

# THE POLITICS OF THE HOMELESS SPIRIT: HEIDEGGER AND LEVINAS ON DWELLING AND HOSPITALITY

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**Abstract:** In this essay, we examine the Heidegger-Levinas debate on dwelling and hospitality and assess its larger philosophical and political implications. Although Heidegger and Levinas are both critical of the subjectivist stance that engenders the rise of the homeless spirit, they posit different solutions to the Hegelian problematic, with Heidegger advocating an ontology of dwelling and Levinas propounding an ethic of hospitality (*hospitalité*). After a discussion of the larger political ramifications of their respective projects, we conclude with a critical assessment of Heideggerian homecoming and Levinasian hospitality. More specifically, we attempt to identify the essential elements of a politics of place that is appreciative of the tension that exists between home and homelessness, between Ulysses and Abraham.

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According to our human experience and history, as least as far as I see it, I know that everything essential and everything great originated from the fact that man had a home and was rooted in a tradition.

Martin Heidegger

“Only a God Can Save Us”

But in order that I be able to free myself from the very possession that the welcome of the Home establishes, in order that I be able to see things in themselves, that is, represent them to myself, refuse both enjoyment and possession, I must know how to *give* what I possess.

Emmanuel Levinas

*Totality and Infinity*

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## Introduction

From the Book of Genesis to Homer's *Odyssey*, the idea of the homeless spirit has received abundant and profound attention in the mythopoeic literature of Western civilization. However, the philosophical development of the notion owes a considerable debt to Hegel, who equated it with the emergence of the principle of subjectivity. From Hegel's perspective, Socrates was the representative and pivotal figure in whom "the principle of subjectivity—of the absolute inherent independence of Thought—attained free expression." According to Hegel, Socrates taught his fellow citizens of Athens that "man has to discover and recognize in himself what is the Right and Good, and that this Right and Good is in its nature universal." As a result of the Socratic teaching, the individual subject, rather than communal custom, becomes the ultimate arbiter of moral authority. For his part, Hegel regarded this "moment" as a "rupture with existing Reality," for while Socrates continued to give obeisance to his beloved Athens, "it was not the actual State and its religion, but the world of Thought that was his true home."<sup>3</sup> Thus, on Hegel's account, the emergence of the principle of subjectivity is a profoundly alienating experience. The subject now feels estranged from its customary home; indeed, it is condemned, on the one hand, to regard its community from a certain distance and, on the other, to engage in a renewed search for reconciliation with the home it has lost

Like Hegel, Martin Heidegger argues that the problem of the homeless spirit is an inevitable byproduct of the liberation of subjectivity. Furthermore, like Hegel, Heidegger suggests that the liberation of subjectivity emerges in the thought of the ancient Greeks,

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<sup>3</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York, 1956), pp. 269-70.

although it assumes a particularly nihilistic character in the modern world in the thought of Descartes, Kant, and, most especially, Nietzsche. While Heidegger was very appreciative of Nietzsche's attempt to break with the failed metaphysics of Platonism, he did not think that Nietzsche had succeeded. Instead, Nietzsche's willful subjectivism and celebration of human freedom represented the last gasp of Platonic metaphysics. Moreover, Nietzsche's thought mirrors the nomadism that is the hallmark of the modern age.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Heidegger's essential philosophical project is to effect a return to a state of human consciousness that existed prior to the irruption of subjectivity. As early as *Being and Time*, Heidegger's antipathy to Cartesian subjectivism can be discerned in his statement that "one of our first tasks will be to show that the point of departure from an initially given ego and subject totally fails to see the phenomenal content of Da-sein."<sup>5</sup> This anti-subjective stance became even more explicit in Heidegger's postwar work in which the rise of modern subjectivism is regarded as a symptom of modern homelessness or the "abandonment of Being by beings." Given the linkage between modern subjectivism and homelessness, then, Heidegger's intention is to help man to return to the homeland which has been forsaken by Western man's lapse into subjectivity. As it stands, the homeland of Heidegger's imagination is the "Da," or "there," in which man "ek-sists" in a state of "nearness to Being."<sup>6</sup> Since modern subjectivity is the logical outgrowth of pre-modern metaphysics, a homecoming does not merely entail a return to a

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<sup>4</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 4 vols., trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, David Farrell Krell and Joan Stambaugh, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York, 1983). See also Gregory Bruce Smith, *Nietzsche, Heidegger and the Transition to Postmodernity* (Chicago, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York, 1996), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco, 1977), pp. 242, 241.

pre-subjective state but also to a pre-metaphysical state as well. In sum, Heidegger calls for a return to a homeland (*Heimat*) where human beings will exist in a state of nearness to Being<sup>7</sup> that has been absent in the West since Greek antiquity.

Such is the broad nature of Heidegger's career-long homecoming project, a project that is as dynamic as it is provocative. No thinker was more disturbed by this project than Emmanuel Levinas. In Levinas's view, Heideggerian ontology ignores transcendence and invites tyranny. "Even though it opposes the technological passion issued forth from the forgetting of Being hidden by the existents, Heideggerian ontology, which subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relationship with Being in general, remains under obedience to the anonymous and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny."<sup>8</sup> Mindful of the flaws endemic to the Heideggerian project, Levinas advances an alternative view of how human beings should relate to place that is infinite in scope and liberationist in intent. For Levinas, the self maintains a proper relationship to place when it welcomes the Other<sup>9</sup> into the home (*la maison*). However, the host is also obligated to extend welcome to the Third (*la tiers*) by creating political institutions that are ethically responsible, respectful of human dignity, and monotheistic in orientation. Thus, Levinas not only levels an insightful critique of Heideggerian ontology; he advances an alternative vision of how human beings should properly relate to place.

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<sup>7</sup> When discussing Heidegger, we shall follow a tradition of many translators and commentators who capitalizing Being so as to distinguish Being from beings.

<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alfonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, 1961), pp. 46-47.

<sup>9</sup> In Levinas, the Other refers to the other person, while the Third refers to the plurality of other people. Moreover, Levinas stresses that the face of the Other expresses infinitude. Thus, as a means of conveying the transcendent import of the Other, we shall capitalize this term in our discussions of Levinas. Since the Third exists in a condition of parity vis-à-vis the Other, it will be capitalized as well.

In this essay, we shall examine the Heidegger-Levinas debate on homelessness, and assess its larger philosophical and political implications. We will begin by relating their conflicting views to Hegel's discussion of the homeless spirit. Although Heidegger and Levinas are both critical of the subjective stance that engenders the rise of the homeless spirit, they posit different solutions to the Hegelian problematic, with Heidegger advocating an ontology of dwelling and Levinas propounding an ethic of hospitality (*hospitalité*). After a discussion of the larger political ramifications of their respective projects, we will conclude with a critical assessment of Heideggerian homecoming and Levinasian hospitality. More specifically, we will attempt to identify the essential elements of a politics of place that addresses both Heidegger's and Levinas's concerns. It will be argued that such a politics of place must be both ontological and ethical, and should occupy a middle ground between the polar extremes of nationalistic chauvinism and rootless cosmopolitanism.

### **Heidegger, Levinas, and the Problem of the Homeless Spirit**

As we have seen, Heidegger argues that the problem of homelessness is an inevitable byproduct of the liberation of subjectivity; and his philosophical project is to effect a return to the pre-subjective and pre-metaphysical state that human beings enjoyed prior to the irruption of individual self-consciousness. Again, as we have noted, Heidegger's search for a home takes place in the context of his career-long critique of Western subjectivity. In *Being and Time*, however, Heidegger's critique of Western subjectivity is decidedly ambiguous. On the one hand, Heidegger's assertion that Da-sein is Being-in-the-world points to the rooted nature of human existence. Da-sein, Heidegger declares, is not a self-conscious individual but is a being that is ensconced in a communal world that

dictates its practical and theoretical concerns. On the other hand, Heidegger's discussion of anxiety establishes the estrangement between the self and world and suggests that human beings are *never* truly at home in the world. As he notes: "*Not-being-at-home must be conceived existentially and ontologically as the more primordial phenomenon.*"<sup>10</sup> Of course, Heidegger's discussion of the *Volk* can be read as an attempt to reassert the embedded nature of human existence. Seemingly, the historical destiny that unites Dasein to its *Volk* is the nexus that links the self to the world. Nonetheless, Heidegger's homecoming attempt is ambivalent at best.

Heidegger's critique of subjectivity became more internally consistent in his middle-period work. In arguing that Being becomes unconcealed in language, Heidegger effectively suggests that the individual subject is ensconced in a linguistic whole that precludes the possibility of detached theoretical contemplation. At the same time, the voluntarism that underlies Heidegger's ringing call for the German nation to "transpose itself – and with it the history of the West – from the center of their future happening into the originary realm of the powers of Being" raises the question of whether Heidegger has merely substituted collective subjectivism for individual subjectivism.<sup>11</sup>

In the aftermath of his mid-1930s confrontation with Nietzsche and his failed rectorship at Freiburg University, Heidegger subsequently came to the conclusion that nationalism is merely subjectivity writ large. Indeed, to the later Heidegger, all political "isms" are manifestations of modern subjectivism. "Every nationalism is metaphysically

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 177.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, 2000), p. 41.

an anthropologism, and as such subjectivism.”<sup>12</sup> Hence, the non-political tone of Heidegger’s call for mortals to dwell in the “fourfold” (*Geviert*) of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals can be seen as a manifestation of his anti-subjective ethos.<sup>13</sup> To the extent that such an enterprise is understandable, much less feasible, Heidegger’s later work consummates his attempt to overcome the spirit of subjectivism. Insofar as the fourfold is characterized by a primordial oneness, there can be no separation between the individual “mortal” and its other components. Similarly, non-subjective meditation on man’s “abode” in the “house of Being” supplants critical reflection in Heidegger’s later work, thus effecting a reconciliation between subject and object in a decidedly mystical manner.

For Levinas, Heidegger’s critique of subjectivity is tainted by ontological supremacy, anti-humanistic bias, and pagan religiosity. Not surprisingly, then, Levinas posits himself as a defender of subjectivity, an intention that he announces at the very beginning of *Totality and Infinity*: “This book does then present itself as a defense of subjectivity, but it will apprehend subjectivity, not at the level of its purely egoist protection against totality, nor in its anguish before death but as founded in the idea of infinity.”<sup>14</sup>

However, as the above statement makes clear, Levinas is by no means an unqualified defender of subjectivity; nor is he an apologist for a subjectivity predicated on Cartesian

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism’, p. 244.

<sup>13</sup> Few commentators mention the fourfold, much less give it significant attention. A major exception is Fred Dallmayr’s *The Other Heidegger* (Ithaca and London, 1993). Interestingly enough, Dallmayr discusses the fourfold in the context of a discussion of Zen Buddhism. Also, Dallmayr’s commentary is one of the few that offers a thorough exegesis of Heidegger’s lectures on Hölderlin, with extensive reference to Hölderlin’s poems.

<sup>14</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 26.

egoism or Kierkegaardian angst. As we shall see, this qualification is of considerable importance.

In Levinas's view, subjectivity is worthy of being defended because individuality is the vital prerequisite for ethical action: "I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an 'I' precisely because I am exposed to the Other."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, only an individual conscious of its autonomy can shoulder its asymmetrical, infinite responsibility for the Other. However, subjectivism is problematic because it potentially complements the totalization of alterity that characterizes the history of Western ontology. While individualism is foundational to ethical action, it can also foster a callous disregard for the welfare of the Other. Similarly, while self-consciousness is a vital prerequisite for ethical conduct, it can facilitate a solipsistic manner of approaching reality that is averse to any sense of transcendence. Hence, subjectivity only merits defense if it recognizes the intersubjective nature of human existence and if it is open to its infinite dimension.

Levinas's ambiguous view of subjectivism can be seen in his view of Socrates. On the one hand, "Socrates preferred the town, in which one meets people, to the countryside and trees." On the other hand, Socrates's manner of philosophizing is objectionable because its inward-looking ethos effectively annihilates otherness: "The primacy of the same was Socrates's teaching: to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though in all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside – to receive nothing free, or to be free."<sup>16</sup> So, while Socrates's manner of existence is

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<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany, 1986), pp. 26-27.

<sup>16</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 43.

marked by a responsiveness to otherness, his mode of philosophizing remains centered on the self. In this sense, Socrates is emblematic of the mixed legacy of subjectivity.

Hence, in the debate between Heidegger and Levinas, we come face to face with two conflicting views of subjectivity. For Heidegger, the essentially modern attempt to maintain identity as a self-conscious individual is a symptom of ontological homelessness, for which the “remedy” is an attempt to return to “the house of Being.” For Levinas, subjectivity is worthy of defense, provided that it rests on an ethical, rather than egoistic, foundation. Not surprisingly, these different views of subjectivity and homelessness culminate in two radically distinct political visions.

### **The Politics of Heideggerian Dwelling and Levinasian Hospitality**

Throughout his writings, Heidegger contends that modern politics is permeated by the spirit of subjectivism. In *Being and Time*, this anti-subjective ethos is reflected in Heidegger’s contention that the public space is a place where individuals are encouraged to succumb to “idle talk” (*Gerede*), “curiosity” (*Neugier*), and “ambiguity” (*Zweideutigkeit*).<sup>17</sup> In his middle period, Heidegger implicitly suggests that the modern practice of politics is plagued by the spirit of social standardization and scientific-technological calculation. And, in his later utterances, this anti-subjective stance manifests itself in Heidegger’s argument that all modern political systems are in the grip of metaphysics and, hence, are organically incapable of facilitating a confrontation between modern man and global technology. The constitutional democracies of Western Christendom are no exception: “I would characterize them as half truths because I do not see in them a genuine confrontation with the technological world, because behind them

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<sup>17</sup> For more on Heidegger’s views on idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity, see *Being and Time*, pp. 157-164.

there is in my view a notion that technology is in its essence something over which man has control. In my opinion, that is not possible. Technology is in its essence that which man cannot control by himself.”<sup>18</sup> Suffice to say, from *Being and Time* to the famous *Der Spiegel* interview, Heidegger argues that modern politics exacerbates the plight of homelessness that ails the modern West.

Given the inherently subjective nature of modern politics, the most appropriate response would seem to be withdrawal from the political realm altogether. Sure enough, much of Heidegger’s work counsels the abdication of the political realm. In the first half of *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that Da-sein safeguards its authenticity by avoiding the public space that encourages inauthenticity. Heideggerian resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) is an essentially solitary act because it “means letting oneself be summoned out of one’s lostness in the they.”<sup>19</sup> In his later utterances, Heidegger’s quietism is evinced by his famous pronouncement that “Only a god can save us.”<sup>20</sup> In these respects, Heidegger’s homecoming project is apolitical, perhaps even antipolitical.

However, in other instances, Heidegger assumes a different stance towards the political. In the second half of *Being and Time*, Heidegger implies that fully realized authenticity necessitates that Da-sein pursue collective action. The “complete authentic occurrence of Da-sein” necessitates an attempt to realize the “destiny” (*Geschick*) that signifies “the occurrence of the community, of a people.”<sup>21</sup> As alluded to earlier, in an

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘Only a God Can Save Us’: *Der Spiegel*’s Interview with Martin Heidegger’, *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (New York, 1991), p. 105.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 275.

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, ‘Only a God Can Save Us’, p. 107.

<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 352.

*Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger calls upon the German nation to save Europe and the world from the threat of nihilism.<sup>22</sup> And in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger argues that the founding of a political state is a means by which ontological truth comes to presence: “Another way in which truth occurs is the act that founds a political state.”<sup>23</sup> In such instances, Heidegger’s homecoming project is political indeed. What are we to make of Heidegger’s ambiguous attitude towards the political? The answer, of course, hinges around the concept itself. Here, it is useful to draw a distinction between the ancient and the modern concepts of the political. Modern politics is permeated by the spirit of subjectivity because it is metaphysical in nature. That is to say, modern politics presupposes a given interpretation of the Being of beings, an interpretation that is beyond the realm of questioning. In contrast, the practice of politics in ancient Greece was non-metaphysical. Because it did not presuppose a metaphysical foundation, the practice of the Greek political art invited questioning. As Heidegger puts it in his 1942 lecture on Holderlin’s hymn “The Ister,” “the *polis* is the realm and the place around which everything question-worthy and uncanny (*Unheimlich*) turns in an exceptional sense.”<sup>24</sup> Viewed from this perspective, Heidegger’s critical stance to politics is really a reflection of his antipathy toward modern politics. Conversely, Heidegger’s more politically-charged pronouncements are manifestations of his attempt to recover the ancient Greek concept of the political.

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<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, 2001), p. 60.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Holderlin’s Hymn ‘The Ister,’* trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington, 1996), pp. 80-81.

Of course, this raises an obvious question: What is the ancient Greek concept of the political for Heidegger? Here, it is instructive to note that the motif of struggle (*Auseinandersetzung*) permeates Heidegger's writings. In *Being and Time*, his emphasis on struggle is evinced in a discussion of how the *Volk* realizes its destiny through communal "battle": "in communication and in battle the power of destiny first becomes free."<sup>25</sup> In his 1935 *Metaphysics* lecture, Heidegger's stress on struggle is exhibited in his discussion of how the founder creates the *polis* through the performance of ontological violence: "The violence-doing of poetic saying, of thoughtful projection, of constructive building, of state-creating action, is not an application of faculties that the human being has, but is a disciplining and disposing of the violent forces by virtue of which beings disclose themselves as such, insofar as the human being enters into them."<sup>26</sup>

In its celebration of struggle, Heidegger's thought evinces a discernible enchantment with the agonistic character of Greek political life. As Hannah Arendt notes, political action in the Greek *polis* was agonal in character: "the public realm itself, the *polis*, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aien aristeuein*)."<sup>27</sup> Considered from this vantage point, Heidegger's emphasis on struggle is a manifestation of his attempt to recover the agonistic aspect of the *vita activa* that animated the world of the *polis*.

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<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 352.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 167.

<sup>27</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Second Edition (Chicago, 1998), p. 41.

Heidegger's celebration of the agonistic character of *polis*-life is at one with his attraction to its hierarchical social structure. The Heideggerian stress on hierarchy appears at numerous instances in his writings. In *Being and Time*, it manifests itself in Heidegger's brief yet significant mention of the "heroes" who spearhead the *Volk*'s attempt to realize its historical destiny. For Heidegger, the full attainment of ontological authenticity necessitates that Da-sein seize upon "the possibility that Da-sein may choose its heroes."<sup>28</sup> In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, an explicit elitism colors Heidegger's discussion of the process by which select individuals found the "the site of history" and, in so doing, "rise high in historical Being as creators, as doers."<sup>29</sup>

In these instances, Heidegger evinces a discernible, if subtle, enchantment with the emphasis on hierarchy that characterized the outlook of the ancient Greeks. Indeed, the philosophical thought of the post-Socratic Greek philosophers who stand opposed to Greek politics also exhibits this Greek sense of hierarchy. The most obvious example is Plato's *Republic*, in which Socrates conceptualizes a city where philosopher-kings rule over guardians and ordinary craftsmen. Considered from this vantage point, Heidegger's elitism is a manifestation of his attempt to recover the sense of rank that characterized both Greek politics and philosophy.

While agonistic conflict and a hierarchical structure are important features of the Heideggerian political vision, for our purposes the most significant aspect of Heidegger's political theory is his stress on the ontological significance of place.<sup>30</sup> For Heidegger, the

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<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 352.

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 163.

<sup>30</sup> A recent, excellent study of Heidegger argues that place plays a central role in all of his thinking, but most especially in the later periods. See Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, 2006).

Greek practice of politics was necessarily place-bound. Indeed, Heidegger often stressed that the proper translation of *polis* is not “city-state” but “site.” “The *polis* is the site of history, the Here, *in* which, *out of* which and *for* which history happens.”<sup>31</sup> In defining the *polis* as site, Heidegger suggests that the Greek practice of politics was spatially circumscribed. As it stands, this recognition that, in Henri Lefebvre’s words, “there is a politics of space because *politics is spatial*,” runs counter to the cosmopolitan thrust of modern politics.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the most influential expression of the cosmopolitan universalism that underlies modern politics was written by Immanuel Kant in his essay entitled “Perpetual Peace,”<sup>33</sup> wherein Kant expresses the modern longing for the arrival of the “universal cosmopolitan state,” which will contravene all national differences and thus render them politically inconsequential. Like Kant, Heidegger anticipates the arrival of the universal cosmopolitan state; unlike Kant, he does not welcome it. For Heidegger, the universal cosmopolitan state is the product of the metaphysical mode of thought that is unique to the West. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say that the universal cosmopolitan state is the product of the *end* of Western metaphysics: “The end of philosophy means the beginning of the world civilization that is based upon Western European thinking.”<sup>34</sup> In contrast to the universal and cosmopolitan state, Heidegger celebrates the particular and provincial community. Whereas the universal and cosmopolitan state encompasses all of

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<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 162.

<sup>32</sup> Henri Lefebvre, ‘Reflections on the Politics of Space’, *Antipode* 8, 2 (1976), p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Immanuel Kant, ‘Universal History’, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, 1983), p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking’, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco, 1977), p. 435.

the world's peoples, the Heideggerian community houses a particular *Volk*. Whereas the universal and cosmopolitan state is spatially boundless, the Heideggerian community is limited in its geographic scope; and, whereas the universal and cosmopolitan state is governed by a state structure constructed on metaphysical foundations, the Heideggerian community is governed by conventions that are decidedly pre-metaphysical in nature. Putting all of this together, Heidegger's homecoming project looks to effect a return to a world of agonistic struggle, heroic creators, and rootedness in the soil (*Bodenständigkeit*) and a people (*Volk*).

Levinas is no less critical of modern politics than Heidegger. However, while Heidegger criticizes the metaphysical cast of modern politics, Levinas charges it with being ontological in nature. For Levinas, ontology is the process by which the self utilizes an *arche* such as reason, spirit, or history to totalize the Other. By extension, ontological politics is the process by which political actors utilize the institutions of the state apparatus to totalize the Other. Indeed, the violent suppression of alterity occurs even when the state is at its most peaceful. As Levinas puts the matter: "For me, the negative element, the element of violence in the State, in the hierarchy, appears even when the hierarchy functions perfectly, when everyone submits to universal ideas. There are cruelties which are terrible because they proceed from the necessity of the reasonable Order. There are, if you like, the tears that a civil servant cannot see, the tears of the Other (*Autrui*)."<sup>35</sup>

Given the inherently violent nature of politics, it comes as little surprise that, aside from his Talmudic commentaries, the bulk of Levinas's writings exhibit an aversion to

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<sup>35</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'Transcendence and Height', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, 1996), p. 23.

politics. However, the fact that Levinas is hardly an apolitical thinker becomes evident when his concept of the Third (*la tiers*) is taken into account. In the Levinasian ethical schema, the appearance of the third person propels the self into the realm of politics. Before the appearance of the Third, the self merely faces a singular Other who demands an infinite response. With the appearance of the Third, however, the self comes face to face with the rest of humanity. Now the self is compelled to act politically on behalf of the rest of the human fraternity. As Levinas puts it: “In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws which are the source of universality.”<sup>36</sup>

In Levinas’s view, the “State, institutions, laws” that are wrought by the presence of the “third party” should respect individual human dignity. Here, it is not difficult to discern how Levinas’s thought overlaps with modern liberalism. Like Hobbes and Locke, Levinas argues that political institutions should respect the dignity of the individual *qua* individual. Even when Levinas calls for a politics of fraternity, he nonetheless recognizes that *fraternite* “involves individualities whose logical status is not reducible to the status of ultimate differences in a genus, for their singularity consists in each referring to itself.”<sup>37</sup> That said, Levinas’s defense of individual dignity is decidedly non-liberal; individuals should be respected not because they possess rights, but rather because they are singularly responsible for the welfare of the Other. Needless to say, Levinas’s *apologia* for liberalism is highly idiosyncratic; as Fred C. Alford observes:

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<sup>36</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 300.

<sup>37</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 214.

“Levinas’s defense of liberalism is likely the strangest defense the reader has encountered.” Indeed, for Alford, Levinas’s defense of liberalism is so qualified that it can be described as a type of “inverted liberalism.”<sup>38</sup> “Inverted” or not, Levinas’s brand of liberalism recognizes the importance of protecting individual human dignity.

Levinas’s “liberalism” is inextricably linked to his notion of monotheism. Indeed, Levinas goes so far as to maintain that monotheism cannot be properly comprehended without reference to the self-Other relation: “Monotheism signifies this human kinship, this idea of a human race that refers back to the approach of the Other in the face, in a dimension of height, in responsibility for oneself and the Other.”<sup>39</sup> That is to say, the Levinasian fraternal order is undergirded not by universal possession of the rights of man, but by the presence of the divine in the ethical relationship between self and Other. This divine presence is the ultimate source of ethical responsibility: “it is only thanks to God that, as a subject incomparable with the other, I am approached as an other by the others, that is, ‘for myself.’”<sup>40</sup> Absent the existence of God, the self would be free to totalize the Other without a second thought.

The imperative to create a monotheistic community demands a corresponding embrace of moral universalism. In the Levinasian community, individuals will demonstrate their fidelity to God through hospitality by welcoming the non-communal Other. This is accomplished when “I welcome the Other who presents himself in my

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<sup>38</sup> Fred C. Alford, ‘Levinas and Political Theory’, *Political Theory* 32, 2 (2004), p. 147.

<sup>39</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 214.

<sup>40</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, 2006), p. 158.

home by opening my home to him.”<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the ethical imperative to welcome the Other operates on a variety of levels. Levinas is a thinker who eloquently speaks to the plight of the “refugees” and “immigrants” displaced by the nation-state system.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Levinas is concerned about the plight of *everyone and anyone* who lacks access to a home. For example, in his discussion of the home in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes the act of hospitality as occurring in the an-archical plane where ethical action occurs. However, the entrance of the Third renders the act of hospitality a decidedly political act. As Levinas writes, “To shelter the other in one’s own land or home, to tolerate the presence of the landless and homeless on the ‘ancestral soil,’ so jealously, so meanly loved – is that the criterion of humanity? Unquestionably so.”<sup>43</sup> In sum, the self is compelled to welcome the Other into the public space of the homeland *and* the private space of the home.

Thus, with Heidegger and Levinas, we are presented with two conflicting political visions. Heidegger’s politics of homecoming looks to a world of rooted communities founded by and presided over by the exceptional few who experience the struggle (*Auseinandersetzung*) of Being with singular intensity. Levinas’s politics of hospitality looks to a universal world order presided over by a single deity who beckons human beings to overcome their local attachments and extend hospitality to the homeless.

### **Levinas contra Heidegger: Ethics contra Ontology**

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<sup>41</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 171.

<sup>42</sup> See also: Annabel Herzog, ‘Levinas, Benjamin and the Oppressed’, *The Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy*, Vol. 12, #2 (2003), pp. 123-38.

<sup>43</sup> Immanuel Levinas, ‘The Nations and the Presence of Israel’, *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith, (Bloomington, 1994), p. 98.

Criticisms of Heidegger have become a familiar part of the intellectual landscape. Everyone from Derrida to Habermas to Rorty has taken Heidegger to task for a variety of perceived shortcomings.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, Levinas is one of a long line of critics of the philosopher of Being. That said, Levinas's critique of Heidegger is distinctive, and although it is couched in seemingly impenetrable vernacular, it is actually quite simple: Heidegger prizes ontology over ethics. As Levinas puts it, "To affirm the priority of *Being* over *existents* is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone*, who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the *Being of the existents*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of the existent (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom."<sup>45</sup>

As noted earlier, Heidegger looks to reinvigorate the Being of Western politics with the agonistic spirit of Greek antiquity. From a Levinasian standpoint, however, the last thing that the world needs is an infusion of Greek agonism into the already violent realm of politics. Even in the context of a more humane age, agonism is objectionable on moral grounds. The excessive celebration of conflict renders precarious the possibility of a peaceful co-existence between the self and the Other. In order to be ethical, peace must be sought "in a relation that starts from an I and goes to the other, in desire and goodness, where the I both maintains itself and exists without egoism."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example: Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago, 1991); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, 1990); and Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers Volume 2* (Cambridge, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 306.

A similar critique can be leveled at the Heideggerian defense of hierarchy. Obviously, Heidegger's celebration of hierarchy is a protest against the homogenizing tendencies of modern egalitarianism. At its worst, however, Heidegger's celebration of the "violent men" who found and preside over a given *polis* raises the specter of a Nietzschean master morality in which the dignity of the many is trampled by the few.<sup>47</sup> Heidegger's defense of hierarchy is disconcerting if only because it evinces an utter lack of concern for the welfare of those who occupy a less exalted position on the ontological hierarchy.

Heidegger's lack of concern for the victims of heroic self-aggrandizement is indicative of a deeper problem that afflicts his thought. Put simply, Heidegger's philosophy is ethically vacuous. In *Being and Time*, that vacuity is apparent in Heidegger's negative description of Being-with (*Mitsein*). Even though Heidegger is at pains to argue that Being-with is a fundamental part of Da-sein's everydayness, he nonetheless comes perilously close to equating Being-with with inauthenticity.<sup>48</sup> In an *Introduction to Metaphysics*, this problem is manifest in Heidegger's disturbing indifference to the ethical consequences of the founding act, an indifference reflected in his pronouncement that "the violence-doer knows no kindness and conciliation (in the ordinary sense), no appeasement and mollification by success or prestige and by their

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<sup>47</sup> We are well aware that the larger implications of Nietzsche's master morality are a contested issue in Nietzsche's thought. Indeed, many commentators would be inclined to argue that Nietzsche's philosophy points towards the continuous dismantling of established hierarchies rather than the maintenance of a static politics of rank. For an insightful exposition of this view, see Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York, 1983).

<sup>48</sup> For an interesting debate on the meaning of Being-with and the possibility of ethics in Heidegger, see Frederick Olafson, *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics: A Study of Mitsein* (Cambridge, 1998) and Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time* (Cambridge, 2001).

confirmation.”<sup>49</sup> Finally, in his later work, Heidegger’s indifference is manifest in a disturbing sentence eventually omitted from his 1949 lecture entitled “The Question Concerning Technology”: “Agriculture is now motorized food industry—in essence, the same as the manufacturing of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as blockading and starving of nations, the same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.”<sup>50</sup> In equating modern agribusiness with Auschwitz, Heidegger exhibits an appalling ethical insensitivity.

Heidegger’s emphasis on the ontological significance of place is tainted by the same spirit of ethical insensitivity. Of course, Heidegger’s place-bound ethos can be read as an eloquent cry of protest against the deracinating effects of globalization. For Levinas, however, the Heideggerian stress on place is inherently cruel because its demarcation between sacred and profane space reinforces the distinction between native and foreigner that underlies nationalism. As Levinas writes, “One’s implantation in a landscape, one’s attachment to Place, without which the universe would become insignificant and would hardly exist, is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers.”<sup>51</sup>

If Heidegger’s politics of homecoming can be accused of ontological chauvinism and ethical insensitivity, what of Levinas’s politics of hospitality? Arguably, Levinas excessively emphasizes ethics at the expense of ontology. Levinas argues that all attempts to speak to the question of Being are inherently violent: “Ontology, which

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<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 174.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Wolfgang Schirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit* (Freiburg: Alber, 1983), 25, and found in John Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington, 1993), p. 132. Caputo notes that he used a Thomas Sheehan translation of this passage from *The New York Review of Books*, June 16, 1988, pp. 41-43.

<sup>51</sup> Immanuel Levinas, ‘Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us’, in *Difficult Freedom: Essays in Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore, 1990), p. 232.

reduces the Other to the same, promotes freedom—the freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the Other.”<sup>52</sup> While the example of Heidegger suggests that there is more than a grain of truth to this position, it nonetheless presents a skewed picture of ontology. While ontology can potentially engender the totalization of the Other, ontology is also necessary for ethical action.

Levinas’s rigid dichotomy between ontology and ethics, like his corresponding distinctions between philosophy and ethics and Greek and Jew, is problematic. How can the self act ethically on behalf of the Other if the Other is not identified as Other? In order for ethical action to take place, the self is compelled to take measure of the ontological gap that separates it from the comprehended being, the Other. Furthermore, if the confrontation with alterity is ontological in this sense, then an adequate account of such an encounter is compelled to take account of the worldly horizon that determines the Being of the beings that face each other in the ethical encounter. For his part, Levinas fails to come to terms with the ethical significance of the world. Although Levinas does discuss the nature of the “Dwelling” in *Totality and Infinity*, for the most part his focus on the self-Other relationship renders him largely indifferent to the question of context. This is borne out by Levinas’s celebration of a nomadic relationship to place: “From this point on, an opportunity appears to us: to perceive men outside the situation in which they are placed, and let the human face shine in all its nudity.”<sup>53</sup>

Seemingly, Levinas is blind to the ethical significance of the world that conditions the self-Other encounter. On one level, Levinas’s obliviousness to the importance of place is

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<sup>52</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 42.

<sup>53</sup> Levinas, ‘Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us’, p. 233.

admirable in that it renders him largely, though not completely, immune to the chauvinistic enthusiasms that ensnared Heidegger. On another level, however, it is a regrettable oversight. The uprooting engendered by the spread of modern technology, as even Levinas recognizes, undermines identity: “Technical things are dangerous. They not only threaten a person’s identity, they risk blowing up the planet.”<sup>54</sup> The technological destruction of identity creates an ontological vacuum begging to be filled. For Arendt, the existence of “homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth” provided an atmosphere conducive to the rise of modern totalitarianism.<sup>55</sup> Of course, the “homelessness” and “rootlessness” that Arendt refers to here is not exactly synonymous with the technological uprooting bemoaned by Heidegger. Nonetheless, the problem of homelessness demands attention if only because of the catastrophic political consequences that potentially flow from it.

Even if we ignore the political consequences that are entailed by it, however, modern rootlessness demands attention for another reason. In our time, the march of globalization annihilates cultural differences through the spread of Western science and technology. None foresaw this development with greater perspicuity than Heidegger. As early as 1935, Heidegger anticipated a “time when the farthest corner of the globe has been conquered by technology and opened to economic exploitation; when any incident whatever, regardless of where or when it occurs, can be communicated to the rest of the

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<sup>54</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us’, in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore, 1990), p. 231.

<sup>55</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, 1968), p. xxix. Of course, Arendt’s thought is heavily indebted to Heidegger. That said, even thinkers who do not have as much baggage as she in this regard are inclined to agree with her diagnosis. For example, albeit from a different perspective, Marshall McLuhan argues that modern man’s homelessness is evinced in the rise of ‘electronic man’: “Man the food-gatherer reappears incongruously as information-gatherer. In this role electronic man is no less a nomad than his paleolithic ancestors.” McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York, 1964), p. 248.

world at any desired speed; when the assassination of a king in France and a symphony concert in Tokyo can be ‘experienced’ simultaneously; when time has ceased to be other than velocity, instantaneousness, and simultaneity, and time as history has vanished from all peoples”<sup>56</sup> Thus, Heidegger foresaw the rise of global world order characterized by the growth of global technology and mass communications, economic exploitation, experiential overload, and historical amnesia. In such a world, Heidegger foresaw, otherness is absent.

Here, it is instructive to consider Levinas’s view of technology. In “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” Levinas draws a linkage between modern technology and Judaism and emphasizes their nomadic ethos. Both uproot human beings from the earth and thereby free them from the cruelties engendered by the pagan emphasis on place: “Technology wrenches us out of the Heideggerian world and the superstitions regarding *Place*” and effectively “does away with the privileges of this enrootedness and the related sense of exile.”<sup>57</sup> Because it carries on the uprooting work of Judaism, the spread of modern technology is an essentially salutary development.

What is wrong with Levinas’s *apologia* for modern technology? In sum, Levinas conflates Hebraic nomadism with technological homelessness. As Peter Tijimes puts it: “Levinas identifies the nomadic existence too readily with the homelessness and uprootedness of modern man.”<sup>58</sup> Of course, this raises an obvious question: what is the

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<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>57</sup> Levinas, ‘Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us’, pp. 232-233, 232.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Tijimes, ‘Home and Homelessness: Heidegger and Levinas on Dwelling’, *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 2, 3 (1998), p. 210.

difference between the “nomadic existence” and the “homelessness and uprootedness of modern man?” Here, Heidegger’s critique of technology gives us a possible answer.

For Levinas, modern technology allows human beings to be seen as they are, undistorted by the superfluous sources of identity that continually obstruct person-to-person relations. As Levinas writes, “From this point on, an opportunity appears to us: to perceive men outside the situation in which they are placed, and let the human face shine in all its nudity.”<sup>59</sup> For Heidegger, however, such “nudity” is impossible because modern technology transforms human beings into standing-reserve (*Bestand*) raw material: “As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then man comes to the brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve.”<sup>60</sup> Hence, whereas the nomad’s homelessness is “natural,” the modern subject’s homelessness is interconnected with its transfiguration into a piece of standing-reserve.

In defending Heidegger’s critique of modern technology against Levinas’s charges, we do not mean to imply that one is compelled to accept the Heideggerian critique *tout court*. Rather, our point is that Levinas’s hostility to Heidegger leads him to adhere to an overly sanguine view of modern technology. Thus, if Heidegger’s homecoming ethos potentially engenders ontological chauvinism and ethical insensitivity, Levinas’s politics of hospitality exhibits a blindness to the importance of ontology, a blindness that causes him to ignore the necessary ontological grounding of ethics, as well as to underestimate

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<sup>59</sup> Levinas, ‘Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us’, p. 233.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1977), p. 332.

the dangers of modern technology. Both Heidegger and Levinas, then, conceive of the human relationship to place in a manner that is clearly insufficient. Hence, what is needed is a politics of place that recognizes the ontological need for rootedness and the ethical imperative to respect alterity.

### **Conclusion: Towards a Politics of Dwelling and Hospitality**

We have painted a decidedly negative portrait of Heidegger's politics, noting how his thought potentially engenders ontological chauvinism and ethical insensitivity. While these dangers are risks of Heidegger's thought, they may not be necessary or exclusive consequences of his manner of thinking. In fact, there is more to Heidegger, at least with regards to the question of place. Similarly, and in the context of his acute ethical sensitivity, there is in Levinas some appreciation for the ethical significance of the home.

Heidegger's concern with homelessness stretches from *Being and Time* to his postwar work, animating everything from his early analysis of everydayness (*Alltaglichkeit*) to his later critique of modern technology. In response to the perceived crisis, Heidegger identifies several ontological models that highlight the embedded nature of human existence, whether it is the world, language, or the fourfold. Thus, for Heidegger, there is a "placed" character to Being; indeed, as Jeff Malpas points out, "Heidegger's thought can be construed as an attempt to articulate this place of being."<sup>61</sup> At the same time, Heidegger's ongoing attempt to help man to return to the house of Being did not lead him to underestimate the value of exile. This is especially the case with the late Heidegger, for whom the home is simultaneously a place of homelessness.

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<sup>61</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, p. 306.

This notion of the home can be seen in Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism." In that essay, Heidegger laments the homelessness that plagues modern man, a homelessness that is ultimately caused by the withdrawal of Being and is exacerbated by the growth of world technology. Yet, in the same essay, Heidegger famously declares that language is the house of Being. Furthermore, "in its home man dwells."<sup>62</sup> Thus, on this account, modern man is both homely and homeless at the same time. As Jeff Malpas puts it, for the late Heidegger, "We dwell, and yet we do not dwell; we belong to being, yet we are separated from being; we are in place, and yet we find ourselves displaced; we are home, and yet nevertheless remain homeless."<sup>63</sup>

Heidegger further develops this notion of the home in a series of lecture courses that were given in the early 1940s entitled "Remembrance" (*Andenken*) and "The Danube" (*Der Ister*). In them, Heidegger suggests that homelessness, or exodus, is a fundamental and necessary element of homecoming. Writing of Holderlin's hymn to the Danube, Heidegger describes the river as a place of home and journey. In its essence, the river is the "locale" of human dwelling; and yet, "the essence of the locale, in which becoming homely finds its point of departure and its point of entry, is such that it journeys." Just so, "*coming to be* at home in one's own itself entails that human beings are initially and for a long time, and sometimes forever, not at home."<sup>64</sup>

Heidegger draws a similar conclusion when he engages in a lengthy and revealing analysis of Sophocles's *Antigone* in the same lecture, something which he had done

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<sup>62</sup> Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', p. 217.

<sup>63</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, p. 309.

<sup>64</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Holderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*, trans. William McNeill and Julia David (Bloomington, 1996), pp. 35, 49.

before in condensed form in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* lectures delivered in 1935. Filled with Heidegger's special interest in language and etymology, the analyses of *Antigone* focuses on the choral homage to human beings, uttered in the midst of Creon's rage at Antigone's having disobeyed his decree and buried her brother, Polynices. It is the first line of the ode that concerns Heidegger: "Manifold is the uncanny; yet nothing more uncanny looms or stirs beyond the human being."<sup>65</sup>

In both lectures, Heidegger calls attention to the word "uncanny." In his 1935 *Metaphysics* lecture, Heidegger declares that the uncanny is "that which throws one out of the 'canny', that is, the homely, the accustomed, the usual, the unendangered." In Heidegger's view, the chorus's recognition that the human being is the uncanny creature *par excellence* is the "authentic Greek definition of humanity." Furthermore, for the chorus, Antigone is representative of human being, "the uncanniest," who shelters the "the familiar only in order to break out of it and to let what overwhelms it break in." It should come as no surprise, then, that such a person as Antigone is "excluded from hearth and counsel"; indeed, Antigone's exclusion is indicated by the final lines of the choral ode: "Let him not become a companion at my hearth, nor let my knowing share the delusions of the one who works such deeds."<sup>66</sup> In this utterance, however, the Theban elders are merely confirming their earlier definition of the human being as the uncanniest of the uncanny.

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<sup>65</sup> Heidegger, *Holderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 67. Conventional translations read as follows: "Many things are formidable, but none more formidable than man!" In his 1935 lecture, Heidegger's translation was: "Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing uncanner than man," Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 156.

<sup>66</sup> Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 161, 161,174, 175, 158.

For Fred Dallmayr, in Heidegger's lectures from the early 1940s, we are presented with "the other Heidegger," a Heidegger who recognizes the simultaneity of dwelling and journey, of homeliness and homelessness. In these lectures, Heidegger suggests that homecoming requires experience with homelessness. As Dallmayr writes, "homecoming ... means not nostalgic return but openness to an untapped promise – the promise of fresh encounters in the calm of spiritual years." Understood in relation to German culture, such homecoming requires a confrontation with Greek otherness in which the Germanic "clarity of thought and style" is nourished by the "divine spiritual fire" of the Greeks. Considered in relation to the West itself, such homecoming necessitates "an entwining of Occident and Orient."<sup>67</sup>

What accounts for the appearance of the "other Heidegger" in these writings? Undoubtedly, the river imagery that Heidegger utilizes in his "Danube" lecture is a far cry from his previous emphasis on agonism and hierarchy. Similarly, one cannot help but be struck by the apolitical tone of such writings. Of course, this may have been an intentional act on Heidegger's part; with the rectorship debacle still fresh on his mind, it is hardly surprising that Heidegger's quietist tendencies would once again rise to the fore. At the same time, this change of tone cannot be wholly attributed to political factors. Rather, it is an entirely natural result of Heidegger's altered approach to the question of Being. In Heidegger's later work, Being is mysterious and ineffable, and it is poetry and art, not metaphysics, that illuminates the nature of Being. Indeed, merely to speak of Being carries "a tendency within it that leads away from the poetic, back into

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<sup>67</sup> Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, pp. 180, 157, 180. For more, see Dallmayr's extended discussion of 'Homecoming through Otherness', pp. 149-180.

metaphysics, and so back into the oblivion of Being.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, Heidegger’s turn away from politics coincides with his turn towards the poetic, resulting in a new receptiveness. In such moments, Heidegger’s thought foreshadows the postmodern celebration of nonidentity, diversity, and otherness.<sup>69</sup>

For Levinas, of course, even “the other Heidegger” is not sufficiently open to the approach of the Other. In Levinas’s view, the very idea of homecoming is ethically problematic. The self’s relation to the Other is *not* place-bound because it is “a relation with a depth rather than with an horizon.” Indeed, such a relationship is a “breach in the horizon.”<sup>70</sup> One can see Levinas’s dim view of homecoming in his interpretation of the Biblical story of Abraham’s departure from home.

In Levinas’s view, the story of Abraham’s departure from home is emblematic of the self’s journey from interiority to exteriority: “To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land, and forbids his servant to even bring back his son to the point of departure.”<sup>71</sup> In Levinas’s view, Abraham symbolizes the metaphysical journey towards otherness that is manifest in what he calls the “Jewish moments” of the Western tradition.<sup>72</sup> The Jewish moments are the instances in Occidental thought when infinity

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<sup>68</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, p. 313. For more, see Malpas’s ‘Conclusion: Returning to Place’, especially the final section on ‘The Poetics of Place’, pp. 305-315.

<sup>69</sup> Dallmayr makes a persuasive case for this point of view in *The Other Heidegger*; for more, see pp. 149-180.

<sup>70</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Is Ontology Fundamental?’, *Philosophy Today*, 33 (1989), pp. 127-128.

<sup>71</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘The Trace of the Other’, trans. Alphonso Lingis, in *Deconstruction in Context*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago, 1986), p. 348. Much like Levinas, Paul Tillich views the story of Abraham’s departure as emblematic of the nomadic ethos that underlies the Judaic vision of place. See Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Roger C. Kimball (New York, 1959).

<sup>72</sup> For more on Levinas’s view of Abraham, see ‘Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics’, in *Proper Names*,

breaks through the walls of totality, and include Socrates's *daimon*, Plato's Good (*Agathon*) beyond being, Aristotle's active intellect, the trace in Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius's doctrine of *via eminentiae*, as well as Descartes's idea of the infinite. In its own way, the story of Abraham illuminates how a "Jewish moment" plays itself out on a spatial continuum.<sup>73</sup>

The story of Abraham is a story of departure: Yahweh orders Abraham to depart from his "fatherland" in obedience to an imperative of divine origin. "YHWH said to Avram: Go-you-forth from your land, from your kindred, from your father's house, to the land that I will let you see."<sup>74</sup> Understood symbolically, Yahweh's command to Abraham implies that human beings are morally compelled to sever their ties to their fatherland.

Clearly, the story of Abraham has profound Levinasian import. Like the Levinasian journey towards otherness, Abraham's journey is exterior in its trajectory. Indeed, not only does Abraham depart from his fatherland, he also "forbids his servant to bring his son to the point of departure." Moreover, the Abrahamic journey is ethical in import; Abraham does not enter into a condition of exile in order to exist in an authentic relationship with Being, but in order to meet the needs of the Other. "Infinity is not 'before' me; I express it, but precisely in giving a sign of the giving of signs, of the 'for-the-other' in which I am dis-interested: here I am! (*me voici*) The accusative (*me voici*)

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trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford, 1996).

<sup>73</sup> For an illuminating discussion of Levinas's notion of how these "Jewish moments" metaphorically serve as reminders of the pre-philosophical experience of the ethical, see Simmons, *An-Archy and Justice*, 7-9; and, as well, Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh, 1985).

<sup>74</sup> *Genesis* 12:1-2 in *The Five Books of Moses: The Schocken Bible*, Vol. I, trans. Everett Fox (New York, 1995).

here is remarkable: here I am, under your eyes, at your service, your obedient servant.”<sup>75</sup> By responding to God’s voice, Abraham distinguishes himself as an “obedient servant” of the Other.

Even so, Levinas’s celebration of Abraham’s nomadism is somewhat at odds with his discussion of the home (*la maison*) in *Totality and Infinity*. In this discussion, the home is revealed to be an ethically ambiguous entity. On the one hand, the home is a place of “recollection, a coming to oneself, a retreat home with oneself as in a land of refuge.” On the other hand, Levinas suggests that the home is the site of hospitality: “I welcome the Other who presents in my home by opening my home to him.” Furthermore, whenever the self welcomes the Other into the home, the former is enabled to dispossess itself of materiality: “But in order that I be able to free myself from the very possession that the welcome of the Home establishes, in order that I be able to see things in themselves, that is, represent them to myself, I must know how *to give* what I possess.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, for Levinas, the home is not an ethically problematic entity *per se*; rather, it is only when the home becomes a pagan shrine to the self rather than an instrument of hospitality that it effectively forfeits its moral legitimacy.

It is tempting to think of Heidegger as the representative of the ancient Greek affinity for home and of Levinas as representative of the ancient Hebrew affinity for journey. Yet, as we have seen, these metaphors are a bit too simplistic. In Heidegger’s post-*Kehre* lectures and in Levinas’s *magnum opus*, the line that separates Heidegger’s Greek

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<sup>75</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘God and Philosophy’, trans. R. Cohen, *Philosophy Today* 22 (1978), p. 141.

<sup>76</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 156, 171, 170-1. For a much fuller development of Levinas on the home and hospitality, see David J. Gauthier, ‘Levinas and the Politics of Hospitality’, *History of Political Thought*, XXVIII, (2007), pp. 158-180.

emphasis on dwelling from Levinas's Hebraic stress on hospitality is blurry indeed. In such works, both Heidegger and Levinas seemingly conceptualize the process of homecoming in terms of a journey towards alterity.

Yet, there is a difference and it is significant. In his emphasis on Antigone's uncanniness, Heidegger conveniently forgets an important ingredient of that which renders Antigone uncanny, that which overwhelms the familiar and breaks into it, that which excludes Antigone from the confines of hearth and counsel. What renders Antigone uncanny is the beckoning of the Other; she responds to the gods – and their laws – through the “face” of the now deceased Polynices. In other words, the very ethical of which Levinas speaks, the Other, is that which calls Antigone and propels her into a homeless state, at least in Creon's kingdom.

It may well be that Levinas does not give sufficient deference to ontology. As we have emphasized earlier, and as Derrida notes, “Not only is the thought of Being not ethical violence (as Levinas claims), but it seems no ethics—in Levinas's sense—can be opened without it. . . . Thought—or at least the precomprehension of Being—*conditions* . . . the *respect* for the other *as what it is: other.*”<sup>77</sup> In attempting to avoid the concretization of ontological constructions, Levinas wishes to abandon ontology altogether. Yet, the insistent monotheistic thrust of his thought has an ontological element to it. This need not be a violent ontology, as Derrida argues, particularly as it is conceived in Levinasian terms, which is to say, phenomenologically. Levinas's phenomenology discovers the moment, in his language a Jewish moment, in which the “otherwise than being” is a face that calls for an ethical response, much like Antigone's.

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<sup>77</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas’, in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1978), p. 138.

Heidegger's forgetting of this helps to explain the vacuity of his politics, of any politics based solely on place.

It appears, then, that both Heidegger and Levinas are appreciative of the tension that exists between home and homelessness, between Ulysses and Abraham. In a world where the effects of globalization render us homeless and a resurgent tribalism threatens to give us a home in which there is violent suppression of difference, it is important to understand and nurture that tension. As we have seen, Heidegger concludes his project with that tension resolved in a mysticism that awaits the disclosure of Being in any place, at any time. In such a resolution, there is very little basis for building a politics, to say nothing of an ethical politics. The project that Levinas undertook is better suited to this task. It is Levinas who diminishes the ontological significance of transcendence by elevating its phenomenal and experiential character. Rather than await the disclosure of Being, we are counseled to listen to the voice of the beckoning Other. Alterity has a face and the politics on which it is based must recognize that face. It is Levinas, then, who signifies the home, politically as well as existentially, as the site of hospitality or even of dispossession; and it is Levinas who sees in homelessness a journey toward the needs of the Other. These are no small "moments" of power and significance.