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## Language and the Social Roots of Conscience: Heidegger's Less Traveled Path

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**Abstract.** This paper develops a new interpretation of Heidegger's concept of conscience in order to show to what extent his thought establishes the possibility of civil disobedience. The origin of conscience lies in the self's appropriation of language as inviting a reciprocal response of the other (person). By developing the social dimension of dialogue, it is shown that conscience reveals the self in its capacity for dissent, free speech, and civil disobedience. By developing the social roots of conscience, a completely new light is cast on the political implications of Heidegger's thought.

Heidegger's description of the call of conscience often teeters on the solipsistic brink of Dasein's plea from itself to itself to become authentic. Despite appearances to the contrary, does his hermeneutics still allow for the possibility of a social conscience? Or in a way epitomized by his predecessor, Hegel, does Heidegger at least preserve the tension between the claim of social membership on the one hand and the autonomy of the individual choice on the other? The answers to these questions not only strike at the heart of two different portraits of human experience, but also have implications for the ethical and political viability of Heidegger's thought. The goal of this paper is to show that Heidegger can only unravel the modern conflict between self and society by depicting language as a dialogue (*Zwiesprache*) among worldly participants. While Heidegger's influence on contemporary social and political theory may be minimal, I intend to unfold the significance of his thought for these areas. Indeed, he provides a key for examining social and political structures according to the same principles of interpretation by which members of a culture address the viability of their own institutions. Thus, Heidegger directs the inquirer to the forefront of historical change where a theoretical rationality assumes the *presuppositions* for organizing a *polis*: free speech, dissent, and social activism.

The concern for politics appears far more tenuous in Heidegger's case than Hegel's, however, because the latter argues that human beings discover their identity within a social context, e.g., *Sittlichkeit*. My aim is not to compare these two thinkers. Rather, their differences can offer guidelines

for uncovering an adjacent concern for human society otherwise hidden in Heidegger's thought, What if Dasein's power to speak and its power to act, if not derived from a common source, were at least correlative? If this were the case, then the attunement (*Stimmung*) which disposes the self to act in a situation would also enable it to participate in dialogue with others. Heidegger's emphasis on Dasein's uniqueness or "authenticity" does not preclude social interaction, but instead permits it by amplifying the self's disclosive nature, namely, as oriented toward the *other* through the openness of dialogue.

As a litmus test of demonstration, we must show how the authentic self's mode of social engagement lies in promoting reform through dissent, rather than in upholding the status quo through conformity. I will begin by identifying the "shared" character of discourse as predicated on the need to "listen." Then I will establish how the call of conscience implies a mode of authentic speech, which culminates in the reciprocity of dialogue rather than in conformity to convention. Finally, I will illustrate how such a dialogue seeks the greatest emancipation among its participants, and permits the kinds of dissent in both speech and action often ascribed to civil disobedience. By embarking along this untrodden path, I will situate Heidegger's thought within the concrete domain of human *praxis*, in a way which may not always be expressed in his texts or in his political allegiance of 1933.

## 1. The Question of Dialogue

Ironically, Heidegger's inquiry may be so completely shaped by dialogue as to prevent it (dialogue) from surfacing as an explicit motif in its own right. In one sense, the relation between being and thought, in which the former advances its claim and the latter provides a response, assumes a dialogical form. And we cannot overlook how Heidegger (1969a: 44–56) appropriates the tradition by engaging his predecessors and eliciting what remains "unsaid" in their philosophies through a "thoughtful conversation" (*denkendes Gespräch*). Yet the *fact* that we can observe Heidegger in a given practice, and even invoke it as we *engage* him, does not preclude our seeking the root of that possibility in his phenomenology. On the contrary, the more pressing issue is *which* of the predecessors Heidegger engages in dialogue provides the precedent for that practice and safeguards it as a future possibility for phenomenology. We have already spoken of Hegel who implemented dialectic as a form of dialogue. But what if there were another thinker who, if not of greater stature than Hegel, could still serve as much as a prelude to Hegel's project as Heidegger's? Given Heidegger's predilection for the pre-Socratics, Heraclitus may provide the most noteworthy example.

According to Heidegger (1959: 45–49), Heraclitus recognized that “harmony” is not homogenous oneness, but rather the setting forth (*Auseinandersetzung*) and balancing of opposition. Correlatively, the greatness of thought lies in its provocative questions and not in simplified solutions which many can applaud. The questions cannot be presented with an assurance which privileges any thinker. Indeed, the landscape of *Seinsfrage* must be shaped by contrasting angles of approach, which in turn encourage altercation among thinkers at the crossroads of these various paths. If we were to give an image for the topography of dialogue, it would be how a thinker traverses these crossroads and remains open to disputes with his/her predecessors. The allegiance that Heidegger seeks with various thinkers becomes a “setting apart” which opens up new possibilities for exploration, including ones that have remained fallow throughout the tradition. In the case where there are specific participants in a dispute, the key to their exchange lies in how the challenge posed by one provides the condition for the other’s coming into his/her own. We are seeking a factual corollary for this dynamic within Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of Dasein.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962: 238) defines care as the “structural totality of Dasein.” All the powers ascribed to Dasein issue from care, or are discharged among its possibilities – including willing, valuing, and judging. But is dialogue to be identified as merely one power among others which is interwoven into the care-structure? Or do we instead look to the momentum which sustains Dasein’s own attempt at self-interrogation? In the latter case, we are referring to the tension whereby Dasein both constitutes the “there” of disclosure and yet as a being (*ein seinendes*) requires that openness in order to encounter itself. Given this tension, the self cannot seize hold of its identity as the pure presence of the *cogito*, but must instead develop its uniqueness in heeding what is most other. The otherness re-orientes Dasein’s identity toward wider limits, turning the self away from its narcissistic closeness and re-establishing the distance necessary for self-disclosure.

Dasein’s path to self-understanding, then, is not one of a geometrical progression toward its goal, but a circular movement along the widest possible arc. Heidegger coins the terms “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*) to describe the self’s deliverance over to its potentiality, to its “can be” (*Seinkönnen*) in a way which both yields the potency of existence and yet precludes any simple mastery of it. However this “de-centering” occurs, the self experiences the unsettling of its existence, the vertigo of anxiety. Heidegger describes the phenomenal overtones of anxiety in great detail. For brevity’s sake, we can say that anxiety outlines the trajectory of understanding, bringing it forth within its widest context and constellating the most diffuse of all meaningful patterns. These meanings are not given uniformly. Instead, they are interwo-

ven into a tapestry of presuppositions, so that Dasein unravels the levels of what it *already* understands in increasing detail, intricacy, and depth. This preunderstanding of human existence brings to fruition its self-implicatory potential. That is, the self's vicissitudes, quandaries, and dilemmas – including death – can stand for or signify Dasein's being as care, its panorama of possibilities.

In occupying the world as a nexus of signifying relations, Dasein acquires the capacity for discourse (*Rede*). Along with understanding and dispositions, discourse constitutes the third component of disclosedness. As this third element, discourse epitomizes the self's inability to possess its disclosive power. In speaking, Dasein is most vulnerable to the frailties of its thrownness, for example, when groping to find the right word, or dumbfounded before what escapes understanding, or even speechless before a mystery. Thus discourse reaches into the deepest recesses of care in order to embody through words the elemental flow and rhythm of existence. In accord with Dasein's attunement, the power to speak arises at the threshold of intelligibility. Through its discreteness, language (*Sprache*) constellates the permutations of care which provide a forum whereby "Dasein can put itself into words" according to the most primitive of all designations, "that for the sake of" (Heidegger, 1962: 362).

As a disclosive power, language provides the vocabulary to express the ineluctable drama of existence, the subtleties, twists of phrase, and nuances to articulate the meaning of care *as* finite. Language tests its own limits in order to express the following paradoxes: the individual's giving him/herself up to death to experience the vitality of life, Dasein's relinquishing the spoils of worldly conquest to win itself, or committing self-sacrifice to receive the bounty of love. The conveyance of care from the depths of its "as structure" defies univocity in order to capture manifold determinations of existence, the modalities of self-understanding. The primitive gesture or indicator "that-for-the-sake-of" provides the pre-conceptual pattern to index all the determinations of existence. In this way, Dasein's potential for speech can be transcribed within the widest context of all, the world (Kisiel, 1993: 7–12). In arising equiprimordially with world, language constitutes the self-gathering, the *logos* through which each of us receives his/her endowment as a speaker, interlocutor, and conversationalist.

According to Heidegger (1969b: 87), we should not construe the designation "that for the sake of" in narrowly egotistical terms. The true key lies in the way that the designation of Dasein's being admits a further transposing of the "as structure" of meaning. Thus the structure of care can be designated in a double sense as including as much the alterity of the other as the reflexive allusion to self. Language provides the spring to unfold Dasein's identity, but

always in such a manner that the path to self-understanding intersects with the other. Given its thrownness into language, Dasein's search for its identity becomes meaningful only out of the circuit of its relationships, and, conversely, any commerce with others can prove either beneficial or detrimental to the self.

We are beginning to see why a discussion of solicitude is so crucial, given Heidegger's claim that Dasein is always being-with-others. But this claim becomes important only insofar as the other takes its place within the domain which the self already occupies as a speaker. Dasein's power to speak can unfold in many ways. Does dialogue belong to its linguistic repertoire? We must first recognize that language is the harbinger of distance, which yields the path of Dasein's self-comportment as much as its comportment toward the other. This distance emerges with the abeyance of Dasein's linguistic power, its receding in favor of what prefigures all responses, i.e., listening. The doubling (*Zwiewalt*) of the power of discourse, in which care transposes itself in the opposite place of the listener as well as the speaker, makes room for authentic speech. Such authentic speech includes the sharing which occurs through a discourse involving Dasein's co-disclosure with others. "In discourse being with becomes 'explicitly' *shared*" (Heidegger, 1962: 87).

The key to this sharing, however, is the way in which the self gives weight to hearing over speaking. "Hearing is constitutive for discourse. . . . Listening to . . . is Dasein's existential way of being-open as being-with for others. Indeed, hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-being – as in hearing the voice of a friend whom Dasein carries with it" (Heidegger, 1962: 206). Insofar as hearing assumes this constitutive role, we find the inner possibility for Dasein's becoming a participant in dialogue, for recognizing a "thou." Hearing first disposes Dasein to reciprocate, that is, to accommodate the opposite stance of the other without succumbing to the "one-sidedness" of opinion. As Heidegger (1992: 403–406) indicates in his lectures on Plato's *Sophist*, to participate in dialogue is not to exchange different viewpoints. Rather, dialogue is a reciprocal engagement in the truth by which both parties let something be seen. The participants avoid "one-sidedness" by attending to the issue itself, by "listening for" what governs the dialogue (Polt, 1996: 65–76). We can clarify this mode of attunement only by considering the social relevance of human being's most intimate form of self-solicitation, the call of conscience (*Ruf des Gewissens*).

## 2. Conscience and Social Dissent

Heidegger's account of conscience harbors a nagging problem. The call of conscience is radically individuating. It makes its appeal by circumventing Dasein's social involvements and yet returns the self to a stance where it first becomes disposed to act in the situation – including in response to its obligation toward others. Dasein's ownmost possibilities, e.g., death, seem to be reserved exclusively to its selfhood so as to minimize the contribution which social interaction makes in shaping human identity. This is a quandary which Hegel (1977: 36–39) avoids by associating distinctness/difference with the appearance of the universal rather than with abstract particularity. He maintains that the self's identity develops through its membership in society, which in turn becomes concrete by expressing the universal, e.g., the determination of laws and customs. In its self-certainty, conscience embodies a *universal form of consciousness* (Hegel, 1977: 394–396). The universality of conscience becomes explicit in the way that language enables the self to interact in a social context, to belong to a culture or nation (Dahlstrom, 1993: 185–192). As Heidegger (1988a: 64) suggests in his 1930/1931 lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel points to the “essence of language as that which constitutes the existence of the self as self.”

Heidegger, however, does not wish to postulate Spirit as the third term to mediate between self and society, as well as to assemble the various contexts in which human identity can be articulated and brought to self-consciousness, e.g., morality, culture, and religion. Heidegger's hermeneutics of the non-presence of Dasein in its factual life, and Hegel's dialectic of the Absolute's self-presence, imply contrary points of departure. Indeed, in his lectures from 1923, Heidegger (1988b: 42) suggests that the attempt to compare hermeneutics and dialectic amounts to mixing “fire and water.” But while the prospect of social cooperation remains a strong suit of Hegel's thought, to seek a parallel in Heidegger's description of authentic selfhood appears problematic at best (McCumber, 1984: 45–52). Yet no matter how either thinker maps the social landscape, language becomes a crucial factor in determining the dynamics of social membership.

Heidegger examines language according to the clues provided by the *logos* as a component of phenomenology, the letting be seen of that which shows itself. The *logos* defers in favor of what shows itself – enduring the tension of otherness – in order to yield the limits for determinateness and meaning essential for discourse. By contrast, dialectic appeals to a pre-established conceptual pattern so as to promote an arche-typical arrangement of differences. The limits of language emerge in accord with the comprehensive grounding assumption of the Absolute. Given its finitude, however, Dasein lacks the benefit of such a ground to establish its relation to language. The determina-

tion of meaning must spring from another source, namely, as the self reaches into the abyss of its finitude and experiences the polarity of presence/absence. According to Heidegger, care undergoes such doubling, insofar as Dasein can assume a dual relation toward language as both listener and speaker. Authentic discourse cultivates Dasein's capacity for self-disclosure by deferring its desire to speak in favor of the need to listen.

By contrast, discourse assumes a derivative form insofar as it decouples the meaning of words from the disclosure which they facilitate, and accepts the convenience of not having to appropriate what is said. Inauthentic speech, which epitomizes Dasein's tendency to take what is said at face value, serves the interests of the "they-self" as the embodiment of convention. But what is convention and how does its development stand in contrast to authentic disclosure? In simplest terms, convention equals the sedimentation of tradition. Dasein faces the gravest danger that its mode of speech may contribute to this sedimentation. But how is it possible for language to speak beyond the constraints of tradition without becoming detached from the wealth of cultural experience, e.g., customs? Is not the familiarity of custom the key to communicating on a universal level, that is, according to "forms of life" which are conventional in the sense which Wittgenstein recognized?

From Heidegger's perspective, however, authentic speech must not serve convention as much as open up new horizons of meaning. Words cannot simply be a mirror of tradition, the haven of popular trends. Rather, language must be a vessel to transmit tradition (*Überlieferung*), to recover its hidden possibilities and safeguard their re-emergence in the future. The new becomes what is most ancient (Heidegger, 1969b: 41). By co-responding to language, we contribute to the birth of new meaning and to restoring the power of words (Heidegger, 1962: 262). But how is this co-responding possible? Existentially, we must find an example in Dasein's readiness to counter the banality of idle chatter and seek guidance from an attunement prior to the spoken word. For Heidegger, the call of conscience constitutes such an example. Conscience calls Dasein back from its falling in the "they." Language's development as a call, however, presupposes the precise tonality which disposes Dasein to listen (Hodge, 1995: 14–17). The power to listen prepares the self to respond to the most pressing demands of its existence and to take over its own possibilities. Thus conscience displaces any pretence of self-control, and allows Dasein to receive guidance in proportion with its openness. In heeding the call of conscience, Dasein testifies to its readiness to reciprocate for the possibilities granted to it as care. Such reciprocation allows for many of the empathetic responses which Max Scheler envisioned.

As authentic, Dasein does not receive the abundance of care gratuitously, but instead exercises stewardship over its existence. We cannot attribute to



Dasein an intrinsic regard for law, nor can we brand it as lawless. Dasein can act lawfully when it overcomes its “lostness” in the they-self and seeks an alternative guidance to replace its conformity to convention. Mechanical obedience to law can never yield the ethical foresight by which the self cultivates the possibilities most in keeping with its task of stewardship. The law must be as dynamic as the development of Dasein’s potential to be a self, just as Dasein must be receptive to guidance in order to throw off the shackles of the “they” and become an individual. Dasein’s historical sojourn shapes the dynamism of law.

The law receives its vitality by summoning the power that enables the self to uphold “that for the sake of” which it exists. The impetus for holding forth “that for the sake of,” and of allowing it to be a primary designation for Dasein’s self-understanding, is freedom. Thus freedom emerges as the necessary companion of law, and the latter can exert its authority only through the former’s historical emergence in Dasein. In his 1930 lectures on Kant, Heidegger (1982: 133–135) suggests that human beings acquire freedom less as a possession and more as a power entrusted to them. As such, human beings experience freedom on many different levels, and can be as much its protector as its benefactor. As the dual protector/benefactor, the self chooses out of the context of its being with others. Though Heidegger never invokes a dialectic of self and society, he does suggest that freedom has an “emancipatory” character which unfolds as others participate in its benefits. This unique “economy” of freedom – whose power increases only through its transmission – enables Dasein to cultivate a heritage which is enriched as much by the diversity of its membership as by an exclusive destiny (Heidegger, 1982: 296). What still remains problematic is how the self through its endowment with language can foster this diversity, that is, cultivate a heritage committed to heeding *many voices* rather than a single, authoritarian one (Watson, 1996: 88–92). As Gadamer (1989: 280–285) recognizes, tradition remains alive only by speaking through a plurality of voices (*Stimmen*).

But while bound to a social context, the self’s project of “that for the sake of” can never be confined to convention. Can Dasein become an advocate of social change, or administer its freedom to permit a “social conscience?” This is a difficult question to answer, particularly given the ambivalence which surrounds the example of Heidegger’s own political choices in 1933 (Sluga, 1993: 22–28). At the very least, we can suggest that the voice of conscience places the self in the crucible of historical conflict, where its freedom can serve the stewardship of care and discount the security of the status quo. In occupying the threshold of history’s development, the self takes up the project of “that for the sake of,” and forsakes the complacent niche of paternalism. Such paternalism can never appreciate the reverence toward the

other as disclosed in solicitude. "Emancipatory solicitude" or "care-giving" restores to the other the power to choose, and promotes a "loyalty" to existence (Birmingham, 1990: 50–53).

Through solicitude Dasein appropriates the care with which it is both endowed and entrusted. Because predicated on freedom, solicitude does not simply promote the interests of those who exist in the social mainstream. As solicitous, the self establishes a precedent of social change in order to permit the empowerment of its members – enabling the other to be other. As Kant realized, civil provisions (legality) do not always coincide with the ideals of justice (morality). In its care-taking endeavor, an individual acts to honor differences among members of society, in such a way that a greater social harmony can be achieved only at the expense of overturning existing social mandates. Such apparent dis-obedience does not defy law out of arrogant disrespect, but instead seeks a sterner commitment of responsibility (i.e., conscience) in order to cultivate an alternative vision of the good.

Among contemporary political theorists, John Rawls (1993: 418) provides one of the clearest statements of civil disobedience: "Civil disobedience is a political act in the sense that it is an act justified by moral principles which define a conception of civil society and the public good." Given the terms of a "social contract," Rawls assumes the "minority's power to participate in the political process," when it is precisely the banishment of its concerns from mainstream social policy which requires dissent in the first place. Hence we must still ask: How does civil disobedience uphold the claim of marginalized factions of society, of the other *as such*, in order to promote greater diversity in the *polis* rather than assimilation to a single view? How do those who practice dissent speak for the welfare of the entire community in a way disguised to the majority interest (Horton, 1992: 162)?

To be sure, the term "civil disobedience" sound like an anomaly when spoken in a Heideggerian context. And yet there are at least minimal overtone in Heidegger's thinking which would sustain the *spirit* of that movement, even if lacking some of its egalitarian elements – as found in Socrates and Henry David Thoreau, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. (King, 1993: 538).<sup>1</sup> In civil disobedience, saying and doing provide complementary paths along which the self can appropriate its freedom, namely, through the exercise of free speech (protest) and dissent (nonviolent demonstration). What still remains questionable, however, is the link between the process of care-giving and the power to heal where suffering prevails (Ricoeur, 1992: 314–315). Indeed, only by reaching into the depths of human suffering can we appreciate human being's potential to enact social change.

In becoming open to the other as an emissary of change, the self discloses the historical possibility of social reform. In overthrowing the constraints

of the status quo, human beings do not neglect tradition, but, on the contrary, recover other possibilities dormant within it which implicate a broader development of freedom. For example, emissaries of political change strive to allow those who have been excluded from the decision-making process to participate in developing social policies. For those who engage in civil disobedience, their words and actions call attention to the ideals which their mainstream opponents take for granted in preserving the status quo. As Heidegger (1977: 138-139) points out, the safeguarding of language's disclosive power, versus its degeneration into a merely rhetorical device to manipulate opinion (sophistry), provides the precondition for a free spirit like Socrates to become a "gadfly on the neck of society."

Quite often those who engage in social dissent allow their own *oppression* to signify the opposite possibility of an emancipation otherwise "forgotten" by the powers that be. The people who are socially dissident cultivate the dynamism of freedom, namely, that the *presence* of social conformity presupposes the non-presence of social conformity presupposes the non-presence of its opposite. Freedom becomes concrete or "factual" in relation to a distinctive place (*topos*), which the self "founds" by wrestling with the large conflict of revealing-concealing (Heidegger, 1959b: 169-174). In order to enact profound social and historical change, an individual must be thrown into that crisis which extends a new constellation of possibilities for such change to occur. Heidegger points to the site of the political (*polis*) as evolving at the interface of humanity's emergence into history and its deliverance over to language as the power to express one's heritage.

In the period of *Being and Time*, Heidegger supplies little insight into how to appreciate the plurality of society's membership, the ability to engage its disenfranchised factions. Indeed, his approach to history develops from an encompassing ontological question which never accents the full cultural spectrum of humanity's historical development, as Dilthey's hermeneutics does. While his hermeneutics implies the heterogeneity of human development, Heidegger does not consider how being's disclosure can unfold in relation to the diversity of cultural responses and possibilities for choice. Instead, freedom become an extension of the possibilities for being's historical disclosure, while humanity receives its decision-making power by participating in the process of unconcealment (Haar, 1992: 163-170). Do freedom and truth completely bound each other, or does the former permit a further allocation of limits in which the individual cultivates his/her power to anticipate social change? Does Heidegger properly understand the link between thought and action? We must address these questions in order to locate the call of conscience within a social context of dialogue, that is, find in the predisposition to "listen" a forum to solicit many voices.

### 3. Free Speech, Dialogue and Social Activism

The ambivalent case of Heidegger's own political involvement with fascism gives us occasion to pause before the enigmatic relation of theory and praxis. Hindsight suggests the danger of bypassing democratic safeguards, which prevent unscrupulous leaders from monopolizing power for their own benefit. To be sure, Heidegger (1959b: 45) did not advocate Western democracy, and in fact abhorred its capitalistic motives. Yet his own philosophy harbors a potential for self-criticism as the mandate for thought to appropriate its *possibilities* from the factual, historical circumstances from which they spring. Indeed, the thrust of Heidegger's inquiry is to re-establish the tension between thinking and acting whereby: 1) thought can provide a critical counterpoint to the *one-sidedness* of political processes and 2) the unfolding of contradictions within the social domain can serve as a deterrent to the presumptuous tendency of thought to superimpose its own solutions.

Heidegger may not have always succeeded in interweaving both of these elements into his hermeneutic strategy, or of distinguishing them as distinct axes of his investigation. Indeed, only when thought preserves its tension with its practical counterpart, and thereby facilitates the larger demand for appropriation, can the aletheia-process in which the thinker participates yield the guidance needed to shape political decision-making. In his critique of Hegel's speculative philosophy, perhaps Adorno (1993: 68–72) most aptly exposes the dangerous tendency in *idealism* to deify thought and to elevate the *telos* of the Absolute over the specific *pathos* of the human condition. While also criticizing teleology in Hegel's sense, Heidegger nevertheless retains a trace of eschatology in his historical approach which may not always uphold the practically bound, factually contextualized demand of appropriation (Schmidt, 1988: 182–184). To be sure, Adorno's negative dialectics and Heidegger's fundamental ontology may stand at odds with each other. Yet Heidegger's divergence from either negative or speculative dialectic only underscores his need to recast history on an equally dynamic plane as does Hegel, although with a greater openness to the dilemmas posed by contemporary society, e.g., from the oppression of minorities to the exploitation of nature.

Heidegger upholds the possibility of a world-historical "hero" who can bear all the contradictions of his/her time and bring humanity to a new threshold of development. Both Hegel and Schelling, who wrote extensively on the nature of human freedom, include similar scenarios in their philosophies (Heidegger, 1985: 145–157). But no matter how significant the hero's accomplishments may be, the need still arises to appropriate that legacy in the broadest way among individuals rather than blindly accepting the rhetoric of a specific leader. As Heidegger (1962: 437) remarks in *Being and Time*, Dasein must face the challenge of "choosing its hero." And we might add, no matter

how charismatic that hero may be, each of us must make that choice very carefully. Only then do we participate in the freedom which a leader upholds, and safeguard its allocation across society as a whole – a form of “distributive justice.” In this way, the self becomes a participant in the political process rather than a powerless spectator.

According to Heidegger, history defines the context in which human beings can cultivate their self-identity in the distinct vocation of appropriating freedom, and thereby co-historize as participants in the decision-making process (Sherover, 1989: 17–23). The self does not nurture freedom as an individual possession, but instead receives its power in the course of its “co-disclosure” of others (Heidegger, 1962: 438). Such disclosure entails a climate of sharing, a co-disposition, in which the self forsakes its reclusive shell and co-responds with concerns voiced by the other. In its mode of listening, the self welcomes an adversarial form of exchange, and endures the conflict inherent in eliciting a wider expanse of disclosure. The possibility of “dissent” from authority unfolds through language and its power to transmit heritage. Through *Überlieferung*, the responses precluded in one historical epoch can be evoked again in another, i.e., voiced in the “self-gathering” and reciprocity of the word (*logos*). To quote Heidegger (1956: 34–35), “[*Überliefen*] is a delivering into the freedom of discussion (*die Freiheit den Gespräches*) with what has been (*mit dem Gewesenen*).”

Language and disclosure become so completely interwoven that they unfold in relation to each other. As we have seen, the self participates in the process of disclosure through freedom. Language also implies freedom, as the innovation of play which still subscribes to law (Heidegger, 1958: 105). While not directly referring to “free speech” in the democratic sense, Heidegger allows for its possibility. Human beings foster an authentic relation to language when, by engaging in speech, they maximize its potential for disclosure and “letting be” (Schürmann, 1987: 158–165). In this way, the precondition for each person’s exercising the power to speak lies in *inviting contrary responses from the other*. As an emissary of freedom, speech fosters the development of *alternative* forms of disclosure, the abundance of possibility. According to Heidegger (1971: 209), human being’s “receptive listening” to language is a lawfulness by the “command of difference.” In upholding freedom and possibility in this primordial sense, authentic speech safeguards the freedom presupposed in First Amendment rights – from dissent of authority to proclaiming different beliefs, e.g., of religion.

Human being’s stewardship over language reveals a law of ontological origin to which the democratic principles regulating “free speech” must correspond – the “command of difference.” Heidegger never considers the different scope of jurisdiction implies in either case, except to suggest that uprooting

the sanctity of speech may also undermine other examples of its free deployment by turning language into a tool to manipulate opinion (Thiele, 1995: 128). When utilized in this way, language articulates only what is already understood as the consensus outlook. The contrarian stance of dissent may no longer be welcome, since only through a climate of openness can a tolerance for dissent flourish.

If language implies freedom, and freedom as “letting be” cultivates the diversity of social relations (including dissent), what does the stifling of dissent entail? Without the option of dissent, it remains difficult to allocate proper limits to choice, that is, to safeguard freedom in order to avoid its deprivation with a totalitarian framework. Indeed, human exchange often remains one-sided in serving a hierarchy of power which imposes views without inviting their criticism from a contrary stance. By contrast, the spirit of openness welcomes this tension and strife, although in a way which serves the aims of stewardship precious to both parties. In recalling Heraclitus’ sense of “harmony,” a “setting in opposition” (*Auseinander-setzung*) constitutes the dynamic factor in any agreement. We can describe the reciprocal process of care-giving as a “dialogue,” in which its participants sacrifice the self-righteousness of certainty in favor of a shared discoveredness where wider horizons of understanding unfold.

By the same token, Dasein’s “conscience” flourishes within these horizons, rather than being rendered obsolete by them. Literally, conscience is a way of being-certain or a certainty of knowledge, as Hegel (1977: 396–399) recognizes. But given the destructive edge of his thought, Heidegger recast certainty in favor of truth whose possibility is intimately connected with error. Thus conscience thrusts the self into the tension between truth and error, in order that Dasein can become awakened to the gravity of its choices and develop them through the unclosedness of resolve. As a form of discourse, conscience discloses the self in its situation in a way which counters its inauthentic tendency toward one-sidedness. According to Heidegger, Hegel also realizes that language can reserve a place for conscience by introducing distinctions which overcome the exclusivity of any single standpoint. “Language is in itself mediating; it prevents us from sinking into that which has the character of the this — that which is totally one-sided, relative, and abstract” (Heidegger, 1988a: 64). Despite this insight, Hegel (1979: 223) construes language as a vessel for the Absolute’s self-articulation as pure presence, without considering language’s affinity with absence and finitude. From Heidegger’s (1962: 485–486) perspective, Hegel’s understanding of Spirit as the infinity of determinations entails a “falling” from Dasein’s finite, contextually bound existence.

By contrast, Heidegger reinstates this finite dimension, first by pointing to conscience as a *silent* call and, secondly by defining the essence of language in terms of the power to hear. As he suggests, conscience presupposes an attunement in which the self must defer its desire to speak in favor of the need to listen. The unfolding of this space of reciprocity enables Dasein to cast aside the shell of an ego and rediscover its belonging together with others within a situation. Only through this reversal can the self assume a posture of co-responsibility, and invite a response from the other while cultivating its individuality. Rather than isolating Dasein, the call of conscience restores to the self that distance whereby it can relate to who it is as well as to others within an expanse of openness. As Heidegger (1969a: 131) remarks at the close of *The Essence of Reasons*: “And so human being, as existing transcendence abounding in and surpassing toward possibilities, is a *creature of distance*. . . . And only the knack for hearing into the distance awakens Dasein as self to the answer of its Dasein with others.” Here Heidegger offers his most succinct response to the problem of “intersubjectivity”: Dasein acquires the power to speak and understand while occupying a world with others. In contrast to a solitary plea, the call of conscience permits the utterance of many voices within a “public forum.” When situated in this social domain, diverse participants can address an issue “from many sides” (Arendt, 1978: 148–151).

Authentic Dasein welcomes the companionship of the other as a partner in dialogue. This possibility not only stems from Dasein’s emergence within a social domain, but, more importantly, from its occupying the abode of language. Human beings can reciprocate with each other insofar as their endowment with language requires the profoundest stewardship of all, i.e., to safeguard the spoken word. Through silence human beings experience the sanctity of speech (e.g., Gandhi), and are prepared to act in a way which speaks louder than the self-righteous clamor of the “they.” But what is the call of conscience other than the silent appeal of care? “*Conscience discourses . . . in the mode of keeping silent*” (Heidegger, 1962: 318). To remain silent is not to assume a reflexive stance divorced from the world. Rather, silence heralds the stillness which reverberates through language, and thereby provides the pitch of attunement for two participants to engage in dialogue. As a call which elicits a response from the other (e.g., as in a friend), language can speak through the *appeal of many voices* (Taylor, 1993: 60–67; Bernasconi, 1995: 370–372). Would it not be ironic if the more we undergo the “ring of stillness,” the more we experience the intimacy of our conversation with others and appreciate the “claim” (*Anspruch*) of “multivocality” (Heidegger, 1969c: 106).

If this were the case, then the call of conscience should receive its power by safeguarding the self's potential to engage others in dialogue, rather than as a vehicle of introspection. The linking of conscience and social activism, of self-responsibility and solicitude, would open up another perspective on the political question within hermeneutic thought. Heidegger's hermeneutics undergoes a further transformation, which enables us to address the innermost *presuppositions* of political organization, including the power of free speech, dissent, and the possibility of social reform. By uncovering these presuppositions, we not only broaden the horizons of sociological and political inquiry, but we also situate Heidegger's thought more squarely within the domain of human *praxis*. To embark upon such a detour is to follow a path less traveled, albeit an important one.

## Notes

1. Martin Luther King, Jr. emphasizes the need for "nonviolent gadflies" to develop the tension necessary within society for radical change. Only in this way is it possible to confront the darkness of prejudice and racism in order to promote brotherhood and sisterhood among all human beings.

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