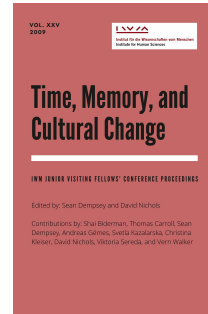


Antigone's Autochthonous Voice: Echoes in Sophocles, Hölderlin, and Heidegger

David Nichols

IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference Proceedings, Vol. XXV © 2009 by the author

Readers may redistribute this article to other individuals for noncommercial use, provided that the text and this note remain intact. This article may not be reprinted or redistributed for commercial use without prior written permission from the author. If you have any questions about permissions, please contact the IWM.



In the summer semester of 1942, Heidegger delivered his third and final lecture course on Hölderlin, subsequently published as *Hölderlins Hymne »Der Ister«*. The poet's descriptions for the Danube, whose source is in the Black Forest, must have resonated deeply with the philosopher's rustic proclivities. Heidegger was more interested in preserving this idyllic terrain than marshalling its resources for global domination. He was already in the process of shifting his attention away from Nietzsche, the advocate of will to power, towards more tranquil possibilities within Hölderlin's poetry. In the Ister lectures, Heidegger presents poetry as the primary linguistic means for allowing beings to emerge into appearance—not for purposes of usefulness or manipulation, but simply to let beings be. The poet recognizes his own historical topography as that of a configuration of beings long in the making. In Hölderlin's case, this includes the realization that what it means to be German remains rooted in the ground of what it once meant to be Greek. These issues of autochthony, for the poet and his people, allow Heidegger to revisit related concepts from Sophocles' *Antigone*. Instead of characterizing Antigone as a rebellious voice postured against the *polis*, as he had done in the 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics* lectures, Heidegger now associates the heroine with a particular sort of dwelling, in close proximity to Being. However, by making this shift, he neglects the excessive attributes of the ecstatic human being, an important existential component of Greek tragedy, in order to submerge human identity within its ground.

In the Ister lectures, Heidegger focuses upon the different ways in which Dasein takes residence within its historical situation. Greek tragedy demonstrates how human beings are always trying to make themselves at home without ever fully accomplishing this goal. They occupy the uncanny (*unheimlich*) status of extraordinary beings among ordinary appearances, always estranged from the larger framework of beings, never able to completely fit into its structure. The Greeks recognized this strangeness in other beings as well, through the extraordinary revealing made possible by the gods. Human beings are uncanny in a peculiar way, however, since they alone are the unhomely (*unheimisch*) ones—those who, despite their seeking, cannot find themselves at home.[1] Poets are in the

business of making new dwelling places for humans, first by acknowledging the strangeness of the essence of beings, and then by giving that strangeness a language. They are unlike other individuals precisely as a result of their willingness to make themselves at home with the reality that they are not at home. This becomes the new heroism of Heidegger's thought about Greek tragedy—the poet creates, not by battling against the current order of beings in order to instantiate another, but by allowing that which is uncanny to surface on its own. Nevertheless, Heidegger chooses to ignore the oppositional strife that was a permanent fixture in Hölderlin's thought about Greek tragedy. The poet understood the importance of a heroic confrontation with beings in order for another beginning to take root.

I. Hölderlin and the Caesura of Tragedy

In *Antigone*, Sophocles introduces his own myth of autochthony focused upon a primary opposition between the authoritative powers of the *polis* and the native ground upon which the *polis* rests.[2] The two sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polyneices, have simultaneously slain each other in battle for the throne of Thebes, which their father had abdicated in his ghastly exile. This abdication allows their uncle Creon to occupy the vacant position with expectations of loyal obedience from the inhabitants. As an example of this patriotism, he forbids the burial of Polyneices for having led an assault upon the *polis*. The drama begins with the sisters Ismene and Antigone disagreeing about the proper response to Creon's edict, which deprives burial to one of their brothers. Antigone defies the law levied against Polyneices, begins the ceremonial rite of burial, and thereby incurs capital punishment for herself. After Creon sentences her to be buried alive, Antigone enters the cave mournfully, a "bride of Hades," where she finally hangs herself within the sealed enclosure. The blind seer Tiresias confronts Creon with a divine warning based upon a sign of contamination: the dogs and birds have been feasting upon the corpse of Polyneices to the disruption of the natural order. Although Creon attempts to reverse his own hubris, he cannot contain the cycle of suicidal deaths that ensue. In addition to Antigone's suicide within the cave, Creon's son Haemon, who had been betrothed to the heroine, now falls upon his sword, followed in turn by his mother Eurydice.

Hölderlin develops an innovative approach to the autochthony of human existence, borrowed primarily from Sophoclean tragedy. He understands the *Antigone* as a mythology of ground whereby human beings speak anew from their native terrain in order to disrupt prevailing systems of thought. This ground ultimately proves groundless, as the breach that makes possible all difference among beings, suspended together in an illusory unity. The same difference surfaces within the Greek tragedy, composed of what he calls "the suffering organs of a body wrestling with divinity"—the poetry, mythology, chorus, characters, etc.[3] In his theoretical writings, Hölderlin traces the abysmal rupture in terms of a fundamental opposition between art and nature.[4] The artist's creativity stems from a holy pathos that causes him to challenge the reigning "gods" of his community. From this engagement he forms a monstrous unity with them for the arrival of another revelation. The collision resembles that of the Greek hero since he operates from an excessive overflow of heavenly fire that drives him toward his own sacrificial

destruction. Hölderlin warns that unless the Germans learn to rejuvenate this creative impulse that was once so familiar to the Greeks, they will miss the opportunity to speak from the native soil of what it means to be German. His poetry embodies this principle by always uncovering the historical heritage underlying his own topography.

Hölderlin's approach to autochthony includes a heightened sensitivity to matters of *terra incognita*, the absence within the ground of human existence.[5] He refuses to absolve the tragic negation of consciousness through the successive steps of a dialectical system, contrary to his friends Schelling and Hegel. Hölderlin would rather preserve the crypt of nothingness by not allowing its abysmal rift to attain closure.[6] He articulates the tragic negation as a caesura, the self-differentiating scission within language itself, which opens into the difference of word, metrical rhythm, even the poet's confrontation with the surrounding world.[7] Caesura becomes most apparent between the heartbeats of poetry, in the silent spaces of the cadence of meter, at its line breaks, and anywhere else in which the "sign" of poetry equals zero.[8] This "counter-rhythmic rupture" demonstrates the power of poetry to preserve difference in suspended equilibrium, without resolving, absolving, or dissolving the negation.[9] Hölderlin says of the prophet Tiresias, spokesperson for the abyss and herald for "the eccentric sphere of the dead," that he introduces caesura into the dramas of *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone* by way of extended speeches. Tragic poetry houses and sustains the essential negation of human experience in a way that funnels that emptiness, as a tragic transport, toward the direction of a particular fate. Poetry serves as the measure of an encompassing whole—the place where the poet envisages the entirety of an experience, an opportune moment, a *kairos*—so that, "Full of worth, but poetically, man dwells on this earth." [10] Hölderlin's river poems, such as "The Ister," illustrate the point succinctly, in Heidegger's estimation, insofar as the poet situates himself within the river as his dwelling place.

Hölderlin's caesura extends to a rift between human beings and the gods, often exemplified by narratives of rebellion in Greek drama. The gods occupy the position of the "organic," the sphere of natural and civic powers besetting human beings.[11] On the other side of the polemic, human beings occupy the domain of the "aorgic," whereby they emerge, ecstatically, from an "excess of inwardness" (*Übermaß der Innigkeit*). [12] In the depths of this excessive intimacy (*Innigkeit*), a holy pathos stirs the individual to rage against an otherwise benumbing, temperate environment.[13] In these instances, the erotic wellspring for artistic creativity has the opportunity to break forth against the stifling constraints of rigid ways of thinking, such as the stagnation of artistic forms. Hölderlin identifies the restrictive atmosphere as "Junonian sobriety," presumably after Hera (Juno), queen of the gods, who typically wishes to quell her husband's unfaithful, sensual desires. The holy pathos of the creative outburst necessitates that the creator first forsake the prevailing "gods," the ontological power structures of meaning that have come to roost.[14] For this reason, the hero of Greek tragedy disobeys the gods in order to better serve them. The individual's creative production ultimately leads to a passage from old gods to new gods, so long as the creator's individuality gives way to another shared, communal understanding, similar to the elimination of the protagonist within the tragic

drama. Although Greek tragedy may allow for this dynamic between human beings and the gods to operate within a suspended equilibrium, the rift never comes together in a healing sublimation of opposites.

The caesura that opens a rift between aortic and organic principles allows Hölderlin to assume a revolutionary tone that is sometimes political as well as intellectual. He was enthusiastic about the French Revolution because he thought that he recognized in the movement the potential to establish a democratic republic resembling the social-political ideals of ancient Athens.[15] He soon became disenchanted with the revolution, however, on account of its failure to transform ethical and political life according to these expectations. Never a militant revolutionary, always the nostalgic poet, Hölderlin advocates the sudden emergence of the revolution without supporting its violent outcomes.[16] He sometimes interprets Sophocles through the lens of the French Revolution, so that the *Antigone* illustrates a moment of national reversal and revolution, a turning of the fatherland (*vaterländische Umkehr*). Creon's Junonian sobriety includes the stabilizing universal and formal constraints of an all-encompassing law. Antigone threatens that order with the recklessness of her insurrection, as an agent of the terrestrial gods of the dead, a sudden chaotic caesura in Creon's otherwise harmonious *polis*. Antigone's transgression results in more than her own destruction: her sacrificial death anticipates the accelerated collapse of Creon's house. The two characters "differ only according to time" since, in a short while, the upheaval will make possible another set of formal constraints.[17] Nevertheless, each time this natal turning takes place, the agents of transformation must draw their inspiration anew from the autochthony of their native, primordial source, "the fatherland."

Hölderlin weaves these themes together into his own Greek tragedy, based loosely upon legends and fragments pertaining to a pre-Socratic philosopher. An incomplete masterpiece, drafted in three unfinished versions, *The Death of Empedocles* mirrors Hölderlin's own struggle to make the natal turning happen. In the drama, the citizens of Agrigentum, who formerly thronged Empedocles, turn against him for having proclaimed his own divinity. The sage who effectively stole heavenly fire and gave it to mortals, now banished, wanders toward Mt. Etna, until he finally sacrifices himself to its crater. Empedocles remains steadfast in his fidelity to the earth as he prepares for his own dissolution. He hears the "subterranean thunder" of Zeus who is "Lord of Time," follows the allure of the *terra mater*, and leaps into the abyss.[18] Empedocles' excessive inwardness, too intense and too singular, makes the entire down-going of the drama possible, from the hubris of his sacrilegious *nefas*, to his persistent determination to thrust himself toward a final point of expression.[19] His suicidal descent into the volcano's divine flame constitutes a sacrifice, one that concludes another conflict between gods and mortals, but also reestablishes a temporary state of equilibrium. He sacrifices his swelling individuality, in its heightened excess, so that he can return to the community from which he has suffered exile.[20] After standing apart from his historical ground, from the community of the dead, in order to speak anew, he must also recede into that historical ground for successive generations. The tragic poet likewise suffers a sacrificial

death, not only as a result of his confrontation with the gods, but even as a prerequisite for the drama itself: he must sacrifice his individuality, with all its inwardness, for the whole of the drama.[21]

Hölderlin's translation efforts demonstrate a strong sense of historical autochthony that parallels his understanding of Greek tragedy. His versions of *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*, published in 1804 as the *Trauerspiele des Sophokles*, defied conventional norms of philology. For Hölderlin, the goal of translation, as a commemorative retrieval, has more to do with unearthing a deeply rooted text from its original ground and then transplanting it appropriately for another people and their era. Again, this requires an act of heroic transgression whereby the translator disobeys the gods in order to better obey them. He betrays the surface meaning of the text in order to let it speak again, from its greatest depths, for a higher level of comprehension.[22] This attempt to retrieve what is unsaid in the text, to understand Sophocles better than Sophocles understood himself, allows Hölderlin to explore the oriental occult strands within Greek tragedy, however muffled they may have already become in Sophocles.[23] Through the process of translation, Hölderlin addresses what is "proper" and what is "foreign" to German consciousness, i.e., what forms the community's peculiar identity now and from whence it derives its historical debts. The Greeks were at home with their fire from heaven, whereas the Germans exhibit greater familiarity with the clarity of presentation.[24] Hölderlin attempts to transpose the foreign into the proper, to bring the Greek sense of destiny and holy pathos into the foreground of the German experience. These translations also betray the beginning stages of his dementia through what must have been unintended errors. After Apollo struck him, as he says, on a return journey from Bordeaux in 1802, he continues to wrestle with the gathering darkness through the exercise of translation.[25]

Hölderlin introduces a powerful metaphor, the "flight of the gods," in order to articulate the tragic plight of modern life. In Homer's epics, the gods sometimes withdraw to Mt. Olympus, content to leave mortals to their own devices. For modern people, those who dwell in "the land of evening" (Hesperides), this withdrawal has taken over as the primary way of encountering the divine. In the present age, where the gods linger only through their absence, fidelity to the gods requires remembrance, and infidelity stems from forgetfulness.[26] The critical historical shift takes place when the conflict between old gods and new gods gives way to a more comprehensive disappearance. The warning signs are already evident in Sophocles for whom Creon and Antigone encapsulate the troubled relationship between human beings and gods. Antigone embodies the god-nearness of primordial Greek religion, its heavenly fire, whereas Creon exemplifies god-distance in his rational-calculative attitude, later to dominate modern thought. The flight of the gods already plays an inherent role within the measured cadence of Greek poetry, so that every line becomes another divine revelation, followed by that god's subsequent withdrawal.[27] This withdrawal also emerges as an essential component for Greek drama—the pivotal moment, in fact, when the hero or heroine faces Dionysus, the god of absence. Oedipus recognizes, to his complete horror, that he has fulfilled the ghastly oracle; Antigone, betrothed to Hades, sings her bridal song of mourning; in all of these lonely events of tragic recognition, a sudden flight of the gods happens, divine absence reigns, and caesura opens into a momentous breach.

II. Autochthony and the Ister

Heidegger relies on Hölderlin's hymn, "The Ister," as a basis for framing Greek tragedy. This framework mostly has to do with autochthony, as both a matter of historical grounding as well as existential identity. Heidegger understands the poem as a lesson about temporality and the river of remembrance, a mournful hymn to the gods who have departed. The Ister makes possible the dwelling place of human beings, so as to determine their sense of belonging and home.[28] Heidegger had already explored the theme of autochthony (*Bodenständigkeit*) in several different contexts during the 1930s. In all of these instances, the theme of autochthony counteracted the failure of modern subjectivity to embed human beings in their communal and historical environs. At that time, he prescribed that Dasein take up its historical allotment in a manner reminiscent of Hölderlin's natal turning, for the tragic purpose of crashing against a current stratification of thinking that holds sway. Heidegger soon replaces this polemical imagery with the preparatory motifs of waiting and clearing a space for new beginnings. In the Ister lectures, he describes Dasein's proper relationship to its historical situation, its autochthony, as a matter of "bearing and suffering it, instead of forcing it and observing it by stealth." [29] Heidegger reformulates his approach to Greek tragedy in a way that places greater emphasis upon mourning and remembrance, poetic dwelling and homecoming.

The key to understanding autochthony in the Ister lectures lies in Dasein's perpetual estrangement. Heidegger locates this homelessness in the hymn as an effect of Spirit, evidenced by the mysterious counter-flow of the Danube as it clings beside the mountains. "He appears, however, almost / To go backwards..." The river flows with hesitancy, stands still beneath rocks and trees, and swirls backwards in eddies (*in Wirbeln*). [30] The source of the river remains alongside it at every moment as that which pushes the river forward, yet always remains concealed within its flow. The river sends human beings on their way into the fitting-together of a particular historical destiny, but "whiles patiently" through the process. Hölderlin shares with his friends Schelling and Hegel an understanding of metaphysics whereby Spirit longs to arrive at its own essence by thinking itself and thereby being alongside itself. [31] Heidegger points to an example in another hymn, "Bread and Wine," where Hölderlin says that Spirit loves colony. In colony, explains Heidegger, the daughter land remains indebted to the motherland, although never fully at home as a result of the distance. Spirit languishes, meanwhile, for the opportunity to come into its own, to make the ground arable once more. "The rock, however, has need of cuts / and of furrows the earth..."

This interpretation of "The Ister" allows Heidegger to form a bridge to Sophocles' *Antigone* and to revisit its second choral ode. He reworks some of his previous points from the *Introduction to Metaphysics* lectures pertaining to the "Ode to Man" chorus, especially those having to do with the homelessness of human existence. He reiterates the importance of two different word couplets within the choral song for understanding what it means for humans to be most uncanny (*to deinotaton*) among beings. Heidegger translates Sophocles' *hupsipolis-apolis* to mean "towering high above the site, losing the site." [32] In a process of ontological hubris, the community loses sight of its being at the

same time that it springs forth from its native origin. Heidegger translates *pantoporos-aporos* to mean, “venturing forth in every direction, without experience.” He claims that a “counterturning” (*Gegenwendigkeit*) takes place within the essence of the human being whereby one dwells, ecstatically, in a perpetual state of being beyond oneself. Heidegger understands the double axis of the rising *polis* and the *polis* wanderer to constitute “the site of the abode of human history,” the primordial ground of being human. The two descriptions nearly form the image of a carousel for Heidegger, or at least that of a twister: the *polis* requires a pole, an *axis mundi*, around which all the activities of the community swirl (*Wirbeln*). He suggests that the driving force behind the whirlwind could be the activity of questioning itself, even to the extent that the *polis* becomes its own question—one that the Greeks were willing to ask, without ever arriving at a definitive answer.

In the Ister lectures, Heidegger adopts an approach to Greek tragedy that waits upon the mystery of Being instead of forcing a polemical confrontation. The poet must remain vigilant in order to catch the first signs of the “holy enigma” (*heiliges Rätsel*) of the opening of new possibilities for thinking.[33] Long gone are the heroic overtones of the *Introduction to Metaphysics* lectures where the poets and other creators of the *polis* violently crash against the prevailing fugue of appearances. Heidegger’s treatment of tragedy in the Ister lectures already embodies what he later calls *Gelassenheit*, the releasement that lets the being of beings be. This explains why Heidegger develops the terminology of the whirlwind for the *polis* instead of retrieving his earlier image of a *polemos* between oppositional forces. “What truly stands steadfast must be able to sway within the counter-turning pressure (*gegenwendigen Andrang*) of the open paths (*der offenen Bahnen*) of the storms. What is merely rigid shatters on account of its own rigidity.”[34] At first glance, these statements resemble the quote from the *Republic* at the close of Heidegger’s 1933 Rectoral Address, “All that is great stands in the storm.”[35] The critical difference, however, has to do with the way that Heidegger abandons the heroism that stands firm *against* the storm. He now advocates following the paths of storms and allowing the rigidity of prevailing thought structures to shatter on their own accord.

The intellectual revitalization of a community depends upon its ability to first recognize what is foreign within what is proper. For this reason, Heidegger identifies “the fatherland” of the German people as their own unique ground, simultaneously haunted by a primordial Greek past. In order to arrive at the home of being German, the community must experience an appropriative event (*Ereignis*), a festival, whereby their other origin, namely that of the Greeks, provides the conceptual resources necessary for a fresh beginning. The task for Germans, in Heidegger’s view, is a re-thinking (*An-denken*) of that which has gone before, another homecoming of the heavenly fire that makes new meaning structures possible.[36] “From Alpheus, long have / We sought what is fitting....” This commemoration of the past becomes a celebration, as when on a holiday—what Hölderlin calls in “The Rhine” hymn a wedding festival of men and gods. Greek tragedies were similar festivals since they transformed longstanding myths into the vibrant reality of another ritual performance. Each time, the infant Dionysus, dismembered and devoured by the Titans, lives again through Zeus’ restorative act. The Eucharistic

celebration in Christian liturgy likewise commemorates, not by simply memorializing the same historical event, but by transforming its elements into flesh and blood. “Do this in remembrance of me,” says he who died, and yet he lives, the first-born of the dead.[37]

Heidegger claims that technology currently poses the greatest threat to any possible rekindling of the Greeks’ heavenly fire. Its instrumental reason prevails over the modern fitting-together of beings as a poor substitute for the mythical-poetic order of Greek thought. Heidegger characterizes technology in ways that resemble contamination, another important theme from Greek tragedy. In the *Antigone*, Tiresias complains to Creon that the animals have become ill from consuming the exposed corpse of Polyneices: the hawks savagely attack each other; the prophet’s animal sacrifices no longer burn properly; dogs and birds defile the altars and hearths of the *polis* with carrion.[38] The old seer observes a natural disorder reigning with the natural order, a pollution of nature that tears asunder the previous intimacy between mortals and gods. As a result of the contamination, the shaman loses the capacity to interpret divine omens, except to read them precisely as those signs that no longer speak. Similarly for Heidegger, technology contaminates the ground of human thought by concealing the essence of beings and forcing unreasonable demands upon people and their environments. The airplane and the radio forever change the course of history, Heidegger explains, by opening different avenues of power that human beings can wield over their situations.[39] Modern intellectuals go so far as to reconfigure space and time according to a framework of calculative domination. While technological progress purportedly serves people better and only makes their lives easier, it actually conceals the same misery that it thrusts upon them. A technocratic structure of meaning now overwhelms, dominates, and chokes the entire arena of the appearances as human beings suffer the homelessness of technology.

Heidegger’s portrayal of historical autochthony, despite its many merits, has some disturbing features as well. He insists on establishing a direct connection between Germans and Greeks that excludes other significant possibilities for “proper” appropriations of the “foreign.” Heidegger typically denounces other historical influences, especially those Christian and Latin in origin, for corrupting this bond. For instance, he favors the counterturning of Sophocles’ uncanny human over the Judeo-Christian story of a creature exiled from paradise and needing redemption.[40] Even the allegedly “pagan” classicism of Goethe and Schiller commits the error of approaching the Greeks through the lens of Christianity. By the same dialectical standard, Heidegger’s interpretation of Sophocles, his *hupsipolis-apolis* and *pantoporos-aporos*, bears at least some lingering connection to the thrownness and fallenness of *Being and Time*, which in turn stemmed from Augustine’s concept of original sin. He also chastises Nietzsche for emphasizing the Romans more than the Greeks in his later thought.[41] Then Heidegger resorts to the explicitly Latin example of vestal virgins to elaborate upon the cultic significance of the hearth.[42] He relies, moreover, upon the Roman historian Tacitus for explaining how Germanic tribes originally related to the “*terra mater*.”[43] These subtle counterexamples to Heidegger’s overarching scheme emerge as problematic cracks, unintended instances of caesura, within his writing, and together attest to a greater complexity about the

foreign within the proper than he cares to admit. Hölderlin, by contrast, resorts to Latin and Christian descriptions quite liberally, as if to call attention to how modern appropriations of the Greeks necessarily pass through this lens.

The notion that the Greeks provided a pure and rarified original ground for European thought disregards the foreign influences that contributed to Greek autochthony in the first place. Hölderlin at least supplements his discourse about the proper and the foreign with important insights pertaining to the interdependencies between the Occident and the Orient. “I presume he must come / From the East. / There would be / Much to tell of this.” The Greeks certainly borrowed much of their mythology, art, and philosophy from other soils—Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Syrophenician sources to name a few. Hölderlin acknowledges this ground-within-the-ground of being Greek in several instances, such as his inclusion of the Egyptian priest Manes in the third draft of *The Death of Empedocles*. Empedocles’ Oriental teacher bears a peculiar name, with connotations of divine power as various as the passionate frenzy of the Greek *mania*, the Latin *manes* or souls of the departed, and Mani the Persian founder of the Manicheans. [44] In the Ister hymn, Hölderlin seems to identify the Indus river valley as the more primordial ground for human history, saying, “We, however, sing from the Indus / Arrived from afar....” Heidegger does catch the mythical importance of the Indus as the place Dionysus visited, overcome by madness, preceding his victorious arrival in Greece. [45] He fails to acknowledge, however, the deeper significance of these eastern elements for Hölderlin whereby the holy pathos of the Greeks reveals itself as an Oriental fire, as the music and poetry that arrives from afar, that sings all the way from the Indus. [46] More precisely, Dionysus was a native to the Greek Thebes, journeyed out to the Indus, and finally returned: the demigod made his visit through the foreign so that he could reenter the proper.

Perhaps most perplexing are the dangerous political ramifications surrounding Heidegger’s Graeco-Germanic historical narrative. By 1942, his commitments to National Socialism had diminished considerably, to the extent of having raised some serious criticisms against party ideology. Heidegger reveals his irritation with Nazi propaganda when he asserts that the Greeks were not the first National Socialists. [47] Despite this dissociation of the Greeks from the party, he goes on to comment that such interpretation does a disservice to the “historical uniqueness” of National Socialism. Clearly, Heidegger still exhibits some solidarity with what he takes to be the hidden, inner greatness of the movement, his own private Freiburg National Socialism. [48] He denounces Anglo-Saxon influences or “Americanism” which threatens to annihilate the homeland of Europe. [49] This includes linguistic challenges to the sacredness of the German tongue, since “Anglo-American language” and presumably, Anglo-American philosophy, reduce speaking to a technical instrument. For Heidegger, Anglo-American thought emerges as a perverse foreign, or more specifically, that which qualifies as neither proper nor foreign. He continues to couple the German homeland with nationalist prerogatives of historical destiny, in a way reminiscent of the *Introduction to Metaphysics* lectures. [50] This destiny now requires more of a patient waiting, however, which endures the ominous storm of war, with its technology and domination, in earnest expectation for the subsequent calmness that will allow another poetic beginning to take root.

Heidegger's nationalist commitments to the fatherland include a stubborn blind side to the most tragic factors besetting its political landscape. "Heidegger's silence" about the horrors of the Nazi regime could not be any more apparent than within the context of his tragic discourse. Moreover, if he had turned his critique of technology more sharply against National Socialism, still this would not have sufficed for a responsible understanding of the tragedy of his time. Nor would it have been enough if he had eventually directed his thoughts about the flight of the gods and the death of God toward the concentration camp. In order to even begin to do justice to the cruel persecution and mechanical removal of the nation's favorite scapegoat, Heidegger would have to be willing to speak on behalf of the victims of tragedy and assign them a voice of their own. He would have to sing Antigone's mourning song all the way to her death chamber instead of allowing her deafening silence to scream from between the spaces of his words about Greek tragedy. Instead, he mostly limits the concept of victimization to those ways in which capitalism and Bolshevism encroach upon the German fatherland from outside.[51] Heidegger characterizes the German homeland as a hostage to global impositions when in fact Antigone suffers victimization at the hands of her own *polis*. Meanwhile, the final solution of National Socialism was to silence and eliminate Antigone *once and for all*, to systematically single out and extract the mere possibility of the one who does not "fit" into the formalized totality of the *polis*. This requires a complete disregard for the excess of her inwardness, the surplus of her otherness, the secret of her individuality. The abyss of Auschwitz ultimately surpasses the meaning structure of Greek tragedy in which the oppositional power of the hero at least impacts the whole. The concentration camp seeks to erase all such divinity within the individual—that irreducible, daemonic mystery that never could be completely at home within its environment.

III. Autochthony and the Poet

The significance of autochthony extends to issues of individual identity, not only the historical development of a people's destiny. Heidegger attempts to address the individual's position within the *polis* with examples from poetry and drama. The poet best exemplifies the proper relationship between human beings and other beings because he stands between gods and mortals, similar to a demigod, as a mediator of heavenly fire. He must be mindful of his own autochthony so as to submerge himself within the arrival of another meaningful configuration of beings. Heidegger aims to undermine any approach to poetry that stems from the poet's subjectivity rather than his historical endowment. For this reason, he proudly asserts, "No German poet has ever achieved such distance from his own ego as that distance that determines Hölderlin's poetry." [52] In addition to abandoning models of subjectivity for a more autochthonous approach to human identity, Heidegger accords human beings a more subservient role before the emergence of beings. He no longer borrows images of heroic rebellion from Greek tragedy when discussing issues of home and hearth. The existential antagonism behind Hölderlin's natal turning holds no more interest for Heidegger either. As a result, he does not allow human beings to assert themselves against the whole by first stepping forth from it.

Heidegger explains that the poet occupies the unique position of founding another dwelling place whereby human beings may reside amidst beings. In order to accomplish this founding, the poet must receive and preserve what Spirit has already sent forward as “fittingly destined” for that particular time. As the “besouler” of a world, the poet allows beings to crystallize, through language, into a meaningful and cohesive whole.[53] He is the demigod who stands between gods and men, through whom heavenly fire illuminates the dark abode of mortals, almost as though Heidegger were describing a conduit for the being of beings. Hölderlin comprehends the poet’s saga (*Sage*) of bringing forth what is homely from out of that which remains essentially unhomely.[54] His poetry invites others to return to the same sacred task, in Heidegger’s view, by “poetizing in advance” the essence of poetry. The river hymns provide just such a window into the essence of poetry because they identify the poet as the one who knows the river of his own temporality and speaks on its behalf. “Now come, fire!” marks the beginning of the Ister hymn as more than an invocation to the gods.[55] Hölderlin also challenges the poets to recognize their hour after a prolonged period of night in which the heavenly fire has remained absent. This “now” indicates the moment of an appropriative event, a remembrance, whereby the poet alone may translate what has gone before into another commencement.

In place of the existential strife (*Streit*) of the poets as creators, which Heidegger had previously advocated, the poet of the Ister lectures embodies a different courage. He waits upon the river in eager anticipation for the opportunity to offer his voice to the “destined fittingness” (*das Geschick*) that has long been on its way. This means that the poet readies himself for the moment of the appropriative event by mustering the courage (*Mut*) of his poetic mind (*Gemüt*), so that he may speak on behalf of his mother (*Mutter*), the earth. [56] Heidegger insists that this readiness does not include bringing the destined fittingness into play by the poet’s own efforts. “Here, that which is to come comes of its own accord.”[57] Hölderlin’s invocation, “Now come, fire!” could never bring that which was already along its way into its own arrival. In the context of this substitute heroism, the danger of the poet now consists in the possibility of standing too close to Sophocles’ “hearth” of Being, as when Hölderlin warns that “the besouler would almost be scorched.”[58] Heidegger suggests in his 1936 essay, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” that the poet succumbed to this threat at the onset of his impending madness, struck by Apollo on the return from Bordeaux.[59] Already in this text, Heidegger speaks of poetic dwelling as a waiting within the abyss of a double not—the no longer of the flight of the gods and the not yet of the coming god. This Dionysus of the between, where humans presently reside, most devoid of the divine, only allows for a preparatory vigil, not the heroic instantiation of another fitting-together of beings.

Heidegger supplements his treatment of tragic poetry in the Ister lectures with a number of observations about the dramatic aspects of the *Antigone*. This focus on *drama* as the Greek concept for human action allows Heidegger to integrate more of his own Aristotelian influences.[60] For instance, Heidegger’s interpretation of Sophocles’ uncanny (*deinon*) human being bears similarities to Aristotle’s discussion in the *Poetics* about what happens to characters at the denouement of a Greek tragedy. Heidegger explains that human beings are most uncanny as a result of a reversal or *katastrophē* that

turns them away from their own essence.[61] This counterturning reveals itself in three forms of human experience: first, through “the fearful” which includes horror or awe, and commands reverent admiration; second, through “the powerful” which looms over humans and compels them toward uniformity with other beings; and third, through “the inhabital” or the extraordinary (*das Ungeheure*) which exceeds everything mundane.[62] These descriptions for the *katastrophē* of the human being closely resemble what Aristotle has to say about a reversal (*peripeteia*) of fate that occurs for one or more characters.[63] The most striking feature of the reversal, from Aristotle’s point of view, is the experience of what he identifies on more than one occasion as “the awesome” (*thaumaston*).[64] This entails the primary mimetic event of an ontological encounter with a strange and mysterious other, accompanied by an awareness of one’s own inherent limitations. The reversal sometimes occurs as a moment of recognition (*anagnorisis*) whereby a person’s hidden identity suddenly becomes transparent to everyone. Naturally, reversal and recognition exemplify the suffering (*pathos*) of human beings within the moment.

More importantly, the counterturning motif reflects Heidegger’s longstanding commitments to Aristotle in regard to the ecstatic nature of human existence. This position stems from Heidegger’s insight that Aristotle understands *physis* as a twofold ontological process of presence and absence. In his 1939 essay, “On the Essence and Concept of $\Phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in Aristotle’s Physics, B, I,” Heidegger explains this doubling that takes place with beings. He argues that for Aristotle the placement of beings into presence (*eidos*) harbors a simultaneous withdrawal of beings into absence (*sterēsis*).[65] Heidegger notes that this absence still manages to present itself in its absence, and in the case of living beings, as a matter of death that accompanies life, e.g., the blossom “buds forth” (*phuei*) while its preceding leaves fall to the ground; later, fruit grows and the blossom disappears.[66] Whether the particular being in question is a living or nonliving one, its abiding presence can only endure so long before its essential unity unravels. Meanwhile, beings reside within a larger ontological framework, an interconnected community (*koinonia*) of appearances, ordered according to the primordial motion (*kinēsis*) of nature (*physis*) itself.[67] The human being stands within this sea of beings as one more example of the twofold process of *physis*, the movement of appearance and refusal, living and dying. Heidegger likewise identifies the uncanny as “that which presences and at the same time absences,” with the result that human beings are always ahead of themselves, turned away from their sheltered absence.[68] The twofold essence of human beings never allows them to completely fit in amidst the ordinary placement of other beings (*stasis*). Aristotle uses the term *ekstatikos* to mean an inclination toward departure, a displacement often bordering on madness—precisely what Heidegger has in mind by the down-going (*der Untergang*) already under way for human beings from the beginning of their action (*drama*).[69]

Heidegger’s description of the counterturning as “uncanny” provides him with another way to explain what it means, in an Aristotelian sense, for humans to be daemonic. When Aristotle speaks of *eudaimonia* as the *telos* of human beings, he intends the fulfillment of a divine self-showing that occurs within them.[70] Heidegger equates the uncanny with the *daimonion* as the extraordinary ground that first makes possible even the most

ordinary showing of beings.[71] He insists that Socratic-Platonic references to the “inner voice” of the *daimonion* merely demonstrate its intimate proximity to human beings, unlike those beings meant for useful manipulation.[72] In contrast to Plato and Aristotle, however, Heidegger gradually shifts his attention away from their heavy emphasis upon a human being’s *daimonion*. Already in the Ister lectures, the poet obeys the call of the gods by receiving and handing down to others the mysterious ways in which beings reveal themselves. The poet names the gods by responding to the demands that they have already placed upon him.[73] To this extent, their self-showing clearly takes precedence over the self-assertion of humans. In the *Parmenides* lectures, the gods actually dominate the discussion as the foremost uncanny ones since they alert humans to their uncanny surroundings and make possible an uncanny district (*daimonios topos*). Evidently, Hölderlin’s theme of disobeying the gods, with all of its heroic overtures to the daemonic mortal, no longer plays a significant role in Heidegger’s analysis.

As the poet assumes an increasingly passive posture, rather than one of oppositional strife, Heidegger has to inscribe crisis more into the ontological fabric itself. He was already accustomed to interpreting Aristotle’s twofold *physis* with support from Heraclitus, for whom “nature loves to hide.”[74] Beings reside alongside one another as self-contained unities of essence (*Wesen*) and counter-essence (*Gegenwesen*), although manifested differently in each instance.[75] The drama of the *Antigone*, from its opening moments, exemplifies the tension that prevails among everyone and everything by presenting a nexus of contrasting relations: Ismene opposes Antigone, the chorus of elders contrast with the youth, the morning is both light and dark, etc. In order to preserve a favorable reading of Heraclitus, Heidegger limits the meaning of *polemos* to this oppositional conflict that necessarily arises within beings. “War (*polemos*) is the father of all and king of all,” says Heraclitus, “and some he shows as gods, others as humans; some he makes slaves, others free.”[76] Heidegger decides that a battle for the appearances already takes place within beings because they are predisposed toward disclosure, and yet struggle to make this showing possible. This supposedly eliminates the need for any additional explanations of *polemos*, such as those demanded by the “agonal principle” underlying Nietzsche’s existential priorities.[77] Human beings suffer in much the same way as other beings, from a deeply conflicted constitution, not from some distinct calling to crash against one’s own fate.

Heidegger disregards one of the most essential components of Greek tragedy when he dismisses the oppositional strife of the hero who revolts against fate. In order to compensate for this loss, he appeals to other existential factors, such as the responsibilities of the poet, character interaction within the drama, and participation in a holy festival. Unfortunately, these measures only conceal a much larger problem for Heidegger as he passes through “the turn” (*die Kehre*) toward Being in matters of language, poetry, and art. His scathing critique of the modern subject and subsequent emphasis upon autochthony still leave him without an equally strong alternative for human agency. The corpse of modern subjectivity lies exposed on the ground so that the dogs and birds of deconstruction can gorge themselves on the remains. At the same time, Heidegger mostly confines human identity to the ground of its historical influences, the ghostly realm of the dead. His project becomes one of tracing the mere possibility of

being-here, from historical roots and for another beginning. The greatest challenge for Heidegger during the turn may be to roll away the stone of Antigone's incarceration, to let human agency emerge from its autochthonous ground and walk in today's sunlight. One way to accomplish this would be to capitalize more upon the existential strife of Greek tragedy—its rebellion, transgression, anxiety, excess, and the whole gamut of properties befitting one who wrestles with God. Hölderlin at least respects Antigone's power, through her own self-assertion, to bring down the entire house of Thebes.

Many of the answers to Heidegger's shortcomings about tragedy remain hidden within Antigone as a character, person, and woman. Her excessive inwardness leads her down the path of a wholly legitimate transgression, a faultless fault, in opposition to Creon's well-ordered *polis*. Insofar as she embodies the poet, or at least the creators within the *polis*, she proves herself guilty of having the creator's innocence. Meanwhile, the drama proceeds through the feminine, vaginally, as the caesura that opens into difference only to fold back again over the breach. (Heidegger has nothing to say whatsoever about her sexuality, except for any loose connections one might apply to Mother Earth and her vestal virgins.) The first opening of difference is the most feminine one: the two sisters argue over their fate, one for rebellion and the other for status quo. After the breach reaches the height of its divergence in a confrontation between *polis* and ground, the characters make their descent into the abyss, one after another. They are making ready the womb for another genesis, of course, since Thebes will have need of a successor. The poet speaks in precisely the same manner, his *ek-stasis* budding forth at the same time that he conceals his own abyss. At some point, his words must "bring down the house," so to speak, much like Antigone's disobedient proclamation before the tyrant, echoed in turn as a prophet's warning.

On the whole, Heidegger offers an insightful reading of Hölderlin's hymn and draws some important connections to Greek tragedy. Unfortunately, the theme of autochthony, which makes possible the best of these insights, also causes some unresolved problems. Heidegger systematically excludes other historical influences from the imagined purity of a Graeco-Germanic heritage. Similarly, he characterizes the German homeland as a victim to outside forces instead of directly confronting the chaos of National Socialism within. In order to pursue the autochthony of an individual's identity, Heidegger focuses primarily on the poet's responsibilities. The poet heeds the call of the gods, allows the being of beings to be, waits upon the arrival of another historical commencement, and literally allows the river of temporality to poetize through him. This approach to the poet replaces the existential strife of an excessive individual with the mere strife of appearances in which beings struggle to show themselves. Without a rebellion against the gods, Heidegger misses the opportunity to capitalize upon a crucial component of Greek drama. Hölderlin recognizes the need for the creators of the *polis* to raise their artistic efforts against nature in the hope of forming, through a monstrous unity, another beginning. Heidegger on the other hand has the tendency to sacrifice the agonistic self-assertion of Dasein for a discussion about its roots.

Notes:

1. Heidegger, Martin. *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister."* Translated William McNeill and Julia Davis. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996, 84.
2. Sophocles. *Antigone*. Translated Reginald Gibbons and Charles Segal. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
3. Krell, David Ferrell. *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing of God*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005, 385.
4. Harrison, R. B. *Hölderlin and Greek Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, 163-4.
5. Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Essays and Letters on Theory*. Edited Thomas Pfau. Albany: State University of New York, 1988, 122.
6. Derrida criticizes speculative dialectics for saying that the crypt can still be incorporated into the system. "Crypt—one would have said, of the transcendental or the repressed, of the unthought or the excluded—that organizes the ground to which it does not belong." Derrida, Jacques. *Glas*. Translated John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, 166.
7. Fenves, Peter. "Measure for Measure: Hölderlin and the Place of Philosophy." Edited Aris Fioretos. *The Solid Letter: Readings of Friedrich Hölderlin*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 34.
8. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, 89.
9. Ibid., 102.
10. Nancy, Jean-Luc. "The Calculation of the Poet." Edited Aris Fioretos. *The Solid Letter: Readings of Friedrich Hölderlin*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 46, 85.
11. Steiner, George. *Antigones: How the Antigone Legend has Endured in Western Literature, Art, and Thought*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, 76-77.
12. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, 55.
13. Ibid., 149.
14. Ibid., 111.
15. Lernout, Geert. *The Poet as Thinker: Hölderlin in France*. Columbia: Camden House, Inc., 1994, 55.
16. Gosetti-Ferencei, Jennifer Anna. *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Toward a New Poetics of Dasein*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004, 188.
17. Fóti, Véronique M. *Epochal Discordance: Hölderlin's Philosophy of Tragedy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006. qtd. 81; 104.

18. Hölderlin, Friedrich. "The Death of Empedocles." Translated Michael Hamburger. Oxford: Anvil Press Poetry Ltd., 2004, 406-407, 440-441.
19. Krell, David Ferrell. *Lunar Voices: Of Tragedy, Fiction, and Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, 49.
20. Constantine, David. *Hölderlin*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, 131-152.
21. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, 52.
22. Ibid., 105.
23. Fóti, Véronique M. *Heidegger and the Poets: Poiesis/Sophia/Techne*. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992, 73.
24. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, 149-150.
25. Ibid., 152.
26. Szondi, Peter. *An Essay on the Tragic*. Translated Paul Fleming. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 13.
27. Nancy, "The Calculation of the Poet," 64.
28. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister,"* 20.
29. Ibid., 167.
30. Ibid., 143, 162.
31. Ibid., 127, 131.
32. Ibid., 79-81.
33. Ibid., 34.
34. Ibid., 52.
35. Heidegger, Martin. "The Self-Assertion of the German University." Edited Richard Wolin. *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993, 39.
36. Heidegger, "Remembrance," 119-128.
37. May, Herbert G. and Bruce Metzger, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Luke 22:19; I Corinthians 11:24; Revelation 1:5, 2:8.
38. Sophocles, *Antigone*, 1060-1086.
39. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister,"* 40, 48.

40. Ibid., 77.
41. Ibid., 54.
42. Ibid., 105.
43. Ibid., 158.
44. Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 241.
45. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister,"* 7.
46. Warminsky, Andrzej. "Monstrous History: Heidegger Reading Hölderlin." Edited Aris Fioretos. *The Solid Letter: Readings of Friedrich Hölderlin*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, 210.
47. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister,"* 80.
48. Bambach, Charles. *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, 266.
49. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister,"* 55, 65.
50. Ibid., 82.
51. Ibid., 70.
52. Ibid., 165.
53. Ibid., 128.
54. Ibid., 137-138.
55. Ibid., 8-9.
56. Ibid., 128.
57. Ibid., 6.
58. Ibid., 134.
59. Heidegger, Martin. "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," Translated Keith Hoeller. *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*. New York: Humanity Books, 2000, 61-64.
60. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister,"* 72, 103.
61. Ibid., 77.
62. Ibid., 63-67.
63. Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated Stephen Halliwell. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, 1452a23-b13.

64. Ibid., 1452a2-5, 1456a18-20.

65. Brogan, Walter A. *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, 107.

66. Heidegger, Martin. "On the Essence and Concept of F ? si ? in Aristotle's *Physics B, I*." Translated Thomas Scheehan. Edited William McNeill. *Pathmarks*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 227.

67. Ibid., 203.

68. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister,"* 72.

69. Brogan, *Heidegger and Aristotle*, 55.

70. Ibid., 101.

71. Heidegger, Martin. *Parmenides*. Translated André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992, 101-102.

72. Ibid., 117.

73. Torno, Timothy. *Finding Time: Reading for Temporality in Hölderlin and Heidegger*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1995, 119, 125.

74. Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of F ? si ? in Aristotle's *Physics B, I*," 229.

75. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister,"* 52.

76. Patricia Curd, ed. *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*. Translated Richard D. McKirahan, Jr. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996, 37, Fragment 79.

77. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 18.

Preferred citation: Nichols, David. 2009. Antigone's Autochthonous Voice: Echoes in Sophocles, Hölderlin, and Heidegger. In: *Time, Memory, and Cultural Change*, ed. S. Dempsey and D. Nichols, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference Proceedings, Vol. 25.