34.

²⁴⁰ Benoist also argues that immigration is bad for immigrants, since they are subject to hostile environments that do not accept them. Bizarrely, Benoist does not recognize his own complicity in anti-immigrant hostility. Rather, he renders it into a matter of fact. Ibid., 34-35.

²⁴¹ Zúquete, *The Identitarians*, 158.

alternative to New Right. While agreeing on many of the same principles, such as the defense of identity, Faye unambiguously affirmed the great replacement theory and rendered identity into an explicitly racial category. He writes in his *Metapolitical Dictionary*, “identity’s basis is biological; without it, the realms of culture and civilization are unsustainable. Said differently: a people’s identity, memory, and projects come from a specific hereditary disposition.”²⁴²

According to Faye’s racist worldview, even the cultural and civilizational achievements that are often attributed to the activity of the spirit are reducible to the alleged existence of biological race. Faye accompanies his appeal to biological racism with the paranoid belief that Europeans are being subject to biological genocide, or “ethnocide.” He writes in his 2001 manifesto, *Why We Fight: European Visions of the Post-Catastrophic Age*:

The fatalistic belief here in the inevitability of race-mixing is simply unsupported by the facts. It’s no ‘mixing of cultures’ that we’re experiencing in France, but rather the destruction, the eradication, the ethnocide of European civilization for the sake of Americanization, on the one side, and Islamisation and Afro-Maghrebisation, on the other.²⁴³

Faye accepts the ethnocide of Europeans as a fact, the result of the both Americanization and the influx of immigrants, specifically those of Islamic faith and from North Africa.

Ultimately, what separates Benoist, as the representative of the French New Right, and Faye, as the representative of Identitarianism, is that the latter makes explicit the implicit racism of the former. Although both writers would take umbrage with this assertion. Faye accuses the New Right’s alleged opposition to racism as a desire for “respectability” that minimizes the

²⁴² Faye, *Why We Fight*, 169.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 39.

threat of replacement.²⁴⁴ For his part, although continuing to be a substantial influence on identitarians, Benoist criticizes “the identitarian claim” as a form of “essentialism” that “becomes a pretext to legitimize ignorance, exclusion, or oppression.”²⁴⁵ Although this sectarian debate is certainly not closed, it is quite clear that Faye’s position has at least won the broad approval of identitarians, who emphasize biological identity along with cultural identity, and who envision immigration as an existential threat. In 2012, for example, *Génération Identitaire* released a “Declaration of War” on the internet, where they claimed: “We are the generation of ethnic fracture, of the total failure of integration, the generation of forced crossbreeding... We have discovered that we have roots and ancestors – and thus a future. Our only inheritance is our blood, our soil, and our identity.”²⁴⁶ By tethering identity to “blood” and “soil” – a reference to National Socialism – Generation Identity makes explicit its appeal to biology, which is further reflected in the paranoid delusion of “forced crossbreeding.” Thus, although containing cultural and spiritual dimensions, Identitarianism is firmly committed to identity as a biological and racist construction, an identity that is biologically threatened by the existence of other races and peoples.

If globalization, liberalism, and capitalism produce this threat to identity both by encouraging immigration and by reducing peoples to a homogenous mass of singular individuals, then what is the Identitarian alternative? Benoist proposes a multi-polar “pluriversum” in favor of the unipolar world of Western hegemony.²⁴⁷ This notion is partially derived from Schmitt’s account of the political. Because the friend-enemy distinction cannot be eliminated, there will

²⁴⁴ Zúquete, *The Identitarians*, 14.

²⁴⁵ Alain de Benoist, “On Identity,” *Democracy and Populism* (Candor: Telos Press, 2018), 267.

²⁴⁶ Zúquete, *The Identitarians*, 27.

²⁴⁷ Benoist, *Manifesto for a European Renaissance.*, 28.

always be a plurality of states that exist in opposition to each other. A unified and homogenous world state is impossible. For this reason, “the political world is a pluriverse, nor a universe.”²⁴⁸ Benoist accepts this basic theoretical model but applies it to a plurality of identifiable cultures and ethnicities/races. In contrast to the unipolar world that had characterized the immediate fall of the Soviet Union, Benoist welcomes a multipolar world, where power is distributed among “emerging civilizations: European, North American, South American, Arabic-Muslim, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, etc.”²⁴⁹ Faye echoes this vision as well, claiming that rather than a “planetary civilization,” “the planet is today being organized in competing ethnic/identitarian blocs.”²⁵⁰ However, he also contests Benoist’s belief that such pluriversum can exist without violence. Reflecting his eliminationist account of ethnocide, Faye rejects the notion of pluriversum as naïve.²⁵¹ In place of a plurality of identities co-existing, but in distinct regions, Faye seems to believe that this pluralism would be ever in a state of conflict.

With regard to the particular attention to Heidegger’s writings in identitarian circles, it is important to note that Dugin’s “Fourth Political Theory,” which deploys Dasein as a political subject that is fundamentally incompatible with liberalism, communism, and fascism, approves of Benoist’s counter-vision to globalization and unipolarity. He writes, “Instead of a unipolar world, the Fourth Political Theory insists upon a multipolar world and instead of universalism, on pluriversalism, which Alain de Benoist brilliantly pointed out in his book.”²⁵² Furthermore, he endorses pluriversalism on the basis of “choice:” “The idea of a multi-polar world, where the poles will be as many as there are civilizations, allows one to propose to humanity a broad choice

²⁴⁸ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 53.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁵⁰ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 39.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁵² Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, 46.

of cultural, paradigmatic, social and spiritual alternatives.”²⁵³ Thus, like Benoist and unlike Faye, Dugin attempts to hide his ethnocentric worldview through a form of differential and pluralistic relativism, a relativism that in actuality confirms a radically conservative agenda.²⁵⁴

What then of Heidegger? In what ways does Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics, his ontological difference, his history of being, and his general account of Dasein, provide a theoretical basis for the identitarian affirmation of identity and their critique of global homogeneity? While I have demonstrated Heidegger’s philosophical affinity to the German Conservative Revolution, it remains to be seen how resonant his thought is to Identitarianism. In the proceeding section, I will explain how Dasein is conceived as an identitarian political subject and how it acts as a counter to globalization. Furthermore, I will explain how identitarians view themselves as engaged in the project of formulating another historical beginning. In order to properly flesh out this account, I will engage with both identitarian movement figures, e.g.,

²⁵³ Ibid., 119.

²⁵⁴ Although arguing for a multipolar world of distinct cultural regions, Dugin’s Fourth Political Theory does grant a certain priority to Russia, since its status as a great power is one of the few forces that can combat Western imperialism, i.e., Americanization. He writes: “If Russia chooses ‘to be,’ then it will automatically bring about the creation of a Fourth Political Theory. Otherwise, for Russia there remains only the choice ‘not to be,’ which will mean to quietly leave the historical and world stage, dissolving into a global order which is not created or governed by us.” To this end, Dugin advocates for a form of “Euroasianism,” which emphasizes that Russia is not identical with the West and can therefore serve as a site for civilizational renewal for Europe. Faye had already anticipated this idea with his notion of “Eurosiberia,” a “destined space” for an alliance between “white” Europeans and Russians. “If it should ever be constructed, Eurosiberia would regroup all White, Indo-European peoples in the great regions into which they have spread, becoming – form far off and for long to come – not solely the world’s foremost power, but the first hyper-power in history.” That being said, there is also a certain degree of hostility towards Eurasianism in parts of the identitarian movement, which they believe is too narrowly rooted in Russian geo-politics and insensitive to the unique identities of European peoples. See Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, 14, 99; Faye, *Why We Fight*, 139-149; Zúquete, *The Identitarians*, 252.

Martin Sellner, and their intellectual influences, e.g., Benoist, Faye, and Dugin. This analysis will then be used to test the limits of the identitarian use of Heidegger's philosophy.

Heidegger as Identitarian: Dasein, *Ge-Stell*, and Globalization

As briefly discussed in the introduction, the identitarian movement, as well as affiliated right-wing movements like the French New Right or the German New Right, have appealed to Heidegger's philosophy for intellectual legitimacy. However, it would be misleading to say that they do not indeed find compelling ideas in Heidegger's thought that are consistent with far-right ideology and critique. Hence, as has been repeatedly revealed throughout his confrontation with the German Conservative Revolution, Heidegger expresses a hostility to liberalism, globalization, and technocracy. Beyond these negative assertions, Heidegger also provides a historical narrative that centers the world-historical value of the German people, which would obviously be compelling to German identitarian thinkers today. But what exactly does Heidegger's account of Dasein provide, if, as identitarian leader Martin Sellner claims, this concept is the "only, true and last enemy" of the "project of the planetary human state." Is Dasein fundamentally opposed to globalization or planetarity?²⁵⁵

Before addressing the political use of "Dasein" it is important to frame it in context of Heidegger's account of planetarity; I will demonstrate why this account is compelling for Identitarianism. As mentioned above, identitarians are opposed to globalization, because they argue that it fosters a homogenous worldview – a composition of liberalism, capitalism, and

²⁵⁵ Göppfarth, "*Rethinking the German Nation as German Dasein*," 258; Martin Sellner, "Heidegger, Revolution and Querfront," *Sezession Online*, Sezession, May 16, 2015, <https://sezession.de/49665/heidegger-revolution-querfront>

human rights discourse – that ignores and even eliminates human difference. Heidegger himself makes almost the exact same arguments.

Heidegger's account of planetarity is primarily derived from Jünger, who argues that the total mobilization uses technology in order to totalize itself across the entire planet. This is accompanied by the planetary spread of the *Gestalt* of the worker. Hence, Jünger writes that "planetary dominion as the highest symbol of the new *Gestalt* (of the worker)" (SW 8: 310/187). Heidegger accepts this basic picture of the world, arguing that machinational thinking is planetary in scale. For this reason, Heidegger presents planetarity as the consummation, or "ending and completion," of modernity and argues that the West, as the site of the submergence of the truth of being, names what is other than planetarity (GA 71: 95/80). Even after turning from machination to *Ge-Stell* as the proper essential determination of technology, Heidegger still speaks in planetary proportions. Hence, in his response to Jünger essay "*Über die Linie*," Heidegger mentions the "world-historical moment of the planetary consummation of nihilism [*der planetarischen Vollendung des Nihilismus*]" (GA 9: 409/309). Furthermore, in the 1949 Bremen lectures, he will emphasize that *Ge-Stell* derives from the "planetary destiny of being [*planetarischen Seinsgeschickes*] from φύσις" (GA 65/62). Thus, throughout the various transformations of the consummation of philosophy in Heidegger's being-historical narrative, planetary dominion and destiny remains in play.

With regard to the identitarian anxiety that globalization fosters homogeneity, Heidegger echoes the same fear in his depiction of planetarity. For example, in his *1939-1941 Black Notebooks*:

Planetarity [*Der Planetarismus*] is the historiographically conceived determination of the abandonment of beings by being, inasmuch as this abandonment is everywhere the same

and covers the entire earth [*die ganze Erde*]. The homogeneity and leveling down of humanity [*Die Gleichheit und Einebnung des Menschentums*] to a kind of achievement of an order of life, despite the apparent heterogeneity [*der scheinbaren Verschiedenartigkeit*] in the provenance and scope of the ‘cultures’ and the folkish existences [*volklichen Bestände*] (Japan, America, Europe,) have their essential ground in the circumstance that power itself, as soon as it attains unconditional empowerment, intrinsically demands a sameness [*das Gleich*], a monotony [*die Eintönigkeit*], in its ever more simple means. Every power tries to expand and thereby collides with every other one in the same machination. The sameness of essence [*Diese Wesensselbigkeit*] is the ground of the historiographically determinable totality and unconditionality of the essence of power (GA 96: 261/207).²⁵⁶

Despite the apparent reality of cultural “heterogeneity,” as a function of machination qua will to power, planetarity demands “homogeneity,” “levelling down,” “monotony,” and “sameness” in order for power to empower itself; the totality of human differences is reduced to the homogenous expression of power. Ultimately, Heidegger concludes that planetarity is another name for the process of beyng-historical devastation; it is the “last step of the machinational essence of the power to annihilate what is indestructible [*Unzerstörbaren*] on the path of devastation” (GA 96: 260/206). By highlighting the “indestructible,” which he also identifies with the “inception,” Heidegger also points to the ever-present possibility of another beginning. Presumably, this indestructibility would then refer to what was heterogenous and different,

²⁵⁶ I substitute “planetarity” for Rojcewicz’s “globalism” and “folkish existences” for “communal assets.”

rather than homogenous and the same. In this way, Heidegger's own account of planetarity is fairly consistent and compatible with the identitarian critique of globalization.

Key identitarian writers not only take up this account of global homogenization from Heidegger, but also present it in uniquely Heideggerian terms, most notably through the use of "*Ge-Stell*." In the case of Benoist, he accepts Heidegger's basic account of modernity, whereby the subject/object split was formed, and, subsequently, technological objectification became the sole mode of relating to beings.²⁵⁷ In an interview with *Compact*, Benoist explicitly connects this account of technology to Heidegger's notion of *Ge-Stell*. In this case, the planetary growth of technology and its various ontic results are orchestrated according to the "capitalist '*Ge-stell*.'"²⁵⁸ In seeking the ever-growing expansion of commodity exchange, capitalism positions itself over the entire planet.

Similarly, Dugin's Fourth Political Theory adopts *Ge-Stell* and Heidegger account of history and pairs it with the economic toil confronting the globe. Dugin argues that this political theory anticipates the Heideggerian "event [*Ereignis*] that will usher in the return to being, which had been abolished to nothingness under the duress of *Ge-Stell*."²⁵⁹ In order to render this abstract notion political, he then connects *Ge-Stell* with capitalism. "The current global economic crisis is just the beginning. The worst is yet to come... This is the new phase in the onset of *Ge-Stell*, spreading the nihilistic stain of the global market over the entire planet."²⁶⁰ Through Heidegger, Dugin renders global economic crisis into a narrower symptom of the problem of nihilism.

²⁵⁷ Benoist, *Manifesto for a European Renaissance*, 27

²⁵⁸ Göppfarth, "Rethinking the German Nation as German Dasein," 261; Benoist, "Populismus ist keine Ideologie, sondern ein Stil," <https://www.compact-online.de/populismus-ist-keine-ideologie-sondern-ein-stil/?cookie-state-change=1676057637928>

²⁵⁹ Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, 29.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

Lastly, Sellner articulates the entire identitarian project as fundamentally opposed to *Ge-Stell*. “In our unconditional defense of established cultures, peoples and religions, we primarily oppose the unification of *Ge-Stell*, which wants to subject everything to the ‘machinations’ of the modern subject.”²⁶¹ While one can object to the erroneous conflation of machination and *Ge-Stell*, it is nevertheless clear that the identitarian affirmation of identity and difference is posited as antithetical to the unifying (positioning) tendency of *Ge-Stell* and the accompanying reign of the modern subject that is untethered from traditional social relationships.

In place of the modern subject, identitarians posit Dasein as the proper political subject that can act as a force against globalization. As discussed in chapter one, Heidegger deploys the idea of Dasein in order to subject human presuppositions to phenomenological reduction. Dasein is defined by its basic comportment towards the world, which follows from its pre-ontological understanding of being. In being co-extensive with the world, Dasein’s being is tethered to the retention of a historical past. However, given its fundamental historicity, it was revealed that historical meaning was not given, but rather constructed and decided upon from the basis of an anticipation of the future, i.e., death. Hence, Heidegger writes:

As a mode of being of Dasein, history has its roots so essentially in the future that death, as the possibility of Dasein we characterized, throws anticipatory existence back upon its *factual* thrownness and thus first gives to *having-been* its unique priority in what is historical. *Authentic being-towards-death, that is, the finitude of temporality, is the concealed ground of the historicity of Dasein* (SZ: 386/367).

Consequently, things like tradition and heritage, are also constructed from out this fundamental finitude as well. Nevertheless, in being related to a tradition, Dasein discovers itself to never be

²⁶¹ Sellner, “Mein Denkweg zu Heidegger,” *Sezession*, no. 64 (February 2015): 13.

alone. Rather it always exists among other beings like itself, which constitute a “community of people” (SZ: 384-385/366). Later on, Heidegger seek to distance his thinking from the charge of subjectivism by changing this account of Dasein. Rather than being a kind of entity, Da-sein is now understood as the clearing wherein beings appear and where being as such is intimated (GA 9: 189/145). Da-sein is now fully separable from human being. But what value can a concept of such openness and in-determinability have for identitarians, since they are committed to the reality of and danger to identity? How can Dasein be understood as a political subject?

Broadly speaking, Dasein reveals that historical-communal identities are constructs. At first glance this would seem antithetical to the biological determinism that identitarians are implicated in. However, if identities are constructed, then this means that they can be de-constructed; historical identities are fragile and subject to the possibility of annihilation, i.e., death. The identitarian fragility of identity is indicated by their existential fantasy of Great Replacement. Hence, identitarians mobilize around the finitude of identities, which must be protected and preserved. More narrowly speaking, this concept also provides a world-historical narrative that foregrounds the values of peoples, and especially the values of the German people. It is for this reason that German identitarians find Heidegger especially compelling.

For example, in 2015, *Sezession*, a German New Right and identitarian journal, published an issue dedicated to Heidegger’s thought. In the introduction, the far-right publisher Götz Kubitscheck recounts his speech at a PEGIDA/LEGIDA protest, where he called for unity of the German people, a unity that is intimated and fostered through “care of the whole people [*unserer Sorge das ganze Volk*].”²⁶² Kubitscheck appears to interpret the street action of these groups in

²⁶² PEGIDA is an acronym for the Identitarian and anti-Islamic group, *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West). LEGIDA more narrowly refers to the Leipzig branch of the group.

explicitly Heideggerian terms. We recall, “care” was initially defined as the structure of Dasein’s being as a whole, i.e., in being concerned about its being, Dasein is also care (SZ: 191-196/178-183). Later on, care was rendered communal and even became one of the essential determinations of Heidegger’s early concept of the political, i.e., the care of the historical people (GA 86: 174/187). Thus, from an identitarian interpretation of Heidegger, PEGIDA/LEGIDA’s political action serves to articulate a German historical identity, i.e., the Dasein of the Germans.

However, Kubitscheck also problematizes this interpretation, arguing that such action fails because “what the German people take to the street with their care [*seine Sorge*] about the future is – which we have described often – above all a hollowed out structure [*ausgehöhlt* *Gebildes*] that is forced into the *Gestell* of every conceivable machination (Heidegger), which knows nothing more of itself, of its soul or of God.”²⁶³ Directly invoking Heidegger’s essence of technology, Kubitscheck argues that this action is already circumscribed within the positioning of positionality (*Ge-Stell*). Connecting this to Heidegger’s assertion that politics is just a symptom of machination, then we could argue that, for Kubitscheck, even identitarian street action remains as another symptom of globalized technology and the nihilistic forgetting of being. That he reaches this conclusion is by no means obvious. Nonetheless, Kubitscheck’s machinational interpretation of identitarian political action indicates the purpose of the journal’s dedication to Heidegger’s thought. In order to properly care for the German people and to thereby prepare for a future that is not circumscribed by technology, it is necessary to better understand Heidegger’s key concepts, like Dasein.

²⁶³ Göppfarth, “Rethinking the German nation as German *Dasein*,” 258; Götz Kubitscheck, “Rückfahrt aus Leipzig,” *Sezession*, no. 64 (February 2015): 1.

This line of thought is taken up by Sellner, who reiterates many of the core elements of the identitarian critique of modernity, but through an appeal to Heidegger terminology. Recalling his objection to *Ge-stell* due to its opposition to organic cultures, religions, and peoples, Sellner connects Dasein to these various phenomena. Unlike machination, which operates according to a logic of objectification, Sellner maintains that Dasein is defined by its essential openness, which follows from the fact that it questions its own being. However, that being is neither a “pure” or “free subject,” rather it always exists in the world, which Sellner renders identitarian. He writes: “Dasein is, in its question concerning its essence and its being, always rooted in a concrete ethnocultural soil.”²⁶⁴ Invoking Heidegger’s notion of “rootedness-in-the-soil [*Bodenständigkeit*],” Sellner emphasizes that Dasein does not just exist in an historical community, but is rooted in a particular ethnocultural community. Although he himself does not make the conceptual jump from ethnography to biology, it is easy for other identitarians to read this in racist terms. Regardless, by being tethered to a particular ethnic-historical group and geographical soil, this sense of Dasein is antithetical to the universalizing tendencies of globalization. Furthermore, insofar as globalization threatens the “annihilation” of “ethnocultural tradition,” Sellner emphasizes the precarity of Dasein and the need for care. Lastly, he explicitly invokes Heidegger’s account of being, claiming that such anxiety follows from a “loyalty to being,” one that identitarians are beholden to.²⁶⁵

That Dasein can serve as a foil to globalization is most forcefully taken up by Dugin. Arguing that every political theory has a unique subject, such as the individual for liberalism, race for fascism and national socialism, and the proletariat for communism, Dugin hypothesizes

²⁶⁴ Sellner, “Mein Denkweg zu Heidegger,” 11.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

that Heidegger's *Dasein* can serve as a subject for the Fourth Political Theory. He writes of Heidegger:

Dasein is described in Heidegger's philosophy at length through its existential structure, which makes it possible to build a complex, holistic model based on it, the development of which will lead to, for instance, a new understanding of politics. Many researchers have lost sight of the fact that Heidegger, especially, in his middle period between 1936 and 1945, developed a complete history of philosophy centered around Dasein, which, it has become apparent in retrospect, can form the basis of a full-fledged and well-developed political philosophy.²⁶⁶

What this philosophy looks like in political practice remains unclear; Dugin prefers to keep *Dasein* an open concept in order to avoid being too programmatic. Nevertheless, he does provide some key descriptions of Dasein that can clarify his project.

The Fourth Political Theory does not categorically reject the other three, i.e., fascism, communism, and liberalism. Rather it appropriates key aspects of them and attempts to combine them into a distinct political theory. In a manner consistent with both Sellner and Benoist, Dugin rejects the racist foundation of fascism and national socialism but does positively appropriate the idea of "ethnos" and "ethnocentrism."²⁶⁷ He maintains that each ethnic identity contains its distinct and relative value and existential comportment that are antithetical to global homogeneity. From communism, Dugin rejects class antagonism, but nonetheless affirms its mythical historical narrative and its sociological method.²⁶⁸ Lastly, the Fourth Political Theory

²⁶⁶ Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, 40-41.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

rejects liberal individualism, but accepts its valuation of freedom.²⁶⁹ Thought together, this theory presents a mythical vision of a pluriversal world whereby each ethnically grounded community is free within its given region. *Dasein* is the proper actor for such a theory since it makes possible all three of these determinations. *Dasein* is not a closed subject, but always exists in a larger, ethnocentric community; it is structured within a mythical narrative of inaugurating another beginning; and, most importantly for Dugin, it is free.

The bearer of freedom in this case will be *Dasein*. The previous ideologies, each in its own way, alienated *Dasein* from its meaning, restricted it, and imprisoned it in one way or another, making it inauthentic. Each of these ideologies put a cheerless doll, *das Man*, in the place of *Dasein*. The freedom of *Dasein* lies in implementing the opportunity to be authentic: that is, in the realization of *Sein* more so than of *da...* Therefore, the Fourth Political Theory is, at the same time, a fundamental ontological theory which contains the awareness of the truth of Being at its core.²⁷⁰

Dasein's freedom to authentically take up its existence, a possibility which is grounded in the truth of being, constitutes de-alienated and open-ended political theory. The three other political theories had alienated *Dasein* from its freedom to constitute meaning by presenting biological race, class, and individuality as social facts, rather than ontological decisions.

Ultimately, Dugin's appeal to *Dasein*'s ethnocentrism, in opposition to globalized *Ge-Stell*, leads him to conclude that the world of the other beginning is a multipolar one, i.e., the composition of a plurality of geo-political regions. Tethered to *Ge-Stell*, globalization is defined by a static temporality, reflected in presentism and the idea of the end of history. By attempting

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

to abolish difference, it forecloses other ways of being that are counter to liberalism.

Accordingly, liberal-capitalist consumption becomes the only way to exist. By being free, however, Dasein is defined by its openness to other possible ways of being, i.e., other beginnings and other futures. For this reason, Dugin appears to advocate for not only a plurality of communities, but also a plurality of times. “When we construct the future, it should not be global in scope. It cannot just be one future, we must have many futures... History will remain local.”²⁷¹ While globalization imposes one modality of historical development over the entire world, a genuinely multipolar world would allow for multitudes of futures and histories, which are made possible by Dasein’s temporality and commitment to being as such.

Thus, we can see the use-value of Heidegger’s thought for identitarians. As summarized by Julian Göppfarth: “The aim is to (re)legitimize the currently questionable idea of an exclusive nationalism by wrapping it in a Heideggerian terminology of history and linking it to the GNR (German New Right) concept of the ethnopluralism of a co-existence of ethno-culturally homogenous but globally diverse peoples.” Furthermore, while noting that Heidegger would have been opposed to reducing Dasein to “ethnic properties” and that Dasein was not a pluralist insofar as he emphasized the value of the German people above all, Göppfarth argues that the “essence of both ethnopluralism and Heidegger’s philosophy forms the conviction that the particular *Dasein* is threatened by the planetary *Gestell*.”²⁷² By accurately reflecting on Dasein’s communal and political belonging, which is articulated in terms of caring, Identitarianism narrows this belonging to ethnic groupings and thereby presents Dasein as foil to the planetary (globalizing) character of *Ge-Stell*, which reduces all human difference to the homogeneity of the

²⁷¹ Ibid., 165.

²⁷² Göppfarth, “Rethinking the German nation as German *Dasein*,” 259.

standing-reserve. This possible interpretation of Heidegger is provided by identifying him as a member of the German Conservative Revolution and, therefore, an historical antecedent to the French New Right, the German New Right, and Identitarianism.

Heidegger Against Identitarianism?

Having demonstrated how Identitarianism is consistent with elements of Heidegger's beyng-historical thought, I want to emphasize that identitarians do present faithful readings of Heidegger, especially if we properly contextualize his work in terms of his philosophical confrontation with the German Conservative Revolution. Does this mean that Heidegger is an identitarian? Certainly not, if we highlight Heidegger's German-centrism and his western universalism. The beyng-historical narrative does not value the plurality of cultures, it values the Germans as those who will bring about western renewal. In part, the failure of the identitarian reading reflects their failure to recognize a clear split between Heidegger's early affirmation of historicism through Dasein's historical anxiety and his later narrative construction of beyng, which separates Da-sein from human being. This failure is particularly evident when we note Dugin's determination that Dasein is a historical and political subject, a reading that Heidegger would have steadfastly refused. Furthermore, even if we admitted that this split is not so relevant to the identitarian political project, there are still other aspects of Heidegger's thought that appear inconsistent with Identitarianism. In this section, I will focus on two aspects in particular: (1) Heidegger's critique of identity and (2) his account of the an-archic πόλις. However, this defense of Heidegger's beyng-historical thinking from the charge of being identitarian will not have a positive conclusion. If one concludes that Identitarianism is another form of errancy, then the tragedy of the political would compel Heidegger to affirm the beyng-historical necessity of this

movement. Hence, like all other forms of political thinking, Heidegger's *πόλις* remains tragically entangled with Identitarianism.

In his 1957 lecture in Freiburg, Heidegger pursues a critique of the principle of identity, or "A is A." He reduces the principle down to a belonging together of thought and being: "Where identity itself speaks, and not merely the principle of identity, its pronouncement stipulates that thinking and being belong together in the same [*im Selben zusammengehören*]" (GA 79: 118/111). In order for something to be thought of as self-same, an understanding of being must be in place, i.e., "is." Taking this logic further, Heidegger proposes that because thinking is a privileged quality of human beings, then identity speaks of the belonging together of human beings and being (GA 79: 120/113). But, given the ontological difference which states that being is not itself a being, and the truth of being, which posits that being is self-concealing, and therefore abyssal, then this foundation for the principle of identity is in fact not a foundation at all. Heidegger writes: "But because it is no longer a ground, we speak in a rigorous and sober sense of an abyss [*Ab-grund*]. The statements that are called basic principles of thinking in an exceptional sense leads us... to the abyss... Grounding-principles [*Grund-sätze*] are leaps that set themselves apart from every foundation and leap into the abyss of thinking" (GA 79: 112/105). Of course, Heidegger clarifies that these abyssal principles can become grounds, but that this is a secondary process (GA 79: 145). These principles are groundless because thought and being are also groundless. Instead of an *a priori* foundation, Heidegger instead proposes that the principle of identity emerges from the "event of appropriation" whereby human beings and being itself are shown to belong together (GA 79: 117). The most important ramification of this claim relates to his account of *Ge-Stell*. Insofar as *Ge-Stell* challenges and positions human beings into positioning beings, then it allows human beings to recognize their essential

relationship to being as such. In other words, *Ge-Stell* intimates the event of appropriation. “In positionality we catch sight of a belonging together of the human and being wherein the letting-belong first determines the type of togetherness and its unity” (GA 79: 119). Thus, by undermining the metaphysical account of the principle of identity, which claims that identity is a principle of the being of beings, Heidegger anticipates the condition for another beginning.

Despite gesturing towards a complicated dialectic of identity and difference, which they also view as historical in character, Identitarianism nevertheless pays heed to a metaphysical determination of identity, whether it be through spirit or biological materialism, both of which are consonant with the nihilistic forgetting of being. It is perhaps fair that Benoist, and by extension the French New Right absolves itself of this problem by criticizing identitarian essentialism. Nevertheless, the heirs to that mode of thinking hold fast to such essentialism. Dominique Venner, one of the key architects of Identitarianism, takes on an explicitly metaphysical account of identity.²⁷³ Claiming that identity is anchored in the “being of a people,” Venner renders identity ontological.²⁷⁴ Furthermore, this being is tethered to both a geographic and “spiritual” place. Through this spirituality, Venner intimates the metaphysical character of identity, which he confirms through his unique valuation of memory and history. Speaking of a “metaphysics of history,” he maintains that history is grounded in an eternal memory. “In the ephemeral nature of the human condition, it (history) is a manifestation of eternity and tradition.

²⁷³ As a youth Venner was a member of the far-right paramilitary organization, *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS) during the Algerian War and would later become a prominent military historian. In 2013, Venner committed suicide in the cathedral of *Notre Dame de Paris* in opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage in France (he had long been diagnosed with terminal cancer).

²⁷⁴ Dominique Venner, *The Shock of History: Religion, Memory, Identity* (London: Arktos Media Ltd., 2015), 137.

By saving the memories of our forebears from the depths of oblivion, it steps into the future... Passing on their lineage was one of the means by which our ancestors escaped the confines of their finite existence.”²⁷⁵ Thus, given that this being of the people is ultimately rooted in eternal memories, which determine in advance the future, then Venner’s identitarian thinking expresses Heidegger’s vision of metaphysics, i.e., being as constant presence.²⁷⁶

Although Faye argues that identity is “dynamic,” inhabited by both being and becoming, he also relies on biological racism.²⁷⁷ As already quoted above: “identity’s basis is biological; without it, the realms of culture and civilization are unsustainable.”²⁷⁸ This commitment to biological identity and its racist implications are corroborated by Faye’s approval of eugenics, claiming that “biotechnology now makes it possible to practice a positive eugenics that directly intervenes in the genome to improve hereditary.”²⁷⁹ From a Heideggerian perspective, this approach to identity is particularly tied to nihilistic forgetting. According to Heidegger, “the doctrine of race” was one of the primary ways that modern metaphysics was consummated; human life becomes reduced to another machinational object, rendered into a “*factum brutum*” upon which its “animality” could be “established” through racial politics (GA 95: 396/309). Thus, by making human identity biological and racist, Faye entrenches Identitarianism in metaphysics and nihilism. Furthermore, by being implicated in objectifying human existence,

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 138.

²⁷⁶ This appeal to eternity is also exhibited by Dugin: “The Fourth Political Theory must take a step toward the formulation of a coherent critique of the monotonic process. It must develop an alternative model of a conservative future, a conservative tomorrow, based on the principles of vitality, roots, constants, and eternity” (Dugin, 66).

²⁷⁷ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 171.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 169.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 136.

Faye's biologism cannot but result in the endorsement of political violence against those deemed other.

That Heidegger makes identity groundless, is taken up and interpreted by Lacoue-Labarthe within an anti-identitarian framework. As briefly discussed in chapter five, Heidegger's an-archic πόλις renders all identity claims fictitious or even mythical. According to Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, myth is defined by its "power to bring together the fundamental forces and directions of an individual or of a people, the power of a subterranean, invisible, nonempirical identity."²⁸⁰ A totalitarian political community posits a fixed identity over an otherwise differential and abyssal πόλις. The most extreme formulation of this was the "Nazi myth," which presented the fictitious Aryan people as the model for modern Germans and pursued specific political programs to fulfill this imitative aim.²⁸¹ By doing so, Nazism incarnated the ideal modern subject by attempting to will a non-existent people into existence. This gesture is echoed by identitarians who also seek to posit an historical, ethnocultural, and even racial people whose actual existence is specious, e.g., at what point and how did the Franks become French. I bring this point up in order to turn to the second Heideggerian critique of Identitarianism: the an-archic πόλις should be seen as antithetical to Identitarianism.

Just as identity is undergirded by a non-foundational abyss, which only receives the appearance of an identity through the event of appropriation, the πόλις is also abyssal and therefore identity claims regarding the "where," "what," and "who" of the political are secondary. Identitarians make very explicit that their approach to political thought presupposes and is organized according to these three determinations. With regard to "where," identitarians

²⁸⁰ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Nazi Myth," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Winter, 1990), 305.

²⁸¹ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, 95.

lay claim to specified regions, e.g., Germany or France; the “what,” through specific eliminationist policies of remigration; and the “who,” those geographically situated people, whose presence is taken as “natural” as opposed to those who are deemed other and foreign. In place of the essential openness of the πόλις, they posit the unconcealment of the political. This is evidenced by the explicit appeal to the concept of the political within Identitarian thought. This is best reflected the prominent influence of Carl Schmitt. Benoist, for example, wrote a book that explicitly defended Schmitt as a theorist for multipolarity and, by extension, the pluriversum.²⁸² Similarly, Faye echoes both Schmitt and Heidegger’s early concept of the political, which the latter would eventually reject as tethered to metaphysical will to power, as demonstrated in chapter three. Faye argues that the essence of the political consists in designating the friend and enemy, and with regard to the former, this task is “aesthetic, poetic, and historical.” He writes: “According to the Greek verb *poiesis* – to create, to make. In effect, the ultimate vocation of the political is to create – to make – a people in history.”²⁸³ While appearing to resonate with Heidegger, it is important to note that Heidegger’s open sense of the political does not make or create a historical people, rather it provides the conditions for a people to be open to historical events in the first place. Through an appeal to “making,” i.e., machination, Faye’s people-formation takes on a technological register (e.g., his advocacy for eugenics), which Heidegger would categorically reject.

The an-archic πόλις is not a subject of historical change, in the way that Heidegger describes the modern historiographical concept of the political. By attempting to politically impose an identity, spiritual or biological, upon the πόλις, identitarians conceal what is essential,

²⁸² Alain de Benoist, *Carl Schmitt Today: Terrorism, “Just” War, and the State of Emergency* (London: Arktos Media Ltd., 2013).

²⁸³ Faye, *Why We Fight*, 217.

i.e., the truth of being. Without this sensitivity, Identitarianism is implicated in the very violence of modernity that it allegedly seeks to overcome, which is obvious when confronting its racist and eliminationist political agenda.

Heidegger, Identitarianism and The Tragedy of the Political

To conclude, on the one hand, I maintain that Heidegger's intellectual affinity for aspects of the German Conservative Revolution constitutes the foundation for a political reading of his philosophy that is consistent with Identitarianism. On the other, Heidegger gestures towards a non-violent, an-archic πόλις, which he constructed through and against that very revolutionary movement, is antithetical to Identitarianism. In place of the open and abyssal πόλις, identitarian writers posit a historically determinate and metaphysically reified people. We can perhaps theorize, then, that Heidegger's critical distancing from both National Socialism and the German Conservative Revolution, would foreclose the identitarian use of his thought, or at the very least a claim to represent its totality; releasement and letting-be are incompatible with the eliminationist political praxis of Identitarianism. But, as was stressed in chapter five, Heidegger's πόλις is the "pre-political" condition of politics and, for this reason, remains inextricably and tragically bound up with the political (GA 53: 102/82). Furthermore, insofar as the tragic narrative of the history of being compels the ultimate consummation of metaphysics, given that these further the submergence of being and provide the conditions for another beginning, then Heidegger would have to affirm the political, including its violent consequences. If Identitarianism is a political movement fully inscribed within modernity, then Heidegger would have to believe in its historical necessity. Hence, even if Heidegger would be opposed to Identitarianism, he nonetheless provides no normative objection to it. At the end of the day, the history of being consecrates all politics, however abhorrent.

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