

# The Ontological Decline of the West

Michael E. Zimmerman

*A Companion to Heidegger's "Introduction to Metaphysics,"* ed. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

The inception is what is most uncanny and mightiest.

What follows is not a development but flattening down as mere widening out, it makes the inception innocuous and exaggerates it into a perversion of what is great....

Introduction to Metaphysics (EM,119)<sup>1</sup>

In the following essay, I describe, contextually situate, and critically appraise Heidegger's conception of history in Introduction to Metaphysics (Einführung in die Metaphysik). In part one, I show that Heidegger rejected efforts to read Western history either in terms of the metaphor of progress, or in terms of the collective events of peoples and nations. Instead, he tells a saga of the West's eruption through the ancient Greek encounter with Being and of the West's subsequent decline into technological nihilism, characterized by the darkening of the earth and the flight of the gods. This decline resulted from the gradual self-concealment of Being, a process that began with Plato and Aristotle and that was hastened by the translation of crucial Greek philosophical terms into Latin, such as the Latin natura for physis. Because language lets things be, this decay of language enables things to reveal themselves only one-dimensionally, not in their depth, complexity, and rank. Western history has become increasingly governed by the "metaphysics of presence," whose combination of anthropocentrism, foundationalism, and representational concepts of truth led to the contemporary view that for something "to be" it must be present as raw material for enhancing the power of the technological system.

In part two, I argue that in some—but by no means all—respects Heidegger's account of the West's history accorded with the belief of "cultural pessimists" such as

Oswald Spengler, author of The Decline of the West (1918). In part three, I offer some critical remarks about Heidegger's view of Western history. These remarks take into account his links with National Socialism.<sup>2</sup> At the outset, I wish to emphasize that despite my critical remarks, I continue to hold important aspects of Heidegger's ontology in great esteem.

### **Part One. Introduction to Metaphysics' Account of the Rise and Fall of the West**

The immediate context for EM was the National Socialist movement, with regard to which Heidegger tried to establish a leading position for his own philosophy.<sup>3</sup> To Nazi ideologues who asserted that philosophy "did not contribute to preparing the revolution," Heidegger replied that genuine philosophy is "a thoughtful opening of the avenues and vistas of a knowing which establishes measure and rank in which and out of which a people conceives its Dasein in the historical-spiritual world and brings it to fulfillment..." (EM,8) Regarding the situation in 1935, Heidegger wrote: "The spiritual decline of the earth has progressed so far that peoples are in danger of losing their last spiritual strength, the strength that makes it possible even to see the decline (Verfall) and to appraise it as such." (EM,29) Caught in the pincers between Russia and America, both of which are governed by "the same wretched frenzy of unchained technology and of the boundless organization of the average man" (EM,28), German (and European) Dasein could be saved from technological nihilism only by a world-founding renewal of Dasein's relationship with Being.<sup>4</sup> That renewal would be carried out by a few thoughtful and lonely creators--poets, statesmen, and philosophers—who were anointed for this task by Being itself.

Such individuals must tread the insecure path of "repeating and retrieving [wiederholen] the inception of our historical-spiritual Dasein, in order to transform it into the other inception." (EM,29) This retrieval begins with posing a question, "How does it stand with Being?" that precedes the fundamental question of metaphysics, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Being has been so emptied of meaning, that the fore-question, "How does it stand with Being?", seems pointless to scientists, engineers, and politicians. For

Heidegger, however, posing the fore-question is essential to the ontological happening (Geschehen) of history (Geschichte), and thus central to the “spiritual fate of the West.” (EM,28) “In this questioning,” we are told, “our Dasein is summoned to its history in the full sense of the word, and is called to make a decision in it....”(EM,34)

For Heidegger, human Dasein is endowed with a unique relationship to the Being of beings. Dasein constitutes the clearing or the opening--temporal, historical, linguistic--in which beings can manifest themselves as beings. For something “to be,” then, means for it to reveal itself or to show up within the clearing opened up through Dasein. Animals can encounter beings, but only Dasein can explicitly note that things are and that Dasein itself exists. Different historical epochs involve determinate ways in which beings manifest themselves, i.e., different ways in which people understand what things are. The modern epoch lacks depth because beings have been so emptied out ontologically that they can manifest themselves only one-dimensionally, as raw material for the technological system. Such a condition, in Heidegger’s view, is demonic and nihilistic.<sup>5</sup> Nihilism amounts to positivism, “where one clings to current beings and believes it is enough to take beings, as before, just as the beings that they are.” (EM,155) Oblivious to Being, positivists assume that beings are everything, whereas Being itself is empty, “nothing,” nihil.

Describing Europe’s descent into nihilism, Heidegger resorts to a striking metaphor: “All things sank to the same level, to a surface resembling a blind mirror that no longer mirrors, that casts nothing back.” (EM,35) Things have been leveled to a flat plane, because Being has withdrawn itself from them and from human Dasein. Deprived of its relation to Being, Dasein can no longer act as the ontological-linguistic mirror through and in which things can manifest themselves and thus “be.”<sup>6</sup> The empirical symptoms of decline, including cultural decay and social disorientation, are to be distinguished from the source of decline (Verfall), namely, the self-withdrawal of Being, which is discernible in the process by which key metaphysical terms were translated from Greek to Latin. (EM,47)<sup>7</sup> The term Verfall is derived from verfallen, to fall, a term that plays a central role in Sein und

Zeit's concept of inauthenticity.<sup>8</sup> To be inauthentic means not to own oneself, that is, not to be the mortal openness that one always already is. Being and Time maintains that such inauthenticity involves a lack of individual resoluteness, but EM suggests that the decline of the West stems not only from a lack of resoluteness on the part of Dasein, but also from the impersonal withdrawal of Being from language, earth, world, and Dasein. Because EM retains some voluntaristic vocabulary, it is often said to stand midway between Heidegger's "early" and "later" phases. In the present anthology, however, Thomas J. Sheehan contests the claim that Heidegger's thought underwent a "turn" (Kehre) in any such chronological sense.

In Heidegger's opinion, a linguistic and spiritual revolution is needed to renew German history and to save the Volk from modern decadence. (EM,41) Such a revolution is not to be confused with political reaction, in which people flee to the past in order to defend themselves from the present situation. (EM,93) Authentic revolution involves polemos, the dangerous struggle by which creators bring Being to a stand in works that open up a world in which beings can come to be. (EM,47) "This becoming-a-world is authentic history." (EM,48; my emphasis) The meaning of history can be understood neither in terms of Divine Providence, nor in terms of progressive human self-actualization, for such views presuppose an illusory metaphysical foundation. Instead, history takes on significance in those rare and insecure moments in which human Dasein experiences Being "from the bottom up and in the full breadth of its possible essence." (EM,155) Today, this experience would constitute a new beginning for the metaphysically exhausted West, a beginning that could be as great as the one initiated in ancient Greece.

Before attempting to encounter Being anew, however, German Dasein must address the fore-question, "How does it stand with Being?" This question can first of all be understood as asking: How are things going for Being? The answer is that things are not going well at all. Indeed, things are virtually disappearing as things, insofar as Being has withdrawn from them. A related way of understanding the fore-question is this: Is Being

standing erect, or is it falling? The answer is that Being has practically toppled over, as witnessed both by the one-dimensionality of beings, and by the ontological spinelessness of Dasein. Without Being in our ontological marrow, we have lost the ability to stand erect ontologically; hence, “We are staggering.” (EM,154) The modern world-clearing has become so constricted that Dasein moves about like an animal on all fours, totally absorbed by the beings that confront it.

The fore-question invites an invidious contrast between ancient Greek and modern Dasein. In ancient Greece, Being stood fully erect, in part because ontologically virile Dasein brought it to a stand in its full magnificence, fury, and overwhelming power. The ontological orgasm resulting from this encounter between Dasein and Being engendered a great historical world in which beings manifested themselves in their articulation, rank, and order. Today, in contrast, Being has become flaccid, leading Dasein itself to become impotent, ontologically and linguistically. In matters of ontology, all movement from the origin involves degeneration and decline. Far from being primitive, proto-modern scientists, then, ancient Greek philosophers were inordinately great, having been touched by an ontological radiance that has been reduced to an ember 2500 years later. Technological control over and scientific knowledge of entities cannot compensate for what has been lost through Being’s self-concealment. For Heidegger, the positivists and Nazi ideologues who praise “hard science” as opposed to “soft-headed” metaphysics are ontologically impotent, incapable of getting it up with regard to Being.

Although EM’s sexual metaphors sometimes suggest that human Dasein is the active (male) party who brings Being to a stand, Dasein’s actions also involve a seemingly feminine, receptive aspect. After all, Dasein’s efforts are not self-owned, but instead are inspired by logos, which itself is an aspect of physis or Being. (EM,88-104) Hence, Greek Dasein’s creativity was grounded in the willingness of great thinkers and poets to submit to ontological violation (Gewalt) by Being. (EM,124-126) As Heidegger indicated in lectures from 1931-1932, ontological eros, the striving after Being (Seinserstrebnis), drew Greek

philosophers and poets toward their violent lover, Being.<sup>9</sup> Once impregnated by the ontological power to which they were thus attracted, they engendered a new world. In 1935, however, in the gloomy epoch of Seinsdämmerung, the twilight of Being, Germans had to experience Being anew, not as the ancient Greeks had experienced it.

Faced with overpowering Being, the ancient Greek mood was astonishment. Faced with the utter meaninglessness of the modern industrial wasteland, the modern German moods are horror and boredom.<sup>10</sup> Despite EM's manly rhetoric about the Greeks bringing Being to a stand, Heidegger insists that modern Germans need courage to submit to and thus to experience their ontological pain. Again, such submission may be read as involving a feminine dimension that seems incompatible with EM's masculinist account of the violence and homelessness of the lonely creator. Heidegger believed that Hölderlin's poetry could help transform the moods of horror and boredom into one of "holy affliction, mourning but prepared."<sup>11</sup> The mood of holy affliction would free the German Volk from the rigid, control-oriented Apollinianism of modern technology and would thus bring an end to the productionist metaphysics that had reduced modern Dasein to the world-conquering laborer, which Ernst Jünger described in Der Arbeiter. Eventually, Heidegger would speak approvingly of the same home and hearth that were spurned by the violent creators, but in 1935, his continuing fascination with the martial discourse of Jünger and Spengler led him to favor the rhetoric of hardness, violence, and courage.<sup>12</sup>

In EM, we read that the "concealed history" (EM,99) of the West's decline lies in how the verb sein (to be) is gradually restricted according to four historically definitive Others: becoming, seeming, thinking, and value. For the sake of "future historical Dasein," we are told, the philosopher must face "the decision [Entscheidung] regarding the concealed powers in these distinctions [Unterscheidungen] and bring them back to their own truth." (EM,73-74) To experience these powers, we must break out of the steel net of grammatical forms. (EM,40) Heidegger starts this liberating process by analyzing the grammar of the verb sein, the infinitive whose substantive form, Sein, is rendered as

“Being” in English. Before reviewing that analysis, which Gregory Fried examines in more detail in this anthology, let us recall that it comes before EM’s discussion of the encounter between ancient Greek creators and the overwhelming power of Being. EM intent is to contrast the merely grammatical account of Being with an originary encounter with it. Grammar impoverishes Being by treating it like a being, whereas an originary encounter allows Being to stand erect so that beings may manifest themselves in new ways.

According to Heidegger, by defining the infinitive (modus infinitivus) as the mode of unboundedness and indeterminacy, the Romans failed to understand Greek reflection on their own language, and thus contributed to the process of emptying sein of meaning. The Greek term for modus is enklisis, meaning to incline to the side. Similarly, the Greek word ptôsis, translated as casus (case) in the sense of the inflection of nouns, originally meant “any kind of inflection of the fundamental form (deviation, declension), not only in substantives but also in verbs.” (EM,45) Heidegger describes how a verb “declines” :

The terms ptôsis and enklisis mean to fall, to tip, and to incline oneself. In this lies a dropping-off from a standing-upright and standing-straight. But Greeks understood as Being this standing-there, this coming to stand and taking a stand which stands erected high in itself. Whatever comes to stand in this way becomes constant in itself and thereby freely and from out of itself runs up against the necessity of its limit, peras. [...] The hold which binds according to a limit, the having-itself within which that which stands holds itself, is the Being of beings; it first makes a being into a being in differentiation from a non-being. To come to a stand therefore means: to attain a limit for itself, to de-limit itself. [...] Limit and end are that by which beings first begin to be. (EM,46)

Far from lacking a limit, Being--that which the infinitive “to be” names--refers to that which lets beings be by bringing to them limit, order, rank, and structure. The

ontological decline of the West is related to the decline (declension, sagging, falling over) of Being into a mere grammatical infinitive, that is, into that which cannot establish limits. The Greeks themselves played a role in this process, since they treated language as one being among others, and since they never questioned the meaning of Being even though they experienced it. (EM, 45,46) For the Greeks, Being means “1. standing-in-itself as standing-forth in emergence (physis), 2. but, as such, ‘constant,’ that is, remaining, abiding (ousia).” (EM,48) Physis appropriates human Dasein, endowing it with the logos required to bring physis itself to a stand in what presences. “Beings as such now first come into being.” (EM,47) Once this momentous struggle (polemos) ceased, however, beings became what simply stands around, available to anyone. “That which originally worlds, physis, now degenerates (fällt...herab) into a prototype for reproduction and copying,” that is, into what we call “nature.” (EM,48) Now that Being has deserted beings, their only constancy (Ständigkeit) derives from their being treated as objects by the human subject. (EM,48)

Now returning to his examination of verbal inflection, Heidegger notes that the basic position of the verb is the first person singular present. Generally, enklisis involves the process by which “the word which stands straight inclines to the side,” thereby making something manifest in its number, voice, tense, and person. (EM,50). The Greek term enklisis paremphatikos refers to a deviation that can make manifest, which capacity is in turn grounded “in the fact that a word as such is word to the extent that it lets shine forth (dêloun).” (EM,51) The infinitive constitutes an inflection, deviation, enklisis, in the following sense: Compared with the basic position of the verb, the infinitive is deficient in the sense that it does not manifest number, person, tense, and so on. Hence, the infinitive is enklisis a-paremphatikos, poorly translated as modus infinitivus by Roman grammarians. Heidegger notes that paremphatikos is related to paremphainô, one of whose meanings is defined by Plato as “the medium in which something becoming builds itself up and from which it then stands forth once it has become....” (EM,50) Things become within chôra,

usually translated as “space.” Heidegger asks whether chôra might be understood as “that which separates itself from every particular, that which withdraws, and in this way admits and ‘makes room’ precisely for something else?” (EM,51) This understanding of chôra amounts to Heidegger’s own conception of Being as that which conceals itself precisely so that things can become present: Abwesen (absencing) makes possible Anwesen (presencing). Focusing on Being as constant presence, the Greeks did not inquire into the temporal condition for presencing as such.

In defining the infinitive as enklisis a-paremphatikos, the Greeks meant that it deviated from the capacity for other forms to reveal additional aspects of a verb by inclining away from its basic (first person singular present) position. The Roman translation as modus infinitivus emphasizes the abstract quality of the infinitive, while dropping out the notion of manifesting included in the Greek notion of enklisis. Moreover, grammarians regard the infinitival form as perhaps the latest in the chronological development of a language. As a result, the infinitive “to be” has come to be regarded as an almost complete abstraction and thus as an empty vapor.

Approaching in a very different the status of the Greek infinitive for “to be,” einai, Heidegger argues that standardized grammar derives “from the speech of dialects which originally stand rooted in soil and history.” (EM, 52) Even though in Greek and Latin the modi finiti had become fixed, the infinitives (enklisis a-paremphatikos) tended to retain the peculiarities of their various dialects. Heidegger considers this to indicate “that the infinitive has a preeminent significance in language as a whole” and suggests that the infinitive “names something which lies at the foundation of all inflections of the verb.” (EM,52; my emphasis) In other words, enklisis a-paremphatikos, far from being the abstract latecomer in language, constitutes that which makes possible all the revealing of beings that occurs in the inflections of verbs. The infinitive einai in particular is a-paremphatikos not because it is deficient in manifesting in comparison with other verb forms, but instead because it obliquely reveals something entirely different: Being, not

beings. Ancient Greek interpretations of the nature of language and subsequent Roman translations of them made it impossible to understand the world-opening relation between language and Being. Instead, language was reduced to the status of one thing among others, while Being was regarded as meaningless. The decline of the West, then, occurs because language deviates from its world-historical disclosive power. The self-concealment of Being occurs in such deviation.

### Part Two. The Historical Context for Heidegger's View of the Decline of the West

As one of the first works by Heidegger to be translated into English (1959), EM played an important role in Heidegger's reception in the English-speaking world. Most American readers were unaware that EM's electrifying discussion of the darkening of the Western world was part of a widespread German conversation. EM's account of nihilism struck a chord with 1960s counterculturalists, many of whom were introduced to Heideggerian themes through One-Dimensional Man, written by Heidegger's student, Herbert Marcuse. More recently, Heidegger's bleak view of modernity began arriving in the form of French poststructuralism. Years ago, I myself portrayed Heidegger as a precursor of what is now called the deep ecology movement, which condemns modernity's drive to dominate nature. Only in the late 1980s, after unsettling disclosures about Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism, did I fully understand the extent to which his thought accorded in many respects with the views shared by many cultural conservatives and National Socialists, as Michael Halberstam explains in this collection.

German discussion about cultural despair was heightened by defeat in World War I, which further eroded the leading status of the liberal-progressive view of history propounded by the influential neo-Kantians. Affirming Germany's appropriation of Enlightenment cultural, political, and scientific values, neo-Kantians interpreted history as the gradual development both of more effective ways of controlling nature, and of more enlightened modes of social organization and cultural self-expression. Opposed to the progressive view of history were two groups: those who believed that history had no

direction, and those who believed that history involved a decline from great beginnings. According to the former group of historians, influenced by Herder and other neo-romantics, each historical epoch had to be understood in its own terms, as a unique manifestation of a possible mode of social organization and cultural self-expression. According to the latter, history was a story of decline and fall from the achievements of earlier peoples, especially the Greeks and Romans. By comparison with the cultural flowering of ancient Athens--with its organic web of drama, sculpture, architecture, philosophy, rhetoric, and politics--modern commercial society seemed tawdry and mediocre to many German academics. Heidegger's approach to history has affinities with the view that Western history involves decline from noble origins. Explaining that decline not in terms of either racial or biological degeneration (Entartung), but rather in terms of ontological degeneration (Herabfallung, Fallung), he believed that other approaches to the meaning of history were obstacles to appropriating Germany's heritage through a new encounter with the Being of beings.

The idea that the West is degenerating has a long history, going back at least to Gibbons' famous work, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, which helped to give currency to the notion that European civilization was bound to imitate the collapse of classical Rome. As Arthur Herman explains, even in the heyday of optimists such as Hegel, Marx, and Comte, social critics became concerned that the same civilizing processes that had brought Western civilization to its heights were now conspiring to corrupt it.<sup>13</sup> These critics often maintained that degeneration was the outcome of commercial culture, which removed people from contact both with instinctive forces and with noble ideals. The Swiss historian, Jakob Burckhardt, admired by both Nietzsche and Heidegger, criticized modern mass humanity and democracy for destroying an already decadent European culture. Like many other cultural conservatives, he believed that the French Revolution had led the way to cultural mediocrity by unfettering "all passions and selfishness."<sup>14</sup> From such a debased mass society, so Burckhardt predicted, a military-industrial complex and totalitarian states

would arise. Later on, Paul de Lagarde “saw progress as the Trojan Horse of a soulless bourgeois future. Mechanization, philistinism, socialism, and liberalism were all of a piece: true spiritual health meant escaping from their malign influences.”<sup>15</sup> Although racists spoke openly of the “yellow peril” threatening Western vitality and dominance, even some progressive thinkers believed that people needed to reestablish contact with nature, improve personal hygiene, become more physically fit, and establish a better sense of community, in order to avoid psychological decay, physiological collapse, suicide, alcoholism, crime, and the other symptoms of urban civilization.

Nietzsche offered perhaps the most influential critique of decadent European society. Though admiring Schopenhauer, Nietzsche distinguished between the earlier thinker’s resigned nihilism and his own active nihilism. True, European culture was in dreadful condition and Western man had been reduced to a herd animal, but Nietzsche said “yes!” to the possibility that a healthy instinct for the Will to Power could be recovered. He envisioned a “blond beast” who could annihilate feeble institutions and beliefs, in order to pave the way for the new, vital, powerful, and creative.<sup>16</sup> Many German intellectuals adopted Nietzsche’s Zarathustra as the symbol for rejuvenating soul-inspired Kultur and for overcoming the effects of calculating, commercial, and technological Zivilisation.

Nietzsche’s thought is clearly at work in the writings of two cultural pessimists, Ernst Jünger and Oswald Spengler, each of whom influenced Heidegger. Unlike some conservatives who condemned modern industry, Jünger claimed that the soft, decadent, and unmanly European bourgeoisie was being displaced by der Arbeiter (the Worker), a new type of humanity combining the steely hardness of modern technology with the iron will of a proto-Nietzschean blond beast. Jünger foresaw a powerful new upsurge of Will in the face of Western decrepitude. Even while adopting Jünger’s rhetoric of struggle and hardness, Heidegger called on Germans to submit to the technological Will to Power in order to overcome (überwinden) it, in the sense of “getting over” it.<sup>17</sup>

Having examined elsewhere Heidegger's relation to Jünger, here I explore Heidegger's critical appropriation of Spengler's book, The Decline of the West (Der Untergang des Abendlandes), which was "a great summing-up of a half-century of historical pessimism and cultural discomfort."<sup>18</sup> This book was labeled "the most popular philosophical work" of the interwar era. Some academics extolled it, while others panned it.<sup>19</sup> Spengler was inspired to write his account of the organic rise-and-fall of world cultures because of a storm of national protest that occurred when Germany appeared to back down from a 1911 confrontation in Morocco between France and Germany.<sup>20</sup> Perceiving this event as heralding a "world-historical shift," Spengler concluded that "The European civilization that rational science and the Enlightenment had made, and that France and Britain represented, was breaking apart. Germany may have lost the battle, but it was destined to win the war that was certainly coming, a struggle between cultural life and death, that is, between Germany and the liberal West."<sup>21</sup> Writing between 1914 and 1917, Spengler presupposed that Germany would be victorious in the Great War. The inconvenient fact of Germany's defeat did not discourage him from asserting that Germany was about to ascend into an era of world-dominating Caesars in the final two centuries before the last gasp of Western civilization. Although pessimistic about the long term fate of the West, Spengler was optimistic that a final flowering of power could occur in Germany. Indeed, denying that he was a pessimist, Spengler even said that he preferred speaking not of the West's decline (Untergang), but rather of its completion (Vollendung).<sup>22</sup>

Attacking progressive views of history, Spengler maintained with Nietzsche that world history is an ultimately meaningless, but aesthetically sublime spectacle generated by irrational and insatiable cosmic Will. John Farrenkopf observes that, "For Hegel world history is the triumphant march of the Weltgeist, for Spengler, a student of Hegel's archrival Schopenhauer, it is the march of the Weltwille, the tragic, irrational odyssey of human will towards catastrophe."<sup>23</sup> Spengler claimed that there have been eight great

cultures—Western, Graeco-Roman, Indian, Babylonian, Chinese, Egyptian, Arabian, and Mexican—each of which has displayed a cyclical sequence characterized by the mounting up of and the slackening of creative tension. As Jeffrey Barash points out, for Spengler great “cultures ‘live’ like other organic realities. Like all life-units, they are individually distinct. Each can be characterized as an individual type.... Spengler proposed his vital cultural types as hypostatizations of a metaphysical life-principle making possible the primary forms (Urgestalten) through which cultural reality is constituted.”<sup>24</sup> All civilizations pass through the same sequence of childhood, youth, manhood, and old age, but are otherwise autonomous and thus not influenced cross-culturally. Since human history lacks any overall meaning or purpose, each civilization views things from its own perspective, establishes its own table of values, and thus constitutes a unique type. Each great culture has an Ur-symbol that “governs the style of the whole expression of life. It lies in the form of state, in religious myths and cults, in the ideals of ethics, the forms of painting, music, and poetry, the basic concepts of every science.”<sup>25</sup> Decline sets in as this primal symbol loses its force. Unlike those who regarded the modern West as but a decadent offshoot of ancient Greece and Rome, Spengler maintained that modern culture did not derive from the classical world, but instead is a completely new and demonic manifestation of world-conquering Will.<sup>26</sup>

The alleged incommensurability and perspectivalism of great cultures posed a certain problem for Spengler. Unlike previous cultural interpretators, who were always influenced by their culturally specific standpoint, he claimed that he effected a Copernican revolution in historiography by achieving the objectivity of the natural sciences.<sup>27</sup> Based on his allegedly objective standpoint, he confidently predicted the decline of the West. Spengler, however, did not adequately address two performative contradictions. The first involves his supposing that he could provide a culture-transcending interpretation of all cultures, even though he himself was a member of one particular culture.<sup>28</sup> The second involves his description of his own work as objective, even though he declared that natural

science itself—the model for Western objectivity—has no grounds for making ultimately valid truth claims, but instead is “a working hypothesis” and is “the servant of the technical ‘Will to Power’.”<sup>29</sup>

According to Spengler, it was in the nineteenth century that the West entered into old age, wintertime, and sterility, the final stage of every historical culture. Mummified and parasitical, Western culture had degenerated to a mere civilization, which “clings to the once living roots of culture, which are its own forebears.”<sup>30</sup> In “the metaphysically exhausted soil of the West,” Spengler observed, a vital new philosophy can scarcely take root.<sup>31</sup> Modern civilization has become rigid, petrified, incapable of reconciling humankind and nature, human being and Volk, individual and community.<sup>32</sup> Denying the existence of the sacred, the West experiences the collapse of values and identity, just as other now-extinct cultures did previously. In order to conceal the decline,

Facile philosophies of optimism—Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Marx-sprang up [...], only to be negated by the skeptical pessimism of Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche. The nineteenth century had to face “the cold, hard facts of a late life.... Of great paintings or great music there can no longer be, for Western people, any question.” Spengler does not use the term “degenerate,” but that certainly describes his civilized man.<sup>33</sup>

As Herman points out, the “type” embodied by Western civilization is Faustian, for Western humankind “restlessly pursues knowledge and change. [The West’s] chief product, science, is merely the concretization of the indomitable Western will, which it then projects onto the rest of the world in mechanical, rather than organic, terms.”<sup>34</sup> The time- and space-conquering appetites of the Faustian imperialists are merely “the prelude of a future which is still in store for us.... The expansive tendency is a doom which grips, forces into service, and uses up the late mankind of the world-city stage.”<sup>35</sup> Enslaved to his

own creation, modern industry, modern man sacrifices the globe in his insatiable lust for money and power.<sup>36</sup>

Spengler believed that only the rise of a new Caesarism could break “the dictatorship of money and its political weapon democracy.”<sup>37</sup> Unless Germans sacrificed their own blood by siding with a new Caesar who could overthrow the money-machine, they too “would be dragged into extinction along with the rest of the West.”<sup>38</sup> Seeking to reconcile German nationalism with socialism, he believed that “Together workers, soldiers, engineers, and right-wing intellectuals would team up to crush the international financiers and the mob. They would substitute a ‘dictatorship of organization’ to replace the ‘dictatorship of money’ in postwar Germany.”<sup>39</sup> Rejecting decadent liberal individualism, Spengler believed that “The Prussian tradition of discipline and self-sacrifice could build a modern, unified community of equals, men joined together by obedience, service, and instinct. This ‘true socialism’ would destroy capitalism and Marxism, since both were false and degenerate ideologies of the past.”<sup>40</sup> Important aspects of Spengler’s vision of a “nationalist socialism,” which so influenced future Nazis such as Strasser and Goebbels, were also echoed Jünger’s writings. To transform Germany into “a single totality of state, man, and machine,” Jünger and Spengler alike believed that a fearsome elite must adopt “Roman hardness.”<sup>41</sup> Spengler proclaimed: “We do not need ideologues anymore, we need hardness, we need fearless skepticism, we need a class of socialist master men.... Once again, socialism means power, power, and yet again power.”<sup>42</sup>

Let us now briefly consider Heidegger’s critical appropriation of Spengler’s thought, including his thesis of decline. Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of the decline of the West differed from Spengler’s view, but Heidegger and Spengler had much in common.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, during the disoriented era of 1920s, Karl Barth, Spengler, and Heidegger were generally viewed as offering analogous diagnoses of Western decay.<sup>44</sup> Agreeing with Spengler that history could not be understood as the progressive self-realization of rational Spirit, and that Western technological civilization was nihilistic,

Heidegger nevertheless criticized Spengler for several reasons. First of all, he portrayed Spengler as an inferior popularizer Nietzsche's thought, and worse as a follower of Schopenhauer.<sup>45</sup> Such a dismissive evaluation conceals the extent of Heidegger's debt to Spengler, however, which may even include the concept of technology as Gestell.<sup>46</sup> Heidegger's own critique of Nietzsche, which began in the mid-1930s, may have been prompted in part by misgivings about Spengler's own use of Nietzschean categories. Like Spengler, Heidegger described modern science as being driven by the Will to Power, but he did not regard the Will as an ultimate metaphysical category. Something akin to Spengler's notion of a culture's Ur-symbol is discernible in Heidegger's claim that each epoch of Western history (ancient, medieval, early modern, technological) is governed by a particular mode of Being that organizes all cultural practices and institutions. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," for example, Heidegger described the Greek temple as a work of art that

first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people.<sup>47</sup>

For Heidegger, however, Spengler's concept of Ur-symbol lacked any notion of works of art as poetic events that open up the world in which beings can manifest themselves and thus "be." Still operating within the confines of metaphysical thinking, Spengler tended to treat language as a kind of being, not as the "house of Being."<sup>48</sup>

Heidegger regarded Nietzsche as the last metaphysician, that is, as the last thinker working out the quest to find a foundation or ground for beings. In the grip of the metaphysical naturalism that Heidegger despised, Nietzsche interpreted humankind as a clever animal, driven by the Will to Power to seek world-dominion. Heidegger controversially portrayed Nietzsche's Zarathustra as the apotheosis of modernity's world-conquering subjectivism. Influenced by a Nietzsche-inspired Lebensphilosophie, Spengler

viewed humankind as a symbolic animal, driven by the Will to Power like every other life form. Spengler anticipated Heidegger's view in the 1930s that humankind had become a power-seeking animal. Herman notes that for Spengler,

once the vital force was dead, "all that remains is the struggle for mere power, for animal advantage per se." The post-Western world appears on Spengler's speculative horizon as a frozen, savage landscape, an atavistic struggle for life and death between uprooted nations and classes. "In late civilization even the most convincing...idea is only the mask of purely zoological striving."<sup>49</sup>

Spengler maintained that the source of decline of the West is estrangement of self from its meaning-giving acts, but he did not view the self as truly responsible for those acts. Rather, the self was a function of deterministic cultural categories.<sup>50</sup> It was Heidegger's view that Spengler, not unlike other ideologues of the twentieth century, concealed the disturbing fact that humans must assume some responsibility for forming and sustaining great cultures.<sup>51</sup> Of course, Heidegger himself subscribed to a certain kind of determinism. If Hegel argued for the teleology of Western history, the final actualization of a hidden potential, Heidegger argued for the eschatology of Western history, the eventual exhaustion of possibilities laid out by the Greek encounter with Being.<sup>52</sup> He maintained that a genuinely new beginning was possible precisely at the point of depletion, but only if Dasein encountered Being in a primordial manner. Whereas Spengler regarded the Will to Power as the foundation for all cultures, Heidegger regarded it as the mode of metaphysical understanding characteristic of the near-final phase of Western history, which is governed by the foundationless destiny (Geschick) of Being.

Like Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, not to mention Marx, Spengler regarded philosophy as nothing more than an expression of a particular culture. Heidegger insisted, however, that far from being such an expression, philosophy makes culture itself possible.

According to Barash, Heidegger concluded that Spengler operated according to a kind of inverted Platonism:

Here meaning arises [not from transcendental ideational structures, but instead] in the generative matrix of the historical process, and any possibility of transcendence of the historical is negated. Consciousness does not retain an autonomous base of coherence in the midst of the historical material it analyzes: consciousness, meaning, and value all are determined by the historically evolving cultural soul.<sup>53</sup>

Spengler asserted that Germany could temporarily forestall decline and bring Western history to perfection or fulfillment (Vollendung) by becoming a world-dominating military power. For Heidegger, however, such an idea only demonstrated the extent to which Spengler's thinking was characterized by metaphysics of the Will to Power. Already in 1921-22, Heidegger remarked:

Spengler's basic lack: Philosophy of history without the historical, *lucus a non lucendo*. That Spengler does not understand what he wants shows itself in the fact that he becomes anxious before his own position and now sounds the retreat and weakens everything and pacifies those for whom the decline-perspective—even if merely in the “as if”—has gotten into their bones. It was really not meant so grimly, business [der Betrieb] can peacefully continue (expression of the soul of the time).<sup>54</sup>

From Heidegger's perspective, taking nationalistic pride in world domination was an indication of hubris, since German Dasein would not at all achieve historical greatness in Spengler's industrial Caesarism. Instead, by becoming a warring animal using high tech weapons to annihilate other cultures and to plunder the planet, German Dasein would bring to a dreadful culmination (Vollendung) the nihilistic history of the West.

Spengler believed that by conceiving of the Will to Power at work behind the scenes in all cultures, he could understand their common patterns. For Heidegger, however, the

Will to Power is a uniquely Western phenomenon that reflects ontological degeneracy. In his view, projecting the Will to Power onto non-Western cultures was the height of folly, because only European history was characterized by the history of Being. Whether in fact non-Western cultures began gloriously and then declined was not one of his concerns. In contrast, Spengler spoke of the uniqueness of each great culture, but postulated the Will to Power as the metaphysical foundation shared by each of them. In this respect, at least according to Heidegger, Spengler did not fully appreciate the truly unique and radical character of Western history: that it began as a life-risking response to the groundless presencing of beings. Unfortunately, this original response degenerated into a search for a permanent foundation that would guarantee the security and survival of that culture. In that moment, human Dasein turned away from the risk and insecurity required for truly historical existence. Whereas Spengler sharply differentiated between Apollinian and Faustian culture, Heidegger insisted that the modern West is the ontically powerful, but ontologically impotent dissipation of the destiny articulated by Plato and Aristotle.

For Heidegger, a key indicator of the West's ontological decline is that virtually all beings are disclosed as phenomena that are best comprehended by the methodology of natural science. Spengler's reference to his own methodological "objectivity" reveals his connection with this constricted ontology, despite his insistence that some of his "intuitions" could not be understood adequately in terms of natural science. Heidegger's critique of Spengler about this matter occurred in the context of the methodology dispute (Methodenstreit) that occurred among early twentieth century German historians. Some historians favored explaining human history through natural scientific (naturwissenschaftlich) methodology, whereas others insisted that only mental-spiritual or "humanistic" (geisteswissenschaftlich) methodology was appropriate for interpreting human history. The latter kind of historians refused to treat human history as analogous or reducible to physical, chemical, or biological processes. According to Heidegger, "Spengler is the consequential and sure expression" of the mode of historical

consciousness that views history as a kind of natural science.<sup>55</sup> Barash has argued, however, that Heidegger ignored the terms of the methodological dispute and rejected not just Spengler's approach, but all other efforts to establish history as an independent scientific discipline of any kind. Instead, he insisted that philosophy alone could provide

Heidegger maintained that by treating history as an objective framework that constrains the present, historians disburdened the current generation of its responsibility for encountering Being in a way that would set into place a new historical world. Such an approach to history is the culminating moment of inauthentic historical consciousness.<sup>56</sup> Gripped by metaphysical foundationalism, historians sought a firm ground for historical events, whether it be Hegelian Geist or natural types. Just as later Christians forgot the radical character of early Christian faith and replaced it with the firm foundation of Christendom, so too modern Dasein ignores the extent to which modernity's apparently firm foundations straddle the abyss of finitude. Seeking to rescue his generation from the dead hand of history, Heidegger summoned German Dasein to the responsibility of making history by radically renewing culture.<sup>57</sup> In the early 1920s, he proclaimed that "In our Dasein, we are today unlike every generation before us ... insofar as through ourselves we have an expressly historical consciousness, live in this consciousness, see ourselves in it, with and from it see or await the future."<sup>58</sup> Although deserving to be taken seriously because he depicts so effectively the degenerate Zeitgeist, Spengler's focus on typology and morphology prevented him from gaining access to the authentic problems of the "historical," defined as the ontological conditions that make historical cultures possible.<sup>59</sup>

According to Heidegger, modern Dasein's striving for certainty and control is the late outcome of the Greek tendency to define Being as permanent presence (Wesen, essence), and thereby to occlude the historicity of Being and the temporality of Dasein. Being's increasing self-concealment of its own abysmal character constitutes the "errancy" to which the decline of the West may be attributed. Despite frequently criticizing Plato and Platonism, Heidegger himself drew on the Platonic metaphor of recollection, Erinnerung.<sup>60</sup>

Only by recollecting what has been forgotten, namely, Being as such, can human Dasein enact the authentic repetition (Wiederholung) of the original Greek encounter with Being. Such repetition is impossible for those who seek to represent history as something given in the past, rather than as a heritage that opens up future possibilities.

Insofar as Heidegger believed that a new beginning was possible for the West, he did not consider himself to be a cultural pessimist of Spengler's variety. Indeed, he remarked that the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, and the destruction of the earth had reached such proportions that "such categories as pessimism and optimism have long become laughable." (EM, 29) Although here seeking to separate himself from the run of the mill pessimist, in effect Heidegger implies that such pessimists had no idea how terrible the situation really was. They saw only the symptoms of decline (collapse of values, loss of the sacred, and so on), whereas he identified its ontological source. Nevertheless, he shared with leading cultural pessimists at least two convictions: first, that under the condition of technological nihilism, the future of the West was grim; second, that existing ideologies and institutions were incapable of rescuing the West from that nihilism.

### Part Three: Critical Evaluation

Having personally experienced cultural loss, social dislocation, and environmental destruction, Heidegger regarded technological modernity as the horrendous outcome of a long decline from noble origins. Critiques of modernity as totalizing as Heidegger's, however, fail to distinguish between modernity's dark side and its undeniably positive achievements. The dark side is well known to people living in the twentieth century, but the noble aspect is often insufficiently appreciated. Heidegger ignored it completely.

The nobility of modernity involves its effort to foster individual personal development by emancipating humankind from material deprivation, political authoritarianism, and religious dogmatism. As Kant, Jürgen Habermas, and more recently Ken Wilber have noted, these goals could be achieved only by differentiating among the spheres of science, ethics/politics, and art. These spheres are undifferentiated in premodern

cultures, in which all knowledge must be consistent with the truth claims made by religious authorities who are the basis for the legitimacy of the ruling class. Individual experience, including appreciation of works of art, must also be consistent with the kinds of judgements permitted by governing institutions. The Enlightenment project sought to differentiate among the truth claims made by three spheres, in order that 1) scientific research could occur freely, without being impinged upon by ecclesiastical authority; 2) political decisions and moral judgments could be made on the basis of free rational judgment, rather than on the basis of dogmatic pronouncements of the kind that encouraged religious warfare; 3) individual persons could develop their own modes of subjectivity, including judgments of taste, independently of collective expectations.

Unfortunately, the noble achievement of this differentiation did not long endure.<sup>61</sup> One of the three spheres—scientific and technological knowing--soon began to dominate the other two. In comparison with the truth claims of modern science, whose validity was born out by the extraordinary technological achievements made possible by them, the truth claims of morality, politics, and art became portrayed as merely emotive responses, not as having any truth validity of their own. The scientific/technological mode of knowing was supposed to serve the worthy goals of freeing humanity from material deprivation and pacifying human social relations. Once the status of the moral/political and aesthetic/personal spheres was almost completely eroded, however, science and technology began to serve not only goals consistent with the emancipatory aims of the Enlightenment, but also goals consistent with the striving after power for its own sake. Heidegger concluded, however, that Enlightenment modernity's talk of emancipation and progress was merely a mask for modern humanity's quest for infinite power. This quest makes humankind brute-like, deprived of an ontological ethos that assigns limit, order, and measure to human existence.

The suffering made possible by unbounded science and technology—including industrialized Nazi death camps, nuclear ICBMs, totalitarian social control mechanisms, and

planetary ecological destruction—is enough to make almost anyone suspicious of the Enlightenment’s “progressive” vision of history. Faced with the potentially species-destroying power of technological modernity, a number of people reject modernity’s ideals and institutions, preferring instead to envision a society that reunites what modernity put asunder. Some radical ecologists, for example, seem to call for a return to premodern ways of life, such as that of horticulturalists or gatherer/hunters. Because premodern cultures do not differentiate among the above-mentioned three spheres, such cultures enjoy an internal cohesion that is understandably envied by modern people whose lives are characterized by fragmentation and conflict. Although denying that he wanted Germany to reproduce ancient Greece, Heidegger admired its internal cohesion made possible by a shared ethos. Seeking to dedifferentiate what modernity had set apart, he yearned for a culture-unifying ethos that would come from a new dispensation of Being. Seeking to accomplish de-differentiation in another way, National Socialism generated a totalizing society that achieved unity first by excluding and later by annihilating otherness. That Heidegger never publicly repudiated Nazism and continued to speak of its “inner truth and greatness” when he published EM in 1953, does not mean that he agreed with its genocidal practices, but it does suggest that he favored some form of anti-modern de-differentiation that would supposedly restore Being to its proper role in Western affairs.

Heidegger is often brilliant when it comes to interpreting the work of thinkers such as Aristotle and Kant, but his interpretation of Western philosophy and history has shortcomings. For one thing, his account of Western history inexplicably omits Hebrew, Stoic, neo-Platonic, early medieval, and Renaissance thought.<sup>62</sup> For another, his interpretation of some thinkers, perhaps especially Nietzsche, is flawed by his effort to fit them into the Procrustean bed of the history of Being. Finally, he does not adequately justify his view that the West has declined, but instead presupposes the truth of that view. In some respects, Heidegger was a cultural pessimist. For such pessimists, as Ken Wilber writes,

the spiritual universe is running down. In the actual unfolding of the universe's history, we humans (and all creatures) were once close to Spirit [Being, for Heidegger], one with Spirit, immersed in Spirit, right here on earth. But through a series of separations, dualisms, sins, or contractions, Spirit became less and less available, less and less obvious, less and less present. .... [H]istory itself is the story of spiritual abandonment, with each era becoming darker and more sinister and less spiritual. For premodern cultures, in short, history is devolution.<sup>63</sup>

A pessimistic evaluation of history highlights the faults of the present age, while ignoring those of the past. Hence, Heidegger never mentioned ancient Greece's slavery, nor its portrayal of women as half-human.<sup>64</sup> In some postwar essays, he surrendered his notion that some cultures are closer to the ontological origin than others, but in 1935 he surely believed that the ancient Greeks were closest of all to Being.<sup>65</sup> Heidegger's account of the overarching influence of Being on Western history is so idiosyncratic that it has prevented him from being taken seriously even by those who share his pessimistic view of the future of the West under the regime of metaphysics. Indeed, some critics have accused him to inventing his own private religion. Furthermore, although many philosophers have given language top billing in this century, few can accept his claim that translating Greek philosophical terms into Latin sent the West into a nihilistic tailspin.

Aspects of Heidegger's conception of Being were shaped by his rejection of the Jewish-Christian idea that transcendent Providence plays a central role not only in human history, but in cosmic history as well. His transcendent Being functions somewhat analogously to providence in Western history, but plays no role in the creation or metaphysical origin of beings. If he had developed a theology, it would probably have been close to Schelling's. Nevertheless, Heidegger resisted the claim of German idealism, which was itself influenced by neo-Platonism, that human history is the manifestation of Spirit in time, whereas nature is the manifestation of Spirit in space. Informed by contemporary

cosmology, a number of thinkers are currently trying to integrate scientific, historical, and spiritual understanding by developing a post-Hegelian, evolutionary narrative of Divine involution, in the form of the sudden emergence of matter-energy (Big Bang), and evolution, in the form of the evolved carbon-based life that enables the Divine to recognize itself.<sup>66</sup> Heidegger would not have countenanced such a reconciliation, in part because of his suspicion of science, which for him was largely equivalent to positivism. Such a reconciliation is not impossible, however, for those willing to regard modernity as an important, but by no means the final step in the progressive process through which humankind strives to put into practice the freedom promised by Spirit.<sup>67</sup> Defining that process, however, must be left to another essay.

---

<sup>1</sup> “EM” plus number refer to pages in the Niemeyer edition of Martin Heidegger’s Einführung in die Metaphysik, as indicated in the text of Gregory Fried and Richard Polt’s new translation of that work. For consistency’s sake, “EM” also refers to the translation, Introduction to Metaphysics.

My thanks to Gregory Fried and Richard Polt for their many suggestions, which improved this essay. Thanks also to David Pettigrew, who offered helpful criticisms of this essay, when it was presented at the Heidegger Conference at DePaul University on April 23, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> See Michael E. Zimmerman, Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> The literature on Heidegger's Nazi involvement is voluminous. An important statement by Heidegger himself, "The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts," is translated in Günther Neske and Emil Kettering, ed., Martin Heidegger and National Socialism (New York: Paragon House, 1990). Secondary literature includes Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis, eds., The Heidegger Case (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Richard Wolin, ed., The Heidegger Controversy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity; James F. Ward, Heidegger's Political Thinking (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Julian Young, Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) See also Hugo Ott, Martin Heidegger: A Political Life, trans. Allan Blenden (New York: Basic Books, 1993), and Rüdiger Safranski, Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> In Reconstructing America: The Symbol of America in Modern Thought (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), James W. Ceaser describes how many conservative Europeans--including Heidegger--scorned America as a degenerate society, ruled by

---

technocrats and motivated by money lust. See Richard Wolin's review, "The Anti-American Revolution," in The New Republic, August 17 & 24, 1998, 35-41.

<sup>5</sup> Had he chosen to do so, the postwar Heidegger could have said that this passage helps to explain the demonic character of the Holocaust, in which Jews and other peoples were treated like industrial wastes. But in so saying, he would have been expected to address other aspects of the Holocaust, including its specifically German dimensions. This, unfortunately, he never did. See Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, eds., Heidegger and the Holocaust (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> It is not clear whether Heidegger meant to use the mirror metaphor as a way of describing Dasein's capacity for understanding Being. If he did so intend, however, the mirror metaphor may be inconsistent with his critique of representationalism. Discussion of this complex topic must await another opportunity.

<sup>7</sup> For Heidegger's discussion of the superficiality of the "symptoms" of decay, see The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 162-163.

<sup>8</sup> See Michael E. Zimmerman, Eclipse of the Self: The Development of Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> See Martin Heidegger, Vom Wesen der Wahrheit : zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet, ed. Hermann Mörchen, GA 34 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988). On this topic, see Michael E. Zimmerman, "Ontical Craving vs. Ontological Desire," in From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire, ed. Babette Babich (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995), 503-525.

<sup>10</sup> On the moods of boredom and horror, see Heidegger, The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, 142-144, 160-162, Vom Wesen der Wahrheit, 195-197, 207, and Grundfragen der Philosophie, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, GA 45 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1984), 197.

---

<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein", ed. Suzanne Ziegler, GA 39, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1980), 141.

<sup>12</sup> See Kathleen Wright, "Heidegger's Hölderlin and The Mo(u)rning of History," Philosophy Today, 37 (Winter, 1993), 423-435. See John D. Caputo, Demythologizing Heidegger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), for a good account of Heidegger's attitude of manly hardness in the 1930s.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History (New York: The Free Press, 1997). I am indebted to this important and informative book.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in ibid., 84.

<sup>15</sup> Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History, 69.

<sup>16</sup> On the "blond beast," see Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, trans. Walter Kaufmann in (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), first essay, section 11, p. 476. Kaufmann's footnote to this disturbing term warns that Nietzsche himself did not envision that right-wing ideologues would eventually use his image of the "blond beast" in connection with their anti-Semitic ideology.

<sup>17</sup> See Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity.

<sup>18</sup> Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History, 238. Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, two volumes, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Pauen, Pessimismus: Geschichtsphilosophie, Metaphysik und Moderne von Nietzsche bis Spengler (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 181.

<sup>20</sup> Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History, 234.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Pauen, Pessimismus, 183.

<sup>23</sup> John Farrenkopf, "The Transformation of Spengler's Philosophy of World History," Journal of the History of Ideas, 52, No. 3 (July-September, 1991), 463-485; quotation is from 477.

---

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Andrew Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1988), 151. To this excellent book, I am greatly indebted.

<sup>25</sup> Pauen, Pessimismus, 191.

<sup>26</sup> Farrenkopf, "The Transformation of Spengler's...", 479.

<sup>27</sup> Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning, 55.

<sup>28</sup> See ibid., 163, note 52.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in John Farrenkopf, "Hegel, Spengler, and the Enigma of World History," Clio, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Summer, 1990), 331-344; citation is from 336. On Spengler's performative contradiction, see ibid., 337.

<sup>30</sup> Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History, 239.

<sup>31</sup> Spengler, The Decline of the West, Vol. I, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History, 239.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>35</sup> Spengler, cited by Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History, 240.

<sup>36</sup> Spengler, The Decline of the West, Vol. II, 504-505.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 506.

<sup>38</sup> Spengler, The Decline of the West, 507; Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History, 240.

<sup>39</sup> Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History, 245.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>41</sup> Pauen, Pessimismus, 182.

<sup>42</sup> As cited in Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History, 249.

<sup>43</sup> For examples of Heidegger on Spengler, Heidegger, Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität), GA 63, ed. Käte Bröker-Oltmanns (Frankfurt am Main: Vittoria Klostermann, 1988), 39, 55-57; Phaenomenologie der Anschauung und des Ausdrucks, GA 59, summer

---

semester lectures, 1920, ed. Claudius Strube (Klostermann, 1993), 16ff;

Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles, ed. Walter Bröcker and Käte-Bröcker-Oltmanns, GA 61 (Klostermann, 1985), 26-74-75; Der Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, GA 29-30, (Klostermann, 1983), 105-107; Besinnung, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Klostermann, 1997), 27-28. Concerning Spengler's influence on Heidegger, see Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity, 17, 26-31.

<sup>44</sup> See Barash, , Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning, 147.

<sup>45</sup> Heidegger, Holzwege (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972), 301; Nietzsche, I (Günther Neske: Pfullingen, 1961), 360.

<sup>46</sup> See Michael Pauen, Pessimismus, 188.

<sup>47</sup> Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 42.

<sup>48</sup> On the notion of language as the "house of Being," see Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism'," trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in Pathways, ed. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 239.

<sup>49</sup> Herman, The Idea of Decline in Western History, 241.

<sup>50</sup> Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning, 157.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> On the eschatology of Being, see John D. Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 153-186, Christopher Fynsk, Heidegger: Thought and Historicity (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1986), and Reiner Schürmann, Heidegger on Being and Acting (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>53</sup> Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning, 157.

<sup>54</sup> Heidegger, Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles, 74.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, Ontologie, 56.

- 
- <sup>57</sup> Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning, 158-159
- <sup>58</sup> Heidegger, Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles, 73-74.
- <sup>59</sup> Heidegger, Phänomenological Interpretation zu Aristoteles, 74.
- <sup>60</sup> Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning, 220, 253-254.
- <sup>61</sup> Ken Wilber, Sex, Ecology, Spirituality (Boston: Shambhala, 1995); Wilber, A Brief History of Everything (Boston: Shambhala, 1996).
- <sup>62</sup> Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning, 250.
- <sup>63</sup> Ken Wilber, The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion (New York: Random House, 1998), 103.
- <sup>64</sup> On this point, see Caputo, Demythologizing Heidegger, *passim*.
- <sup>65</sup> In Demythologizing Heidegger, 97, Caputo cites Der Satz vom Grund (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1957) as abandoning the search for origin.
- <sup>66</sup> See Wilber, Sex, Ecology, Spirituality; Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, The Universe Story (HarperSan Francisco, 1992); Paul Davies, The Mind of God (New York: Touchstone, 1992).
- <sup>67</sup> For a brilliant defense of Hegel against his postmodern detractors, see Cyril O'Regan, The Heterodox Hegel (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).