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# Politics and Heidegger: Aristotle, Superman, and Žižek

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# *Politics and Heidegger: Aristotle, Superman, and Žižek*

## Babette Babich

“Philosophy is metaphysics”<sup>1</sup>—so Heidegger reminds us and goes on to explain what metaphysics does. As we recall his 1929 inaugural lecture, “What is Metaphysics?” the project of questioning/defining metaphysics is one he undertakes throughout his life, so that as we read in 1964: “Metaphysics thinks beings as a whole—the world, man, God—with respect to Being, with respect to the belonging together of beings in Being.”<sup>2</sup> In addition to Descartes, and hence with implicit reference to Husserl, Heidegger’s moves follow Kant on metaphysics in each of the cases noted above. They do so, first, in negative detail, as Kant reflects in his *Prolegomena*, where he critically writes:

There is no single book to which you can point as you do to Euclid, and say: “This is metaphysics; here you may find the noblest objects of this science, the knowledge of a highest being and of a future existence, proved from principles of pure reason.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Heidegger begins “What is Metaphysics?” on the basis of Kant’s initial reference here to the “other sciences,” as these are literally exemplary just where metaphysics is not. These “other sciences” are the mathematical

1. Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (San Francisco: Harper, 1972), p. 55.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56.

3. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), p. 20.

and natural sciences whereby, as Heidegger argues, deploying to this end a distinction developed by Aristotle:

Mathematical knowledge is no more rigorous than philological-historical knowledge. It merely has the character of exactness which does not coincide with rigor. To demand exactness in the area of history is to violate the idea of the specific rigor of the humanities.<sup>4</sup>

In this project, Heidegger asks what the scientific attitude is all about and poses the further question of nothing, famous to us, if for no other reason, because just this emphasis sets Heidegger up for mockery by Carnap (and others) as Heidegger ironically notices for and if nothing else “one thing is sure: science wishes to know nothing of the nothing,” indeed, “we know it, the nothing, in that we wish to know nothing about it.”<sup>5</sup>

Heidegger undertakes to raise a question usually neglected, and rightly so we may suspect. Thus he says, the “nothing is conceded. With a studied indifference, science abandons it as ‘what is not.’”<sup>6</sup> To raise a question about nothingness is to immediately be confronted by the one science that seems as certainly secure as a science if anything is, even mathematics, and that is logic.

By “asking what and how it, the nothing, is,”<sup>7</sup> as Heidegger points out, we have already contradicted ourselves, which catches us in a bind following the “ground rule of all thinking, the proposition that contradictions are to be avoided.”<sup>8</sup> And as we know from *Being and Time*, held out into the nothing as we are, qua thrown finite being, also renders the human being nothing less than “a lieutenant of the nothing.”<sup>9</sup> And it is this, before this our utter finitude, that brings us “face to face with metaphysics itself.”<sup>10</sup> Thus we read, again, that what is to be named metaphysics beyond the fancied conventionality that places Aristotle’s treatises apart from his *Physics* and thus and simply in its wake, is to be understood as “inquiry beyond

4. Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics,” trans. David Farrell Krell, in *Basic Writings* (San Francisco, Harper, 1977), p. 96. This well-known allusion to Aristotle distinguishes between kinds of rigor and the capacity to distinguish between the same.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

10. *Ibid.*

or over beings which aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp.”<sup>11</sup> Here “the nothing does not remain the indeterminate opposite of beings but reveals itself as belonging to the Being of beings.”<sup>12</sup> Whereby and “assuming that the question of Being as such is the encompassing question of metaphysics, then the question of the nothing proves to be such that it embraces the whole of metaphysics.”<sup>13</sup> Which embrace in turn brings us up against “the decision concerning the legitimacy of the rule of ‘logic’ in metaphysics.”<sup>14</sup>

When Heidegger raises the question that is for him inseparable from the question of Being, from the project of thinking Being, thinking the coincidence or correspondence of Being and thinking, he notes that the obstacle here is what we take ourselves to know about nothing. This kind of talk remains dominant, as Heidegger says—still thinking of Carnap but also of his followers—“Science would like to dismiss the nothing with a lordly wave of the hand.”<sup>15</sup>

At issue is the problem of talking about nothing, of raising the question of nothing: “The question of the nothing puts us, the questioners, in question.”<sup>16</sup> In other words:

human existence can relate to beings only if it holds itself out into the nothing. Going beyond beings occurs in the essence of Dasein. But this going beyond is metaphysics itself. This implies that metaphysics belongs to the “nature of man.”<sup>17</sup>

In this sense, we begin to understand why Heidegger takes the basic question of metaphysics to be “Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?”<sup>18</sup>

Whether we follow Heidegger or not, we see that his inquiry follows the specific project of Kant’s critical philosophy, that which is to be set on the “critical” high road of a “science,” as the natural sciences and as mathematics can be said to be locatable on the road of science, is what

11. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

Kant calls “metaphysics,” which as he says in his preface to the *Critique* was once given the title of the “Queen of all the sciences.”<sup>19</sup>

The problem is in a knowledge that goes beyond the physical domain (which is the reason that Hume’s critique of causality serves as it does as wake-up call for Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, and not less as that critique specifically applies to the physical domain itself, a recognition Eugene Wigner takes even further by speaking of the wondrous nature of mathematics, “wondering” indeed that mathematics should apply to the world at all, just given its all-too-human origins).<sup>20</sup> Pointing out that the students of science itself made what progress they made by recognizing a certain Copernican revolution of terms, that is, again, “that reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan of its own and that it must not allow itself to be kept, as it were, in nature’s leading strings”—note here that this would be the conformity between the intellect and the world to be known—“but must itself show the way with principles of judgment based upon fixed laws, constraining nature to give answer to questions of reason’s own determining.”<sup>21</sup> What is wanted are necessary laws, for only qua necessary can one speak of law in the realm of nature, which then presupposes a certain metaphysical schema.

But where physical science, by attending to nature must take as its guide “that which it has itself put into nature,”<sup>22</sup> thus formalizes the teachings of experience and thereby permits their extension, metaphysics “is a completely isolated science of reason,” soaring “far above the teachings of experience,” resting “on concepts alone—not, like mathematics, on their application to intuition.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus Kant reflects that following both the physical sciences and the mathematical sciences (which is thus marvelously for Wigner intuitively and indeed empirically applicable) suggests that we should suppose that

19. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 7.

20. Eugene Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences,” *Communications in Pure and Applied Mathematics* 131 (1960): 1–14. For a brief discussion in connection with Nietzsche (and thence to Husserl and Heidegger), see Babette Babich, “Towards a Critical Philosophy of Science: Continental Beginnings and Bugbears, Whigs and Waterbears,” *International Journal of the Philosophy of Science* 24, no. 4 (2010): 354ff.

21. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 20.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p. 21.

and in general, “knowledge must conform to *our* knowledge”<sup>24</sup> rather than the other way around, arguing as he does that the object “must conform to the constitution of our faculty of intuition,”<sup>25</sup> which famously allows Kant to express as his new methodology for thinking that “we can know *a priori* of things only what we ourselves put into them.”<sup>26</sup>

The metaphysical references that Heidegger details are Kantian (enough): the world, that would be the object of the physical sciences as such, including cosmology, the human being (as Kant speaks of it in terms of freedom and morality), and God. We see this in the range of his antinomies, beginning with the Platonic program for axiomatic reasoning as one can read in the *Timaeus* concerning the disjunction between the world as always having been or else as having “a beginning in time,” as of parts and whole (and simples), causality/freedom, and God as creator.

For Heidegger, “every metaphysical question always encompasses the whole range of metaphysical problems. Each question is itself always the whole.”<sup>27</sup> He continues to say that “[a]ll metaphysics, including its opponent, positivism, speaks the language of Plato”<sup>28</sup> (and so too, as we have noted, does Heidegger himself speak with Plato), but Heidegger moves to Parmenides, to the one that, as we know, serves as guide to both Plato and Socrates.<sup>29</sup>

Hence it is worth thinking that many regard a post-metaphysical age as an age beyond the revelations of the church, as beyond the modernistic confidence game that is the reign of humanism. But the church is still with us—as in a fair moment of unkindness, Nietzsche rebuked those who supposed themselves “his” free spirits, that is to say, as his converted followers, that is to say, his best readers, for “apart from the church, *we too* still love its poison.”<sup>30</sup>

24. Ibid., p. 22 (my emphasis).

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics,” p. 95.

28. Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” p. 67.

29. Peter Kingsley, among others, is useful here to outline the complexities of such guidance. See Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Inverness, CA: Golden Sufi Press, 1999). See also Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-Discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

30. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 36, my emphasis. Nietzsche’s *Genealogy*, if it is anything, is an analysis of poison and the way it works on us, and for some reason only Derrida has managed to foreground this effectively, while

The church, despite our lack of theism, faith, or even an historical sense for tradition, is hardly vanished from the earth if we recognize it not as it once functioned, i.e., as the church of Rome, of Wittenberg, Zürich, and Geneva, but and rather in its most recondite form, as I take this form in the sense in which has Nietzsche argued it, attending to evolution or genealogy, and which form thus includes the church in what turns out to be its latest, Nietzsche says its “best” form, namely, modern science. Here Heidegger would include technology, as Nietzsche underscores the high church character of science and its deliberate pretension to this position. In all its sundry forms, the “church” today would thus include both modern technology and modern science, and the “church,” as well as the academy and above all the corporate world and political world, and especially in the guise, if one is in want of ceremony and circumstance, of the entertainment industry, that Adorno honored by naming the “culture” industry, this last sheerly in tribute to the technological mediations of the same.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly widespread is our humanism, as it may be seen as we collectively and very literally at the cost of all other beings (animal, plant, mineral) continue to clear-cut a world-for-ourselves, flattened into our own image, on every continent, in every corner of the earth, throughout all space, real and increasingly unreal, that is virtual, that is our networked worlds of self/actor/avatar.<sup>32</sup> Thus to the high “church” of the digital, of

blinding us at the same time to seeing the way this operates in Nietzsche. To describe this as I have elsewhere tried to explain the efficacy of *ressentiment* as and in Nietzsche’s style, as and in the substance of the text, Deleuze is indispensable. Many authors, including Derrida, but also Deleuze, Fink, and the present author, have foregrounded the interplay of style (and *ressentiment*) in Nietzsche’s text and/as this text works upon the reader, which can just as well mean as this text steers clear of appropriation. See my “The Genealogy of Morals and Right Reading: On the Nietzschean Aphorism and the Art of the Polemic” in Christa Davis Acampora, ed., *Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 171–90.

31. I discuss this on several occasions. See most recently Babette Babich, “Adorno on Science and Nihilism, Animals, and Jews,” *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy/Revue canadienne de philosophie continentale* 14, no. 1 (2011): 110–45.

32. Beyond the still insufficiently received Baudrillard, I recommend attention to Jacques Ellul but not less to Ivan Illich and Heidegger’s (and Adorno’s) student Günther Anders. I discuss Illich and his critique of pedagogy as the most efficient means of political ideology in the first half of Babette Babich, “Education and Exemplars: Learning to Doubt the Overman,” in Paul Fairfield, ed., *Education, Dialogue and Hermeneutics* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 125–49. I turn to Anders at the conclusion of my essay on Sloterdijk (along with Slavoj Žižek) in Babette Babich, “Sloterdijk’s Cynicism: Diogenes in the Marketplace,” in Stuart Elden, ed., *Sloterdijk Now* (Oxford: Polity, 2011), pp. 17–36, 186–89.

techno-media economic development at any price and without the slightest advantage to the common individual, we may add the ongoing cult of ourselves as fantasy projection.

The new theorists of net culture concede and embrace all of this. This is what it is to be cyborg, to be transhuman, that is to say to be, as some analysts prefer here following Bruno Latour's important work over many years, to be part of the "network of actors."<sup>33</sup> Technology here is not in question other than and to the extent that we want more details on how to be more (never less) "integrated" in Jean Baudrillard's telling language, as he uses this in his *Intelligence of Evil* and which he extends beyond Heidegger, beyond Simondon and de Certeau.<sup>34</sup> In this fashion Heidegger himself is able to add that following today's "technological" turn, "'philosophy' has been in the constant predicament of having to justify its existence before the sciences,"<sup>35</sup> which of course and as the turn to neuroscience and evolutionary and related theory also exemplifies Heidegger's point in our day, as Kant's appeal to Galileo and Newton would seem to have demonstrated the same in his own time, philosophy tends to believe that it can best justify its existence "by elevating itself to the rank of a science."<sup>36</sup>

33. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) as well as his slightly more subversive *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1987).

34. Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Berg, 2005).

35. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," p. 194.

36. Ibid. In a recent "history of philosophy" (i.e., in what is a fairly analytically minded) essay, Cathryn Carson, while drawing a number of useful parallels between Heidegger and Habermas vis-à-vis Heisenberg (who remains an elusive figure just because he is also a philosophic voice in his own right), manages to both understate and affirm Heidegger's pre-1930s interest in science. See Cathryn Carson, "Science as Instrumental Reason: Heidegger, Habermas, Heisenberg," *Continental Philosophical Review* 42 (2010): 485. One could, with some justification, see Carson as setting Heisenberg in the place of an earlier generation's setting of Carnap contra Heidegger, or indeed Cassirer contra Heidegger. But Carson uncritically, and this is worrisome, repeats a popular convention contra Heidegger's account of Planck in Heidegger's "Science and Reflection," a popular conventionality that was instigated or claimed by Planck. Yet in his 1909 lecture series at Columbia University, published in German in that year, Planck poses the question "What lies at the bottom of physics?" and answers his own question: "measurements" (Max Planck, *Eight Lectures on Theoretical Physics: Delivered at Columbia University in 1909*, trans. A. P. Wills [New York: Columbia UP, 1915], p. 3). As Planck explains, "mathematics is the chief tool with which this material is worked. All physical ideas depend upon



When Heidegger calls for us to learn thinking, he reminds us that only those who are thinking can “come to know what it means to think.”<sup>37</sup> And the paradox there, a paradox that belongs to the koan, that belongs to every kind of wisdom (that too, Nietzsche says, is a kind of youth), is that as “soon as we allow ourselves to become involved in such learning we have admitted that we are not yet capable of thinking.”<sup>38</sup> It is in this text that Heidegger, who had taken over a certain critical stance toward the sciences already from Nietzsche, utters his most unforgivable statement: “science does not think,” qualifying that his own declarations are hollow enough, emphasizing that “what has been presented here has nothing to do with scientific knowledge,”<sup>39</sup> adding that this is inevitable if that is to say, “the discussion itself is to be a thinking.”<sup>40</sup> But the point of this as he emphasizes is to science’s own advantage, assuring “its proper course.”<sup>41</sup>

Nor is Heidegger unaware of the political risks involved in his claim that “science does not think.”<sup>42</sup> As he reflects, one does well to “let the statement be shocking” and remarks that “science always and in its own fashion has to do with thinking,” provided indeed that one realize that the “fashion” in question is genuine and consequently “fruitful only after the gulf has become visible that lies between thinking and the sciences, lies there unbridgeably.”<sup>43</sup> Which last only means, as he explains, that one must “leap” into thinking and that only such a leap brings us into the “region where thinking remains,” a leap that thereby and at once takes us to a place where “everything is different, so different that it strikes us as strange.”<sup>44</sup>

Heidegger includes himself among those discomfited by the multifarious claim that we need to “learn to think,” that most “thought-provoking

measurements, more or less exactly carried out” (ibid.). And Planck goes on to observe that talk of objects is arbitrary and one should only speak of “complexes of sense perceptions” rather than, say, the “rustling” of the leaves of a tree (ibid.)—a claim that Heidegger expressly opposes, in Husserl’s spirit and with his own emphases. For his part, and this should matter for Carson, Planck goes on to emphasize that any discussion of measures “presupposes that the progress of the phenomena is not influenced by the measuring instrument” (ibid., p. 98).

37. Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 3.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., p. 7.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p. 8.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., p. 12; Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 353.

of all is that we are still not thinking,” that “science does not think,” and must give themselves over or endure what is “shocking and strange about thinking.”<sup>45</sup>

This is what makes what Heidegger writes about thinking so very strange. For most of us, “thinking” and being able to think whether one is a philosopher, a scientist, or what have you, simply goes without saying for human beings, we who call ourselves the animals who “have” logos: we are the thinking animal. But Heidegger would say that our saying so goes without thinking altogether. And he argues that as thinking slips out of its proper “element it replaces this loss by procuring a validity for itself as *techne*, as an instrument of education, and therefore as a classroom matter and later a cultural concern.”<sup>46</sup>

The point for Heidegger has everything to do with the quite related concerns of the then active Frankfurt School,<sup>47</sup> arguing that philosophies offer themselves up for popular consumption and rate, and are rated by, such standards. Thus those who “busy” themselves with philosophy “offer themselves as -isms and try to offer more than others.” This is the marketplace of ideas, and it is significant that where the second-century satirist Lucian took this for granted, namely, that the very idea of “philosophies for sale” (the title of one of his satires) would strike his audience as dissonant, and hence good for a laugh,<sup>48</sup> and so too, of course, Bacon, we have become much more comfortable with the notion of philosophizing for popular consumption—this is the very problematic meaning of a “public” intellectual—and subject to the evaluation of popular consumption.

Hannah Arendt’s own reflections seem to echo Heidegger’s distinction here, which and to be sure Heidegger draws out from Jaspers and others, in his reflection on the private sphere by contrast with the public sphere, if he also here simply spells out the cognate point he makes in *Being and Time* (and this together with popular misreadings of this text is his reference here). Thus he argues that:

Private existence is not really essential, i.e., free human being. It simply insists on negating the public realm. It remains an offshoot that depends

45. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, p. 5.

46. Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” p. 197.

47. Ibid. Habermas has become rather less critical about “the peculiar dictatorship of the public realm.”

48. Lucian, “Philosophers for Sale.” See also his “Fisherman or the Dead Come to Life.” For a discussion of Lucian’s parodic schema, see Babette Babich, “The Philosopher and the Volcano,” *Philosophy Today* 55 (2011): 213–31.

upon the public and nourishes itself by a mere withdrawal from it. Hence it testifies against its own will to its subservience to the public realm.<sup>49</sup>

But because it stems from the dominance of subjectivity the public realm itself is the metaphysically conditioned establishment and authorization of the openness of individual beings in their unconditional objectification. Language thereby falls into the service of expediting communication along routes where objectification—the uniform accessibility of everything to everyone—branches out and disregards all limits. In this way language comes under the dictatorship of the public realm which decides in advance what is intelligible and what must be described as unintelligible.<sup>50</sup>

Already here there is the basis for a Heideggerian coordination of Adorno's similar challenge, an alliance that Adorno to be sure, meaning to make this point his own point, refused. Habermas, by contrast, simply endorsed the public realm renaming it as an ultimately democratic possibility of communicative discourse by locating it not in the present but as always already dynamic in social interaction.

Famously Habermas refuses both Heidegger's claim and its parallel to the concerns of critical theory with the ad hominem insistence that

Heidegger's critical judgements...on the dictatorship of the public realm and the impotence of the private sphere, on technocracy and mass civilisation, are without any originality whatsoever because they belong to a repertoire of opinions typical of a certain generation of German mandarins.<sup>51</sup>

There are those who have taken upon themselves the necessary difficulties of reading between Heidegger and Adorno, and the project of reading between Heidegger and Habermas probably remains to be done—though one has first to engage the greater challenge of what Habermas has done, in effect, to so mute the legacy of the Frankfurt School as to make the effort hardly worth the bother, one would seem to have other concerns. What remains true is that we overlook the important reference to critical

49. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," p. 197.

50. Ibid.

51. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 140.

theory here if we do not draw such parallels, despite the objections on both sides of the fence.<sup>52</sup>

But the line in the sand concerns the standardized absolute of universal public discourse, which as our own era is all about this standardized universal, it will do to look at this just a bit more closely. Thus, in *What Is Called Thinking*, Heidegger writes, not unlike Adorno:

Today every newspaper, every illustrated magazine, and every radio program offers all things in the identical way to uniform views. . . . The one-sided view . . . has puffed itself up into an all-sidedness which in turn is masked so as to look harmless and natural. But this all-sided view which deals in all and everything with equal uniformity and mindlessness . . . reduces everything to a univocity of concepts and specifications the precision of which not only corresponds to, but has the same essential origin as, the precision of technological process.<sup>53</sup>

This takes Heidegger to language, and there he always turns to the artists, the fabricators of language or the word, those who make, who bring forth or call into being, as it is those who make who are the poets.

As Heidegger writes in his “Letter on Humanism”:

Thinking brings this relation to Being solely as something handed over to it from Being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking Being comes to language. Language is the house of Being. In its home the human dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home.<sup>54</sup>

In “What Calls for Thinking,” what is at stake for Heidegger remains the paradox with which he begins, the “human being still does not think, and just because what must be thought about turns away from him.”<sup>55</sup> In other words it is not about the human; it is not a shortcoming of the scientist that one is, as Heidegger repeats, “still not thinking.” Instead, what must be thought about “withdraws” from the human: “What withdraws from us draws us along by its very withdrawal whether we become aware of

52. For a discussion that by no means panders to Heidegger, see Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP), pp. 215ff.

53. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, pp. 33–34.

54. Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” p. 193.

55. Ibid.. Heidegger, “What Calls for Thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, p. 7, altered.

it immediately, or at all.”<sup>56</sup> This is of course, as commonly said, very like Benjamin’s angel of history: “As we are drawing toward what withdraws, we ourselves point toward it.”<sup>57</sup> And this is how Heidegger defines the human, as a pointer, a sign. I recall Alphonso Lingis’s articulation of the exemplary humanism of the “anthropological” phenomenology of human morphology, upright as we are in the world.<sup>58</sup> Thus “the human is a sign,” but Heidegger quotes Hölderlin: “We are a sign that is not read.”<sup>59</sup> Adding the continuation that was key for both Heidegger and Gadamer:

We feel no pain, we almost have  
Lost our tongue in foreign lands.

Indeed, what bears reflection for Heidegger, as he reflects in his lecture course, *The Ister*, is exactly what is needed for the sake of history, to the extent that “historical language is in and of itself in need of translation, and not merely in relation to foreign languages.”<sup>60</sup>

For Heidegger, what we learn from Hölderlin, in his poetizing, in his encounter with Greece, in his translations, is above all that we are in need, and this in our own tongue, of a translation, of an interpretative effort: “translation is more an awakening, clarification, and unfolding, of one’s own language with the help of an encounter with the foreign language.”<sup>61</sup> The point is not simply that we may, as Heidegger here points out to his students, “speak ‘German’ yet talk entirely ‘American,’” but rather that no “historical people” is “of its own accord,” that is to say, “without its own intervention, at home in its own language.”<sup>62</sup> So much attention to the anxious apprehension that a German poet might remember his own tongue in his experiences as a wanderer in France, reflecting on the Greek conception of mortal being cast, dispersed upon the earth, alienated from a higher dimension, a literally metaphysical dimension, earthly beings, as

56. Heidegger, “What Calls for Thinking,” p. 7.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 5

58. See Lingis’s several studies, particularly his *The Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994) and his *Foreign Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1994), as well as his *First Person Singular* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2007).

59. Hölderlin, *Mnemosyne*, and also, as Heidegger notes, Hölderlin’s *The Serpent*, *The Sign*, *The Nymph*.

60. Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister”*, trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), p. 65.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

we find ourselves on “Hertha green” (as Hölderlin writes in *The Ister*), but and no less as “children of heaven” (as Hölderlin also writes).<sup>63</sup> In *What Is Called Thinking*, Heidegger reminds us with reference to the church and its persistence, and at the same time about the Enlightenment and all its claims, “nothing religious is ever destroyed by logic; it is destroyed only by the god’s withdrawal.”<sup>64</sup>

The movement is one that invites us to “openness,” and this is the heart of Heidegger’s attunement, “to be ready and willing to listen,”<sup>65</sup> as it is this listening attunement that sets Heidegger against the church as that so-named “church” matters for him as it matters for his then-listeners and for us today. Yet the clear “danger” in an academic context, that is, in university discourse, is that a specific reverence is reserved for the sciences, the *hard* sciences, that is to say, those sciences that “forcibly” require us, in Heidegger’s words here, to “rack our brains.” Thus everyone admits that the arts and sciences differ, as Heidegger observes, while yet conjoining them (faculties of arts and sciences and such). Thus when one distinguishes “between thinking and the sciences,” the conclusion is immediately taken that what is intended “disparage(s)” the latter.<sup>66</sup>

Heidegger, as he learned from Nietzsche, was at pains to avoid a thinking of *for* and *against*, a *pro* and *con* thinking discouraged in *Being and Time*, only to have exactly this thinking hung around his neck as an opponent of this or of that—most particularly of the inauthentic and the like. But Heidegger was at pains, however unsuccessfully, to remind his readers that the negative in question had to do less with a deficit than a standard or stock or ordinary way of being, one with another alongside the world or the worlds of one’s with world and one’s concerns. In the case of his specific comments regarding the church, Heidegger suggests, in a perfectly Lutheran spirit, that it would be bad form within the church itself to speak against the church. Thus he emphasizes speaking of what counts for us as “the” high church of all churches, and that is of science: “When we speak of the sciences as we pursue our way, we shall be speaking not

63. See here the important reading that Heidegger gives of Hölderlin’s *Bread and Wine* in his essays on language and of his discussion of the fourfold with respect to Trakl in Martin Heidegger, “Language,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

64. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, p. 5.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

against but for them, for clarity concerning their essential nature.”<sup>67</sup> That “essential nature” as we know, readers of the *Question Concerning Technology* as we are, and as he also takes care to tell us in this separate locus, is indeed reflected in what he calls the “exciting fact that today’s sciences belong in the realm of the essence of modern technology, and nowhere else.”<sup>68</sup>

Having said this, however, Heidegger proceeds to step away from both the techno-enthusiast and the acolyte of the church of science, and especially of the academy, with all its sense of itself and its highly intellectual qualities, by turning toward the joiner’s art: cabinetry. The craftsman, and here Heidegger speaks with Plato who spoke of the shoemaker, as a man of the *polis*, as he speaks with Aristotle, who himself, in the little we know of his life, grew up in an intrigue-beseiged kingdom’s court (his father, Nicomachus, was physician to Amyntas II, father of Philip the Great, who was in turn father of Alexander the Great).<sup>69</sup> Heidegger underscores the fact that we know next to nothing about Aristotle’s life in the driest of fashions, recounted to us by his students as he begins his 1924 lecture course on Aristotle with just such an *incipit*.<sup>70</sup> When Arendt, who made this anecdote famous, also underlines that what Heidegger says of Aristotle gives us the minimum that can be said of Aristotle with any certainty,<sup>71</sup> we also recall that hermeneutics teaches us that just this barest of contexts also frames the way we might read the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which begins indeed by speaking of the nested nature of “every art and every inquiry,” illustrating the point by speaking of the art of shipbuilding and of strategy, and not less related to this of the bridle maker’s art as well as “the art of riding,” thus ordering “this and every military action under strategy.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed, it makes a difference that is still worth further exploration that when we speak of the virtues, we find ourselves talking about virtues like courage that most of us can never have known, because courage is a very specifically military virtue as it must be regularly practiced in the face of

67. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

68. *Ibid.*

69. McKeon mentions this in his prefatory words to his edition of *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), p. xiv.

70. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2009), p. 4.

71. Hannah Arendt, “Martin Heidegger at Eighty,” in Michael Murray, ed., *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1978), p. 297.

72. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1094a.

death (unless our times become, as Slavoj Žižek likes to remind us of the Chinese curse, yet more “interesting”).<sup>73</sup> Thus, the Aristotle who details such noble or warrior virtues grew up as a boyhood friend of Philip of Macedon, and who was to be invited back to Macedon as Alexander’s tutor, came to Athens and retired from Athens in the historical constellation of such politics. This makes a huge difference—as Aristotle would say, it makes “*all* the difference.”<sup>74</sup>

For his own part, Heidegger reprises his earlier illustration of the equipmental (and the Aristotelian resonance of purposes and occupation matters here) array or constellation of world and care in *Being and Time*, invoking the cabinetmaker’s craft as he proceeds to do, as an apprentice learns this essence, as he “makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within wood—to wood as it enters into human dwelling with all the hidden riches of its nature.”<sup>75</sup> This relatedness is what makes the joiner one who is a woodworker as such. “Without that relatedness, the craft will never be anything but empty busywork, any occupation with it will be determined exclusively by business concerns. Every handicraft, all human dealings are constantly in that danger.”<sup>76</sup> If Heidegger can here emphasize as he does that the “writing of poetry is no more exempt from it than is thinking,”<sup>77</sup> it is clear today that political action is also endangered. With the current movements of Occupy Wall Street, nothing could be clearer than such “business concerns,” nor could the “danger” of what Adorno and Marcuse called co-option or Žižek’s warning not to “fall in love with yourself” be more urgent.<sup>78</sup>

If Heidegger then goes on to the section of the text that captivates Derida, to speak of hands, as Lou Salomé was also captivated by Nietzsche’s

73. “Welcome to Interesting Times” serves as the afterword to the paperback edition of Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2011).

74. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103b. Related to my observation here, I recommend Richard Bodéüs, who points to some of the extraordinary complexities of the broader Greek context even in the case of so patently familiar a thinker as Aristotle. See both his *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle’s Ethics*, trans. Jan Garrett (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993) and his *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, trans. Jan Garrett (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000).

75. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, p. 14.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

77. *Ibid.*

78. See the instant book edited by Carla Blumenkranz, et al., *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America* (New York and London: Verso, 2011).



hands, Heidegger's point is that "the hand's gestures run everywhere through language, in their most perfect purity, precisely when man speaks by being silent. And only when man speaks does he think—not the other way around, as metaphysics still believes."<sup>79</sup> The point for Heidegger is that thinking is "humanity's simplest, and for that reason, hardest handiwork."<sup>80</sup>

Elsewhere Heidegger reminds us that it can seem that philosophy has simply dissolved into the sciences, but this is the completion of philosophy. All of this, he says, requires little predictive power to name in the name of cybernetics, inasmuch as this last "science corresponds to the determination of the human being as an acting social being."<sup>81</sup> With this reference to cybernetics and the connection to the social, we have a clear connection to today's discussion of network actors, even if as we recall (and perhaps for good reason, and Adorno had the same kind of allergies), that Latour is on the defense when it comes to Heidegger, as indeed Heidegger had been, as he was not at the root of any academic travail that Latour may have suffered in the past.<sup>82</sup> Thus, Heidegger argues as a matter of fulfillment or culmination (and this too is a way to look at the postmetaphysics) that "philosophy is ending in the present age. It has found its place in the scientific attitude of social humanity. But the fundamental characteristic of this scientific attitude is its cybernetic, that is, *technological* character."<sup>83</sup> The point here, as Heidegger seeks to underscore this (this is the relevance of his alternative title, "The Task of Thinking"), is the rule of theory, taking the definition of the same in terms of its cyberneticality, as it were, whereby the "operational and model character of representational-calculative thinking becomes dominant."<sup>84</sup>

79. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, p. 16.

80. *Ibid.*

81. Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (San Francisco: Harper, 1972), p. 58.

82. Latour indeed need not be so apprehensive for, as noted earlier in the discussion, many technically-technologically minded Heideggerians have proven themselves well able to read between Latour and Heidegger, and indeed to Latour's benefit, if it must also be said that many scholars read Heidegger today with the express intention of leaving him behind, which means indeed using as a deliberate tactic, a clear non-reading: thus we are, automatically, after or post-Heidegger.

83. Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," p. 58 (my emphasis, for clarity).

84. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Thus, one can argue (and, to be sure, some have indeed already sought to argue) that Heidegger is a transhumanist or else (and this is much the same) that he fails to be a transhumanist.<sup>85</sup> But to read Heidegger in this way is to stop reading, taking Heidegger's remarks as what stands without question, as if for Heidegger standing apart from any possible need for questioning would or could be a good thing. Indeed, Heidegger here goes on to predict what has come to pass in the interim, complete with a number of Heideggerian accounts of the same, at least with regard to cognitive science. For example:

The sciences are now taking over as their own task what philosophy in the course of its history tried to present in certain places, and even there only inadequately, that is, the ontologies of the various regions of beings (nature, history, law, art). . . . The operational and model character of representation-calculative thinking becomes dominant.<sup>86</sup>

In this way, and by observing that no part of the dominion of science (in this techno-cybernetical sense, we can go ahead and say digital if we like), what functions on the university or academic level as "philosophy" has been left behind. Thus, what Heidegger means by invoking "the end of philosophy" means the culmination of, the consummation or fulfillment of philosophy. This is nothing but the globalization of technology, which "proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world. The end of philosophy means the beginning of the world civilization based upon Western European thinking."<sup>87</sup>

85. There are very few criticisms of transhumanism, probably for reasons that Günther Anders had already analyzed in 1956 in his *Antiquierheit*, eleven years after the end, as Geert Lovink dates it, in the weaker wake of Adorno, or death of humanism as such "in 1945." Anders writes that we do not want to 'appear' reactionary. Geert Lovink argues that we don't want to seem to be out of it—this is behind his praise of Alan Liu's "cool"—but what has not changed is his 1998 assessment: "There is no radical critique of the new technologies." Both citations are from Geert Lovink, "Critique of Transhumanism," available online at <http://www.alamut.com/subj/ideologies/pessimism/lovinkTrans.html>. This diagnosis holds of both older and younger theorists, these days including Lovink himself. See, again, for a discussion of Anders in the context of Sloterdijk's *Rules for the Human Zoo*, the concluding section of Babich, "Sloterdijk's Cynicism," esp. pp. 26ff.

86. Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," p. 59.

87. *Ibid.*

What “task” is left for thinking at this juncture? What remains? Here Heidegger inquires after (with a naïveté that seems breathtaking given the prescience of his other insights) “the possibility that the world civilization which is just now beginning might” well or might yet still “one day overcome the technological-scientific-industrial character as the sole criterion of the human world sojourn?”<sup>88</sup> Heidegger thus recommends a turn “to the things themselves,” a call he traces via Hegel and then to Husserl (thus including every Cartesian echo), noting that “from the perspective of Hegel and Husserl—and not only from their perspective—the matter of philosophy is subjectivity.”<sup>89</sup>

If we can see all this, we can also see what inspires Heidegger to write as he does in “Overcoming Metaphysics,” echoing what he had earlier written in his *Contributions*, where he addresses nothing less than the very calculated violence of his reading of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* contra the rhetoric and force of the Nazi Superman. I note as an essential aside in the current context, as I move here to conclude that America, as we all know, has had, like Nazi Germany, its own fantastic image of the same modern technological imaginary: a none-too-Allied Superman, pure Americana, true blue and all the way.<sup>90</sup> Not George Bernard Shaw’s vision of *Man and Superman*, as that was for its part too theoretical, too conscious of the Nietzschean compounds, complexities that accrued to such a constellation, but and just the pulp comic-book hero Superman, as that marvelous cartoon embodiment of the modern technological imaginary is only an extension of that ideal of the secret higher life that is also the firm article of faith for so very many mild-mannered Clark Kents, living their everyday lives.

Clark Kent turns out to exemplify the qualities of the subhuman, recalling Lois Lane’s persuaded sense of Clark’s utter lack of appeal, a lack magically to be remedied, as all such revelations continue to be remedied

88. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

90. It is Superman’s costume that is striking in the first issue of *Action Comics*, published in 1938, featuring his characteristic red cape and matching red underwear worn over a blue jumpsuit with red socks as knee high boots, channeling a more streamlined, futuristic version of Flash Gordon’s patently Nazi short pants (ca. 1934). Indeed the aesthetic iconography of Superman’s pose (holding a green Volkswagen in a full barbell press lunge over his head, while dashing its front trunk to bits against a rock, thus shattering the Volkswagen’s famously un-sturdy front bumper and sending one tire flying) is less of a challenge for political analysis than the question of whether Superman (and not Madonna) inspired Michael Jackson’s penchant for wearing underwear/bodysuits over his jeans.

not only in comic books but on the silver screen, for both men and women, in the cliché fantasies of Hollywood, requiring in the end nothing like a skin-tight blue jumpsuit, complete with red cape and boots, but only the removal of a pair of eyeglasses. Eyeglasses are thereby revealed as being—this we recall out of the depths of our collective, cinematic imaginary—the original and all-purpose cybernetic signifier. In this way, as it happens using the very same routing, *contact lenses* turn out to be the seamless route to transhuman excellence: a supermodel in the germ. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, outfitted with so many similarly subtle enhancements, all of us can be, if to be sure for a yet to be specified fee, set on the path of the supposedly incipient ultimate upgrade that is the pretended or affected or imagined (pick one) technological singularity, which if one sets a date on it may be expected to come and go rather in the fashion of a fundamentalist preacher's claim to a similarly apocalyptic rapture on the model of the end of days.

Speaking of the nihilism that is in our times more urgent than ever, under the sign of what he calls the “unconditional completion of nihilism,” Heidegger writes of what he calls “the armament mechanism of the plan,”<sup>91</sup> using the language of his day. If we have other words for our part now, if the mechanism remains unchanged:

Subhumanity and superhumanity are the same thing. They belong together, just as the “below” of animality and the “above” of the *ratio* are indissolubly coupled in correspondence in the metaphysical *animal rationale*.<sup>92</sup>

Of course, we almost do not need to mention that Heidegger cannot but add the caveat that “Sub- and super-humanity are to be thought here metaphysically, not as moral value judgments.”<sup>93</sup> What matters is supreme calculability, perfect performance: thus automatic, thus all about the automaton (just as Günther Anders for his own part underlines). Heidegger notes that “instinct is required for superhumanity” precisely because “subhumanity belongs to superhumanity, but in such a way that precisely the animal element is thoroughly subjugated in each of its forms to calculation

91. Martin Heidegger, “Overcoming Metaphysics,” in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 103.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*

and planning (health plans, breeding).”<sup>94</sup> We can be eager to interrupt this by adding the idea of the implanted bits of the technology we love most today: cellphone receivers, GPS chips, and maybe something somewhat more elegant, more functional than the mechanical limbs, hearing aids, and pacemakers currently on offer.<sup>95</sup> But we also suppose the still-promissory full deployment of the genetic engineering that Heidegger already takes for granted here.

Heidegger is talking both about the designation of the world as world-for-us, for our purposes, so many military exercises for business benefit, as that initially expresses itself in terms of atomic escalation, which has in the interim simply slid back into the same gas station and shale field explosions of a technological dependence on energy that never, in the end, found its way to another means of fuel: in case it remains, as Heidegger writes, that “the using is a using up.”<sup>96</sup> In the process, Heidegger hits upon the point that also remains central for current speculative interests: “Man is the ‘most important raw material’ because he remains the subject of all consumption.”<sup>97</sup> Whatever Marxian reading of Heidegger may be worked out, it would have, it should, begin with this: the “circularity of consumption for the sake of consumption is the sole procedure which distinctively characterizes the history of a world which has become an unworld.”<sup>98</sup> Heidegger transforms Clausewitz, as Foucault would later do in *Society Must Be Defended*, by writing at a time when nothing was more patent than “War has become a distortion of the consumption of beings which is continued in peace.”<sup>99</sup> In the context of noting that “the distinction between war and peace has become untenable,” he adds well in advance of the discourse of globalization, that “the distinction between ‘national’ and ‘international’ has also collapsed.”<sup>100</sup> Heidegger adds that we are living on the edge of this problem and its unrestrained, and possibly non-restrainable, issue to our pain, such that we live on the terms of nothing but the impossible, taken to eternity. But Heidegger is fond of rustic examples, which means that we tend to mock him for that, and to overlook what he says as he reminds

94. Ibid., p. 106.

95. As Michael Chorost has observed, “Thousands of people need better prosthetic limbs. No one knows how to make them.” Quoted on the title page of his article “Waiting for the Bionic Man,” *Wired*, April 2012.

96. Heidegger, “Overcoming Metaphysics,” p. 103.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid., p. 107.

99. Ibid., p. 104.

100. Ibid., p. 107.

us that the “birch tree never oversteps its possibility. The colony of bees dwells in its possibility.”<sup>101</sup> By contrast, modern science and technology

devours the earth in the exhaustion and consumption and change of what is artificial. Technology drives the earth beyond the developed sphere of its possibility into such things which are no longer a possibility and are thus the impossibility.<sup>102</sup>

Žižek teases us as we listen as the good and docile sheep of the media, in the virtually real or integral order, that we suppose nothing more likely than the technological possibility of the imaginary precisely by contrast with the “can’t be done” or enjoined symbolic impossibility that would be at stake in any bid to change the order of rule, such that the world need not work as industrial leaders, i.e., as business interests, command that *everything* be done for the sake of business interest or profit. We attend on the same for what we hope might one day—although it never has—yet accrue to ourselves as wanna-be capitalists. (We think we are investors if we have a bank account or a pension, and actual capitalists love that we think that.) Thus we are complicit, but Heidegger, who thinks that more is possible than what we suppose about possibility and impossibility, suggests what he called *Ereignis* in his *Contributions* and here again at the conclusion of *Overcoming Metaphysics*: that appropriating might bring “mortals to the path of thinking, poetizing, building.”<sup>103</sup>

101. Ibid., p. 109.

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid., p. 110.