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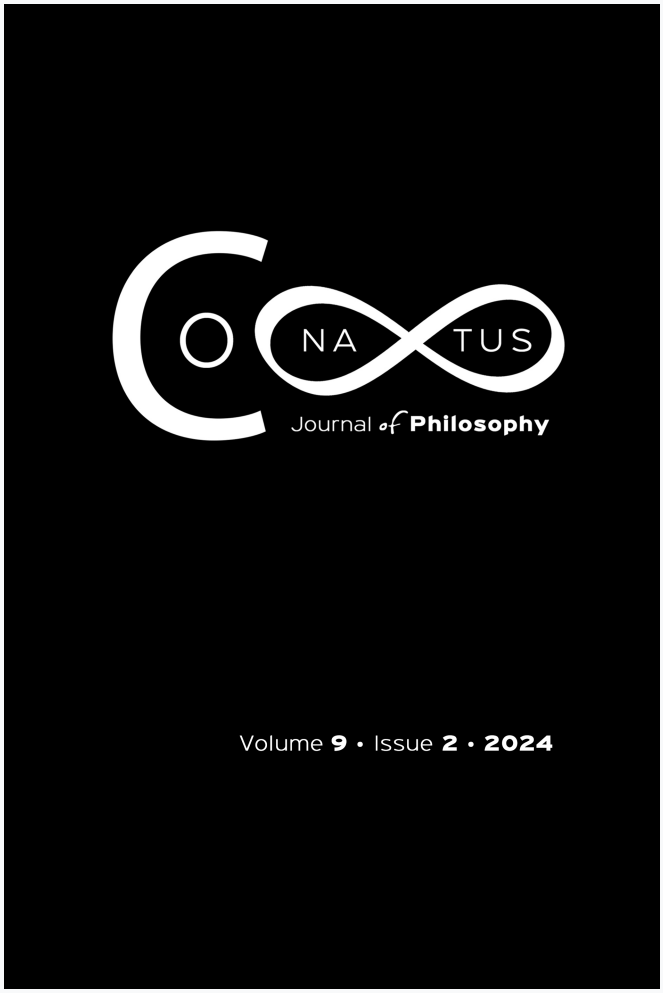

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Werner Marx and Martin Heidegger: What "Measure" for a Post-metaphysical Ethics?

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Abstract

German philosopher Martin Heidegger's later thought is significant because of his attention to the meaning of "truth" (alētheia) and its connection to Protagoras's thesis of anthrōpon metron ("of all things man is the measure..."), which Heidegger elevates to the "highest principle" of philosophy. Philosopher Werner Marx concurs with Heidegger that our time faces the "age of technology" as the completion of the Western tradition of metaphysics. With the "end of philosophy" in this sense, we stand to inaugurate "a new beginning" in thinking without reliance on the principles and standards that have their provenance in the tradition from ancient Greek philosophy onward to late European modernity. For Marx, this elicits the possibility of a non-metaphysical ethics, hence the question of "measure" that he engages in connection with Heidegger's later thinking. However, it is problematic that Marx engages Schelling's reflections on the essence of human freedom to articulate a possibility of measure. Here Marx's reflections are engaged by considering his motivation and the thought of Schelling, Nietzsche, Heidegger, as well as the historical context of the twentieth century, all of which constrain Marx's normative objective. Heidegger's engagement of Schelling and Kant to elucidate the problem of human freedom raises questions whether Marx's proposal for a measure "on this earth" can achieve the goal of a foundation for a post-metaphysical ethics.

Keywords: *Werner Marx; Martin Heidegger; ethics; measure; thinking*

Where have the days of Tobias gone,' Rainer Maria Rilke asks sorrowfully in the Second Duino Elegy. Are those days forever gone, the poet wonders, when man was blessed with the immediacy and simplicity of speech that were the marks of Tobias, the simple one? Can we latecomers in a long cultural process ever hope to find our way back to such an immediacy and simplicity and thereby become again truly creative, or as the Greeks said *poietic*?
Werner Marx, "Heidegger's New Conception of Philosophy" (Winter, 1955)

I. Introduction: Heidegger's elevation of Protagoras's anthropon metron ("measure")

"Of all things the measure is man: of those that are, that they are; and of those that are not, that they are not."[1] It is well known among students of philosophy – especially those engaged in disputations concerning the legitimacy of moral relativism and moral skepticism – that the sophist Protagoras (c. 490-420 BCE) championed this ostensibly relativist and conventionalist "thesis," "theorem," or "doctrine" of "measure" – called for short the *anthropon metron* or *homo mensura* (measure with reference to the human being) – in a work on "Truth" (*Alētheia*) that is no longer extant. Both Plato (in the *Theaetetus* and *Protagoras*) and Aristotle (in *Metaphysics*, Γ5) subjected this thesis to critique.[2] The thesis is said to be "a striking and allusive claim" of truth uttered in the context of intellectual or specifically rhetorical debate, insofar as Protagoras is situated (polemically) among the sophists of that time, the philosophical validity of the thesis thereby depreciated and rendered dubious.[3] As a thesis uttered in a setting of public performance and display of rhetorical skill in argumentation (where the task is to win the argument irrespective of truth – i.e., "making the weaker argument the stronger"[4]), the statement is perhaps intentionally ambiguous and provocative. Its meaning is by no means immediately clear and, therefore, subject to philosophical interrogation since Plato's time.

If engaged as a matter of epistemology (as represented in Plato's *Theaetetus*, 152a), as Mauro Bonazzi reminds, the thesis seems to ex-

[1] Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152a.

[2] See, e.g., Jan Woleński, "Aletheia in Greek thought until Aristotle," *Annals of Pure and Applied Logic* 127 (2004): 339-360.

[3] Mauro Bonazzi, "Protagoras," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (Fall 2023 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/protagoras/.

[4] See, e.g., Alexander Sesonske, "To Make the Weaker Argument Defeat the Stronger," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6, no. 3 (1968): 217-231.

press an empiricist postulate (thus epistemological relativism) that makes each individual the judge of truth, such that one's sensuous intuition, i.e., sensory perception, measures the truth of reality (what is real, what is "being," what is not real, what is "not being") in contrast to falsehood, i.e., being mistaken about that reality and thereby having a false opinion (*pseudodoxos*) rather than knowledge (*epistemē*). If engaged as a matter of ethics, similarly, the thesis seems to express an individualist approach to moral or value judgment (thus moral relativism) and, thereby, issues a moral relativist postulate that each individual is the judge of right and wrong, good and bad, action. Thus, each individual is presumed capable of "good judgment" (*euboulia*) in practical matters that concern human conduct.

Many who believe in the possibility of a universally valid truth (thus moral universalism) readily challenge the validity of Protagoras's thesis. Jako M. Lozar, e.g., observes that it has the "notoriety" of being a "relativistic threat to philosophical endeavor,"[5] given philosophy's quest for universally valid truth. Thus, Lozar observes, "what Socrates/Plato reads from the *anthropon metron* in Protagoras, is his grounding of knowledge of perception."[6] Given an epistemological relativist reading, then, at *Theaetetus* 161d "Plato claims that Protagoras' perception-based knowledge is and remains in the clutches of *doxa* [opinion]: 'Well, I was delighted with his general statement of the theory that a thing is for any individual what it seems to him to be.'" Plato's concern here, of course, is with the criterion of knowledge (*epistemē*), since for him knowledge is infallible, and opinion (possibly fallible) cannot be knowledge *per se*. But, there is for Plato a further problem with Protagoras's thesis:

> Probably the most important aspect of Plato's Protagoras interpretation, far more important than the grudge against perception and *doxa* as the building blocks of knowledge, is the ontological exposition of the core insight of Protagoras' statement, namely the primacy of becoming [over being].[7]

Thus, on the foregoing lines of reasoning, the philosophical challenge of Protagoras's thesis broadens from one of only epistemology to one

[5] Jako M. Lozar, "A Short History of Protagoras' Philosophy," *Synthesis Philosophica* 65 (2018): 251-262.

[6] Ibid., 254. See here Plato, *Theaetetus*, 160d.

[7] Lozar, 254.

of epistemology and ontology, i.e., on the possibility of knowledge of being. This is the focus of Aristotle's subsequent critique of the doctrine of *anthropon metron*.

In his lectures from the summer semester of 1931 at the University of Freiburg, Martin Heidegger accounted for the early Greek philosophical confrontation with Protagoras's "theorem" (*Satz*). For Heidegger, Protagoras's theorem is of great importance inasmuch as it occupies an outstanding place in the debates about the fundamental questions of ancient philosophy.[8] In fact, Heidegger emphasizes that one must be careful to distinguish (difficult though it be) between what is Protagoras's own opinion and what Plato adds and develops in his interpretation of the *anthropon metron*. Protagoras's meaning is by no means immediately clear. In particular, Heidegger questions the approach to the theorem that places Protagoras in an epistemological school (thus Protagoras supposedly an advocate of epistemological relativism or epistemological skepticism). Interpreting Protagoras in this way presupposes a prior and questionable philosophical comportment: "because if only what and how it [something] appears *to everyone* is true, then of course a universally valid, objective truth is not possible."[9]

This leads to Aristotle, whose engagement with Protagoras's thesis concerns what it implies in view of the principle of non-contradiction. As Aristotle puts it in *Metaphysics*,

> [...] if all contradictory predications of the same subject at the same time are true, clearly all things will be one. For if it is equally possible either to affirm or deny anything of anything, the same thing will be a trireme and a wall and a man; which is what necessarily follows for those who hold the theory of Protagoras.[10]

At 1008a Aristotle goes further, asserting much more controversially that, "it is not necessary to affirm or to deny a statement," and this

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[8] Martin Heidegger, "§20. Die Wirklichkeit des Wahrnehmbaren und der Wahrnehmungsvermögens," a) Das Problem des Wahrnehmbaren und der Satz des Protagoras," *Aristoteles, Metaphyik θ 1-5: Von Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft*, Gesamtausgabe Band 33 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981).

[9] Heidegger, 198; emphasis added.

[10] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Γ5, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge: Harvard University Press & London: William Heinemman Ltd., 1933/1989), 1007b19ff.

> applies to all terms [...] [Again,] either (a) the negation will be true wherever the affirmation is true, and the affirmation will be true wherever the negation is true, or (b) the negation will be true wherever the assertion is true, but the assertion will not always be true where the negation is true.[11]

Aristotle is concerned that Protagoras's thesis permits contradiction of *opinions* and does not provide a way to distinguish true from false propositions, thus eliminating the possibility of knowledge. Presumably, Aristotle is concerned philosophically to make room for a universally valid, objective truth, while also allowing for the apodictic truth of individual propositions without contradiction.

Heidegger finds the foregoing complaints about Protagoras's theorem something of "a cheap argument" (*ein billiges Argumentation*). The assumption – that only what and how something appears *to everyone* is true – Heidegger says, is not justified at all:

> One forgets to ask whether the real essence of truth does not consist in the fact that it does not apply to everyone – and that truths for everyone are the most insignificant thing that can be found in the field of truth.[12]

Accordingly, Heidegger continues, "But if you think about it and ask questions like this, then the possibility arises that the much-derided sentence of Protagoras [...] contains a great truth, and ultimately one of the most fundamental truths [...]."[13] Heidegger's assessment thus counters that of both Plato and Aristotle. Concerning Aristotle's interpretive stance, Heidegger remarks,

> the Aristotelian discussion in *Metaphysics* Γ5 clearly reveals that there was something more and more essential behind this teaching, something that is all too easily put aside in the general judgment due to the outstanding importance of Plato and Aristotle.[14]

Critical of both philosophers, Heidegger nonetheless concludes:

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[11] Ibid., 1008a.

[12] Heidegger, 198.

[13] Ibid., 198.

[14] Ibid.; italics added.

> Understood in this way, Protagoras' sentence takes on a completely new meaning, namely the one that elevates it to the highest principle of all philosophizing. 'The measure of all things is man, of those [things] that exist, that they are [real, have being], of those [things] that do not exist, that they are not [real, not being].' A principle [*Ein Grundsatz*] – not as a cheap statement that can be used at will, but as the approach and application of the question in which *man finds himself the foundation* [*den Grund*] *of his being* [*seienes Wesen*]. But this questioning is the basic act of all philosophizing" [*die Grundhandlung alles Philosophieren*].[15]

Heidegger also engages Protagoras's theorem in his confrontation with Nietzsche, and there he accounts for Aristotle's position in particular insofar as it references the principle of non-contradiction as cited above.[16] He reminds,

> If we recall here that in Greek philosophy before Plato another thinker, namely Protagoras, was teaching that man was the measure of all things, it appears as if all metaphysics – not just modern metaphysics – is in fact built on the standard-giving role of man within beings as a whole.[17]

He eventually expresses a caveat to this historical fact:

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[15] Heidegger, 203. It is noteworthy that Casadebaig, "Heidegger and Protagoras," opines that Heidegger's interpretation "could be used against him, in order to question his thought as a modern kind of sophistry." For a more comprehensive discussion of Protagoras's thought, see Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), especially Chapter 7, "The 'Human-Measure' Fragment," 117ff. Schiappa (on page 119) comments that, "The weight of the evidence suggests [...] that Protagoras was fundamentally concerned with the *judgments* of humans, in which perception plays only a part." He adds further (on page 120) that Protagoras may have been contending either or both of two judgments: "that humans are the measure of 'how' things are (essence)" or "that humans are the measure that determines 'that' they are (existence)" – although he reminds (pages 120-121), "A clear conceptualization of essence cannot be documented prior to Plato's notion of the Forms [...]."

[16] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume Three: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics; Volume Four: Nihilism*, ed. David Ferrel Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982/1987).

[17] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 86. See Anthony Chimankpan Ojimba, "Nietzsche's Intellectual Integrity and Metaphysical Comfort," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy,* 9, no. 1 (2024): 109-130, https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.34391.

> If metaphysics is the truth concerning beings as a whole, certainly man too belongs within them. It will then be admitted that man assumes a special role in metaphysics inasmuch as he seeks, develops, grounds, defends, and passes on metaphysical knowledge – and also distorts it. But that still does not give us the right to consider him the measure of all things as well, to characterize him as the center of all being, and establish him as master of all beings.[18]

Heidegger then references the connection among Protagoras, Descartes, and Nietzsche with regard to metaphysical positions, since there are those who would make the three equivalent in some manner. But, he comments, "Nevertheless, Protagoras' fragment says something very different from the import of Descartes' principle" even as it says something different from "Nietzsche's doctrine of man as lawgiver of the world..."[19] He then provides his own "translation" of Protagoras's theorem, thus:

> Of all 'things' [of those 'things,' namely, which man has about him for us, customarily and even continually – *chrēmata, chrēsthai*], the [respective] man is the measure, of things that are present, that they are *thus* present as they come to presence, but of those things to which coming to presence is denied, that they do not come to presence.[20]

For Heidegger, Protagoras is concerned with the *being* of things, what "comes to presence of itself in the purview of man," man (*anthropos*) understood as "the respective man" – "I and you and he and she, respectively." But, Heidegger cautions against reading here the Cartesian "ego," against "unwittingly inserting representations of man as 'subject' into it," for this would be "a fatal illusion."[21] Setting aside this reference to the Cartesian concept of 'ego,' Heidegger clarifies that Protagoras is saying that,

> Man perceives what is present within the radius of his perception. What is present is from the outset maintained as

[18] Ibid., 86.

[19] Ibid., 90.

[20] Ibid., 91. Heidegger cites the text as received from Sextus Empiricus, thus: *Pantōn chrēmatōn metron estin anthrōpos, tōn men ontōn hōs esti, tōn de mē ontōn hōs ouk estin.*

[21] Ibid., 92-93.

> such in a realm of accessibility, because it is a realm of unconcealment. The perception of what is present is grounded on its lingering within the realm of unconcealment.[22]

Protagoras's *anthropon metron* thus is essential as the highest principle insofar as it discloses the fact that the human being has access to this realm of unconcealment, i.e., *alētheia*, and thus participates in the process of unconcealment of beings in their manner of being.

Protagoras is saying something fundamental that neither Plato nor Aristotle recalled (though presumably Aristotle saw that Protagoras's theorem involved something more important) and that even modern philosophy has neglected in its metaphysical positions:

> We today, and many generations before us, have long forgotten the realm of the unconcealment of beings, although we continually take it for granted. We actually think that a being becomes accessible when an 'I' as subject represents an object. As if the open region within whose openness something is made accessible as object *for* a subject, and accessibility itself, which can be penetrated and experienced, did not already have to reign here as well! The Greeks, although their knowledge of it was indeterminate enough, nonetheless knew about the unconcealment in which the being comes to presence and which the being brings in tow, as it were... By lingering in the realm of the unconcealed, man belongs in a fixed radius of things present to him. His belonging in this radius at the same time assumes a barrier against what is not present. Thus, here is where the self of man is defined as the respective 'I'; namely, by its *restriction* to the surrounding unconcealed.[23]

Unconcealment, *alētheia*/*Unverborgenheit*, is for Heidegger the essential meaning of "truth" such as Protagoras had insight in writing his *Alētheia*, thus *alētheia* as *a-lētheia* (*a-* here being privative). Unconcealment and concealment (*Verborgenheit*) are both involved in the human recognition of the manner in which things are present or not present; and, this recognition is what enables the human as one who "measures" being and not being (the latter in the two senses of *me on,* "relative non-being," and *ouk on,* "absolute non-being").

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[22] Ibid., 93.

[23] Ibid., 93.

For Protagoras to say 'the man is the measure' is also to imply, Heidegger remarks, that one recognizes "a concealment of being" and admits to "an inability to decide about presence and absence, about the outward aspect of beings pure and simple." The respective man "faces" what is unconcealed and in that sense "knows" what he claims to know; and, in the case of what remains concealed, Protagoras can say, "περὶ μὲν θεῶν οὐκ ἔχω εἰδέναι, οὔθ' ὡς εἰσὶν οὔθ' ὡς οὐκ εἰσὶν οὔθ' ὁποῖοί τινες ἰδέαν" – which Heidegger offers in translation as: "To know [in a Greek sense this means to 'face' what is unconcealed] something about the gods I am of course unable, neither that they are, nor that they are not, nor how they are in their outward aspect."[24] Why so? This seems a misplaced and errant claim in view of Greek ancestral custom with its mythology of the gods. But, Protagoras explains: "πολλὰ γὰρ τὰ κωλύοντα εἰδέναι ἥ τ' ἀδηλότης καὶ βραχὺς ὢν ὁ βίος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου" – "for many are the things which prevent beings as such from being perceived; both the not-openness [that is, the concealment] of beings and also the brevity of the history of man."

This, for Heidegger, is "a prudent remark" that shows Protagoras's thoughtfulness, that he is a serious thinker, and not someone to be depreciated in the way Plato disparages the sophists, hence Socrates (*Theaetetus*, 152b) saying (as Heidegger quotes), "εἰκὸς μέντοι σοφὸν ἄνδρα μὴ ληρεῖν;" – "It is to be presumed that he [Protagoras], as a thoughtful man [in his words involving man as *metron pantōn chrēmatōn*], was not simply talking foolishly." Thus, Heidegger adopts a positive comportment towards Protagoras's theorem insofar as it contains "a great truth, and ultimately one of the most fundamental truths" that is accessible to "one who philosophizes." One who philosophizes has to question about the meaning of truth (*alētheia*) as unconcealment first and foremost, since this seems to be the focus of Protagoras's theorem. It is a concern more primordial than the subsequent metaphysically determined understanding of truth as *homoiōsis*, *adaequatio*, correspondence.

Heidegger concludes his discussion of Protagoras's thesis to allow for "a completely new meaning" (*eine ganz neue Bedeutung*), indeed "one that elevates it to the highest principle of all philosophizing" (*die ihn zum obersten Grundsatz alles Philosophieren*).[25] Read differently from the way Plato and Aristotle interpreted it, Protagoras's thesis points to the essential truth that "man finds himself the foundation of his being" (*der Mensch auf den Grund seines Wesens geht*) by himself,

[24] Ibid., 94, citing Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Protagoras B4.

[25] Heidegger, *Aristoteles, Metaphysik θ 1-5*, 203.

in his manner of being positioned as the site, the *topos*, of unconcealment. In short, Protagoras speaks to contemporary philosophy and the effort to find a measure not only for ontology, but also for practical philosophy and normative reasoning in our post-metaphysical setting.

While there is significant philosophical disputation about Protagoras's meaning, the point here is not to rehearse that corpus of philosophical efforts to understand Protagoras's meaning, but rather to observe that classical Greek antiquity debated the idea of "measure" (*metron*) and sought to clarify its locus. That locus could be, as with Protagoras, in the individual human being, or, as with Plato, only in the infallible knowledge (*epistemé*) of the philosopher and not in variable opinion (*doxa*) of "the many" (*hoi polloi*), or, as with the poets, in "the law of the gods" (*theon nomoi*) of the Greek pantheon that superintended human affairs, even as Protagoras conceded he had no knowledge of the gods.

II. From Nietzsche's Fürsprache to Heidegger's call for thinking

The problem of measure for both knowledge and morality continued to be conceptualized variously over the course of the Western philosophical tradition. Consistent with one or another commitment to theory (*theoria*) and practical reason (*praxis*), ranking philosophers from Greek antiquity onward to late modernity have articulated what Heidegger called "standard metaphysical positions" (metaphysics *qua* "first philosophy," *proté philosophia*) and a derivative or systematically dependent "special metaphysics" (*metaphusica specialis*), i.e., political philosophy and ethics. Throughout this historical presentation of positions, the foundationalist enterprise has included appeal to principles or standards to ground practical rationality or moral philosophy.

The problem of measure, especially for normative ethics in its quest for foundational principles of morality, reached its highest *problematique* in the nineteenth century with Friedrich Nietzsche's "anti-metaphysical" pronouncement that 'God is dead' ('*Gott ist tot*').[26] Accounting for his "pronouncement" in the sense of a "fore-speaking" (*Fürsprache*) or "heralding" of what is coming in our day, we find Nietzsche telling us in Book Three of *The Gay Science* (*Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*) that ours is a time, as it were, of "the madman" who utters frantic and desperate words as he seeks "God" but cannot find him:

[26] Nietzsche declares both that 'God is dead' and that 'we [humans] have killed him.' (See Book Three, 108, 125; Book V, 343, of Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josephine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 109, 119, & 199-200).

"Haven't you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, 'I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!'" And, after hearing him, amused non-believers asked apparently rhetorical questions, laughing at his ridiculous queries. But then,

> The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Where is God?' he cried; 'I'll tell you! We have killed him – you and I! We are all his murderers [...]. Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!'

The point here is not merely with concern for the Christian God, but with all gods; for, as Nietzsche says in *The Antichrist* (19), "Two thousand years have come and gone – and not a single new god!" Then, in Book Five of *The Gay Science*, titled "We Fearless Ones" (343), we who are witnesses to our plight such as Nietzsche describes it are placed into some puzzlement; for, it seems that if 'God is dead' is a true proposition, then we should be *cheerful* in the face of this incomparable feat. The logic is palpable: The proposition is indeed *true*, in which case, assuming some unspoken principle of morality that is normatively guiding here, we *should* be cheerful rather than remorseful about the great and incomparable deed of deicide. Specifically, Nietzsche would have us understand that, in the Western context of religious belief, we who are witnesses to "the greatest recent event" are to understand that, "the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable," and that, from his historical position in the late nineteenth century, this event "is already starting to cast its first shadow over Europe." Even so, he remarks,

> Even less may one suppose many to know at all *what* this event really means – and, now that this faith has been undermined, how much must collapse because it was built on this faith, leaned on it, had grown into it – for example, our entire European morality.[27]

This collapse of superstructure and foundation may not be a matter of cheer, however; for, Nietzsche declares,

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[27] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, "Book Five: We Fearless Ones, No. 343," 199.

> This long, dense succession of demolition, destruction, downfall, upheaval that now stands ahead: who would guess enough of it today to play the teacher and herald of this monstrous logic of horror, the prophet of deep darkness and an eclipse of the sun the like of which has probably never before existed on earth?[28]

This event stands ahead, he says, as a contradiction between yesterday and tomorrow – the yesterday of religious faiths and the tomorrow of total negation of foundation and superstructure. Yet, there is anticipation here, for (to follow the metaphor) an eclipse will pass to yet again disclose "the sun" that was hidden for a time, in which case there is yet a promise of a new god, despite the flight of the gods.

The question, of course, is: For whom does this "tomorrow" present a logic of horror? For those who are believers in the Christian God and all other gods? Yes. For those such as Nietzsche, who heralds this event, or for those who identify as "free spirits" in consequence of the death of God? No. Nietzsche is clear: "Indeed, at hearing the news that 'the old god is dead', we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel illuminated by a new dawn.'"[29] Nietzsche as herald of the death of God (understood as the demise of the epistemological and normative authority of all that has been "transcendent" and "foundational" *measures* in the history of the Western tradition) leads us into the twentieth century faced with the task of thinking at the end of philosophy, as Heidegger put it.[30] Heidegger asked two related questions that are essentially connected, pertinent to our present inquiry, and responsive to Western humanity's plight:

> a. What does it mean that philosophy in the present age has entered its final stage?
> b. What task is reserved for thinking at the end of philosophy?[31]

Heidegger clarifies that, "The end of philosophy is the place, that place in which the whole of philosophy's history is gathered in its most ex-

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[28] Ibid., 199

[29] Ibid., 199.

[30] Heidegger delivered a lecture in 1964 with the title "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking." See Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

[31] Ibid., 55.

treme possibility."[32] This most extreme possibility, Heidegger tells us, is accomplished in Nietzsche's thought (as well as that of Karl Marx), i.e., in Nietzsche's reversal of metaphysics as well as in the dissolution of philosophy in the twentieth century into "the technologized sciences." Thus our "today" is situated in a tension between the final epoch of metaphysics and its reversal as Nietzsche articulates it. This historical situation Heidegger characterizes thus:

> The end of philosophy proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world. The end of philosophy means: the beginning of the world civilization based upon Western European thinking.[33]

Said otherwise, the processes of European colonialism and subsequent globalization have assured the Westernization – the "technologization" – of "the Orient" despite the modes of thought indigenous to these peoples (Confucianism in China; Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, in South Asia; Islam in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia).

This opens up a task for "thinking" (*Denken*, not to say 'philosophy') that neither metaphysics nor the technologized sciences may undertake, even while granting that this thinking is "preparatory" and not foundational. Specifically, Heidegger continues: "We are thinking of the possibility that the world civilization which is just now beginning might one day overcome the technological-scientific-industrial character as the sole criterion of man's world sojourn."[34] This is a palpably indicative statement. Referencing Heidegger's "end of philosophy" proposition, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy captured the sense of the present situation: "the West is the sunset. It is therefore both an achievement and an anguish. The West will have been such a powerful machine of accomplishment [...] [but] It will have been just as much the anguish of an entire world delivered to its own destruction."[35] Nancy adds, seeking to realize itself Western philosophy has become "the fulfillment of its knowledge *as technoscience*, the fulfillment of its duty *as humanism*

[32] Ibid., 57.

[33] Ibid., 59.

[34] Ibid., 60.

[35] Jean-LucNancy, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," trans. Benedetta Todaro, *Philosophy World Democracy*, July 29, 2021, https://www.philosophy-world-democracy.org/other-beginning/the-end-of-philosophyNancy.

and the fulfillment of its desire *as globalization*."[36] Conspicuous in its absence from this representation of the Western project is all reference to the divine, whether in the Western or Oriental conception of religious thought, hence technoscience, humanism, and globalization are all evidence for Nietzsche's anticipation of the character of our time.

III. From Heidegger to Werner Marx: The problem of a post-metaphysical measure

Werner Marx (following Heidegger and the poet Friedrich Hölderlin, whom Heidegger cites for his insight into this "destitute time" in which humanity experiences "the flight of the gods"[37]), is concerned to find "the saving power" that is salvific of humanity by confronting the loss of measure in the age of nihilism and planetary technology – "a result of the increasing estrangement and loss of meaning in the Western world."[38] He accounts for Heidegger's concern for the "highest danger" confronting humanity today "in the essence ruling in technology," hence the need to find a way to "dwell poetically on the earth."[39] He opines:

> A 'rescue' from the danger predominant today seems conceivable only if there is a possibility for even those who are no longer able to derive their concept of measure from a heavenly realm to be capable of an experience that would afford them some kind of measure here on earth.[40]

He expresses his hope:

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[36] Ibid., italics added.

[37] Martin Heidegger, "III: What are Poets For?" *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). Heidegger cites Hölderlin's Elegy, "Bread and Wine," Heidegger commenting (p. 89) that, "For Hölderlin's historical experience, the appearance and sacrificial death of Christ mark the beginning of the end of the day of the gods. Night is falling... The world's night is spreading its darkness. The era is defined by the god's failure to arrive, by the 'default of God.'...The default of God means that no god any longer gathers men and things unto himself, visibly and unequivocally, and by such gathering disposes the world's history and man's sojourn in it. The default of God forebodes something even grimmer, however. Not only have the gods and the god fled, but the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world's history." Hölderlin and Nietzsche are in this way consonant.

[38] Werner Marx, *Is There a Measure on Earth? Foundations for a Nonmetaphysical Ethics*, trans. Thomas J. Nenon and Reginald Lilly (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Marx, *Is There a Measure on Earth?*, 13.

[39] Werner Marx, "Ethos and Mortality: Reflections on Nonrational Elements in the Formation of Personal Virtues," *Dialectica* 39, no. 4 (1985): 329-338.

[40] Marx, *Is There a Measure*, 4.

> [...] the historical situation of the philosophers of today is characterized by the fact that they are 'condemned' to think in a space between 'tradition' and 'another beginning.' Perhaps a reflection on this domain of movement of our present philosophical endeavors may inaugurate a meditation on the possibility of a 'non-metaphysical' ethics.[41]

Marx's quest for a measure to be found "here on earth" is thereby already oriented to the *post*-metaphysical.

The question of measure has its provenance in Hölderlin's poem "*In lieblicher Bläue*." Therein Hölderlin himself answered that there is no measure on earth ("*Es gibt keines*"). In contrast to Hölderlin, Marx answers in the affirmative that there is a measure to be found on earth, once we have thought further what it is that concerned the later Heidegger, even as he himself accounted for the early Heidegger's phenomenological concern for the phenomenon of death and its significance for normative ethics. It is with his attention to the fact of human mortality, that humans are first and foremost mortal beings, that Marx hopes for a normatively grounding experience to motivate human conduct even as he does not articulate a system of ethics or issue principles in the usual sense given in moral philosophy.

Taking his cue from Heidegger,[42] whose *Being and Time* addressed the question of the finitude of human knowledge as well as the fact of death as the uttermost possibility that belongs to each human being, Marx seeks a measure that speaks to us in light of the inevitability of human mortality. He asks, "What are the essential characteristics of a measure as such, if it is no longer tied to 'heavenly beings' as the

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[41] Werner Marx, *Towards a Phenomenological Ethics: Ethos and the Life-World* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992).

[42] See here also Werner Marx, "Heidegger's New Conception of Philosophy: The Second Phase of 'Existentialism,'" *Social Research* 22, no. 4 (1955): 451-474. As Thomas Nenon, "Ethics between Tradition and a New Beginning," *Research in Phenomenology* 27 (1997): 199-207, has opined, Marx discloses a sense of "nostalgia" for what has been lost to us in our day, consequent to the dominance of technoscience. He recalls the pre-Socratic "*Philomythoi*" of the ancient Greek world of human engagements (as characterized by Aristotle in the first book of the *Metaphysics*), with "thinking" in that time "simple, immediate, and creative" in "philosophizing poems," with attention to "divine presence" and "the deeds of the gods." Heidegger's thought is thereby significant and guiding for Marx insofar as he sees Heidegger's thinking linked to that of the *Philomythoi* so as to articulate not only a new "Essence of Man" along with the new "Essence of Being" but also to work to overcome the age of technology. Marx (p. 469) opines that it is through his turn to Hölderlin that Heidegger's "thinking and speaking assumed a character akin to that of poetic composing."

absolute sources of normative measures?"[43] Given Heidegger's effort in thinking to deconstruct the Western philosophical tradition, to overcome its dispensations or epochs of metaphysics and retrieve an "originary" (*ursprüngliche, anfängliche*) thinking from Greek antiquity that yet speaks to our present, Marx directs his question to Heidegger. This is a reasonable move, given Heidegger's assurance that there yet remains a task for thinking despite the end of philosophy *qua* metaphysics.[44]

While concerned with the possibility of a measure to be found here on earth, Marx is not intent upon the task of articulating a full-fledged normative ethics.[45] He is asking only about "foundations," notwithstanding the post-metaphysical displacement of foundational and systematic discourse *per se*.[46] Rather than seek a foundation in the sense pursued in practical rationality, i.e., in deliberative reason, Marx turns to human experience (*Erfahrung*) to ask, "whether the experience of an encounter with one's own mortality could not so transform a person's ethos that the virtues of justice, compassion and neighborly love [*la dignité humaine*] could ensue." Such an encounter is "non-rational" (not an appeal to deliberative reason) and instead one of what he calls *intuitive* reason. The way to such experience is for him through the mood (*Gestimmtheit*) of dread (*l'angoisse, der Angst*).

Marx asserts that dread is both empowering and transformative by first destroying "the mood of indifference" and moving an individual to experience other moods that are self-transforming, especially and most importantly that of compassion (*Mitleidenkönnen*). His reference to the virtues recalls Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* and considers the possibility of arriving at a new *ethos* that is neither a "purposive rationality" (e.g., such as that articulated by Max Weber) nor a practical reason that prescribes rules (principles, maxims) of conduct (e.g., such as that of Kant and deontological ethics). Marx's central question is posed thus:

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[43] Marx, *Is There a Measue*, 6.

[44] See Werner Marx, "Thought and Issue in Heidegger," *Research in Phenomenology* 77 (1977): 12-30.

[45] Thomas Nenon comments that in his final two books Marx "presents neither a normative ethics as a set of prescribed or forbidden actions, nor does he concern himself with a metaethical analysis of the necessary conditions for normative ethics." Like Heidegger who did not write an "ethics" in the sense of a systematic moral philosophy, Marx preferred to use the word '*ethos*' rather than 'ethics' and in that way try to distinguish himself from the tradition's articulation of normative ethics. See here Nenon.

[46] See, e.g., from a neo-Hegelian context, Richard D. Winfield, *Overcoming Foundations: Studies in Systematic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) and his "The Route to Foundation-Free Systematic Philosophy," *The Philosophical Forum* 15, no. 3 (1984): 323-343.

> How can a person who lives in an indifferent mood with regard to his fellow man become a virtuous person, i.e., a just and compassionate person or even one moved by neighborly love?[47]

An answer to this question is a function of phenomenological description initially, in which case Marx recalls Heidegger's elucidation of this phenomenon. But, he seeks to advance beyond Heidegger inasmuch as dread may disclose "our ethical comportment" – a question Heidegger did not engage directly.

Problematic for Marx is that in our time "the mood of indifference usually determines all of man's actions." Differentiating his conception of the mood of dread from that of Heidegger,[48] Marx claims that the mood of dread can (1) "disclose to man his own mortality," (2) "destroy that mood of indifference," and (3) "send him on a pathway of self-transforming moods" – moods that enable nearness to others (thus awareness of the other as neighbor) and "the emotional attitude of solidarity," both conducive to the production and exercise of virtues such as justice and compassion.[49] Indifference as a mood is problematic for ethical existence insofar as it lacks "attunement" to the good and the bad (combining here "state of mind," *die Stimmung*, and "being in the mood," *die Befindlichkeit*).[50] The task for a new *ethos*, then, is to "unsettle" this everyday indifference. This can happen, Marx opines, when an individual "suddenly becomes aware of his own mortality" – not in the biological sense of cessation of bodily function (i.e., clinical death), but in the phenomenological sense that understands the world of human engagements as a life-world (*Lebenswelt*), thus death a loss of the individual person's "being-in-the-world."

Dread is disclosive of one's existential situation in this way. It affects one's emotional disposition and discloses both one's *isolation* and *help-*

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[47] Marx, "Ethos and Mortality," 330.

[48] Marx seems to think that dread as Heidegger understands is a mood essential for the possibility of authentic (*eigentlich*) existence and that such authentic existence does not conduce to regard for "one's fellow man." I find this claim problematic in view of Heidegger's attention to what *ethos* is to be drawn from one such as Sophocles. See here my "The Poetic Task of 'Becoming Homely: Heidegger Reading Hölderlin Reading Sophocles," *Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2021): 93-108, and "Preserving the Ethos: Heidegger and Sophocles' *Antigone*," *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (2006): 441-471.

[49] Marx, "Ethos and Mortality," 331-332.

[50] See here Bruce Baugh, "Heidegger on *Befindlichkeit*," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 20, no. 2 (1989/2014): 124-135.

lessness in the face of one's own mortality, which is always "mine" alone to experience. Thereby, an engagement with dread draws one towards other humans with an attunement of compassion and concern for the *difference* between the good/right and the bad/wrong in human conduct, thus with *inclination* to choose the good/right over the bad/wrong. Of course, Marx assumes it is possible to take up the thinking of "the later Heidegger" to articulate a "new determination of the essence of measure as well as the measure itself." He assumes further that any formulation of a measure involves "a set of standards" concerned with "responsible action" such as one may find in a normative ethics. One must ask: What does this entail, given that Heidegger himself did not articulate either a normative ethics or a metaethics (even though he commented on Kant's practical reason and Kant's concern for the metaphysics of morals in relation to the essence of human freedom)?

To answer in short: Following Heidegger in his formally indicative manner of thinking, one must consider what is the task of thinking in view of a new beginning. But, surprisingly, Marx turns to the thought of Friedrich Schelling for his conceptualization of the essence of measure. This is a move Heidegger himself would likely not take, especially in view of his engagement of Schelling's treatise on the essence of human freedom and his own discussion of the essence of human freedom with explicit reference to *Kant's* thinking.[51] Marx recognizes that this turn to Schelling involves a conceptual connection to the metaphysical tradition, even as he attempts to think non-metaphysically. Schelling's thinking, he admits, retains "Christological tendencies," in which case

> *God's character as absolute* in his 'absolute freedom', his 'absolute reason', and, above all, his 'absolute will' taken as 'the willing of divine love', *is the decisive measure for man*, for it serves as a point of orientation for man throughout the ongoing history of redemption, shows him the difference between good and evil, and provides a motivation for preferring good to evil.[52]

Clearly, for Heidegger, such an appeal for the elucidation of a measure "on this earth" will not meet the challenge that follows from the

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[51] Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985). Also see Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Human Freedom: An Introduction to Philosophy,* trans. Ted Sadler (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2002).

[52] Marx, *Is There a Measure*, 18; italics added.

flight of the gods, including the demotion of the Christian God from transcendent authority for law and morality. Heidegger reminds that Schelling's "treatise" is in fact a set of "inquiries" – "not a presentation and communication of results and assertions or simply the characterization of a standpoint."[53] From this vantage of interpretation, then, it would be incorrect to find in Schelling's appeal to absolute freedom, absolute reason, or absolute will – all with their Christological tendencies – the basis of a measure "on this earth." Heidegger would have us understand that for Schelling the

> nature of man is in question; that is, one is *questioning beyond man to that which is more essential and powerful than he himself*: freedom, not as an addition and attribute of the human will, but rather as the nature of true Being, as the nature of the ground for beings as a whole.[54]

Schelling, in short, remains metaphysical in his inquiry even as he seeks to step beyond, even as his inquiry legitimates pantheism rather than Christological theism, this pantheism at the center of Schelling's deliberation about the origin of good and evil.

In speaking of "nature," Schelling accounts for the strife between the universal and the individual, thus between "the universal will" and "self-will" present even in the animal – which "is bound to the universal of the species." Thus, Heidegger remarks,

> We know that the project of the movement of becoming of creating creatures is oriented to the ongoing task of explicating the metaphysical possibility of man. This possibility in its turn is to show in what the conditions of the inner possibility of evil consist.[55]

Thus, Schelling asserts, "In man there exists the whole power of the principle of darkness and, in him, too, the whole force of light. In him there are both centers – the deepest pit and the highest heaven." This is an expression of the human being's metaphysical becoming. For the human being in its freedom, in Schelling's view, "freedom is the faculty of good and evil. Accordingly, evil proclaims itself as a position of will of its own, indeed as *a way of being free* in the sense of *being a self in*

[53] Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, 9; italics added.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 140.

terms of its own essential law" (emphasis added). This "ownmost" essential law is capable of a negation of the universal will and of "placing itself in dominance."[56] In other words, one can say that it is through this essential law of the particular will, of the self-will in strife with the universal will, that the human finds him/herself expressing in conduct that which is called evil, but understood metaphysically as this strife of universal and particular.

What is the consequence of this strife? Heidegger opines: "Negation now transposes all forces in such a way that they turn against nature and creatures. The consequence of this is the ruin of beings." The jointure of being (inclusive of all reality) can be turned into the ruin of beings through the negation of the universal will that the human chooses. Heidegger observes,

> Thus, the dubious advantage is reserved for man of sinking beneath the animal, whereas the animal is not capable of reversing the principles [of light and darkness]. And [the animal] is not able to do this since the striving of the ground never attains the illumination of self-knowledge because in the animal the ground never reaches either the innermost depth of longing or the highest scope of spirit.[57]

Thus, the animal is not "self-knowing," whereas *the human is self-knowing*, having self-consciousness, this self-knowledge involving the particularity of will that positions the human being to contend with the universal will. The plight of humanity in the twenty-first century is thus, on this view, due to a negation that the human self-will positions into dominance over the universal will of "the Spirit" (in Schelling's terms).

How, and from where, then, one may ask, is one to find a measure "on the earth" that somehow is clarified with regard to the thinking of Schelling? Where is there a measure to be found if, as part of human metaphysical becoming, the human "can turn his own essential constituency around, turn the jointure of Being of his existence into dis-jointure" and participate in the ruination of beings? Marx recognizes that, in Schelling's account, the human is not placed before the possibility of choosing between *either* good *or* evil but instead has the "'real' freedom for *both* good *and* evil."[58] He, therefore, asks:

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[56] Ibid., 143.

[57] Ibid., 144.

[58] Marx, *Is There a Measure*, 19.

> What meaning can the normative measure that provides an absolute orientation for man have if there is a 'principle of darkness' in God's essence? How can human freedom as the universal will imitate this divine love if evil essentially enters into this dimension of freedom and can determine it?[59]

It seems, on Marx's reading of Schelling, that if the human is "cognizant of the final purpose in the history of salvation," then s/he can free him/herself "for goodness by taking up the struggle against evil within the 'moral dimension' of freedom."[60] Yet, in all of this, there remains a fundamental ambiguity of what counts as freedom for goodness and struggle against evil, since precisely here the measure is missing – except insofar as one moves from pantheism with the presence of light and dark principles to theism with the absolute goodness of God and, hence, the absence of any dark principle whatsoever in God's creative acts.

Notwithstanding, and despite his concern for a non-metaphysical ethics, Marx sees the value of Schelling's onto-theo-logy for a formulation of the essence of measure, thus:

> A measure is a 'normative standard' that as such contains the demand of an 'ought'. As something already valid prior to any derivation of measure, its mode of Being is one of 'transcendence'. At the same time, it has the 'power' to determine man as 'immanently', and herein lies the decisive significance of a measure, its 'binding obligation'. It also has the power to endure as 'self-same' in various situations and thus has the traits of being 'manifest' and 'univocal.'[61]

Thus stated, Marx's conceptualization of the essence of measure is hardly innovative, since it includes the traditional elements – a standard that, *qua* normative, involves the assertion of a binding obligation (thus the formulation including the 'ought,' whether in the affirmative mode of 'ought to do' or the negative mode of 'ought not to do') – and has univocal (rather than plurivocal) meaning, its provenance that of a transcendent authority that thereby obligates a human being to conduct him/herself accordingly (thus immanently). In this respect, the definition is by no means controversial. But, of course, the definition is entirely for-

[59] Ibid., 19.

[60] Ibid., 19.

[61] Ibid., 20.

mal – it does not stipulate the precise principle of action in the way in which Aristotle's relative mean between excess and deficiency does, or in the way in which Mill's principle of utility, Kant's categorical imperative, or Rawls's difference principles do. Hence, Marx has to ask, as he does, "whether the traditional essential traits of measure [...] can still hold for us?" In particular, Marx asks whether there are "secularized versions" that include love of neighbor, compassion, and justice.[62]

By 'love' Marx means not only the Judeo-Christian love of neighbor (*agape*) but also "fraternity, friendship, and social solidarity." This, for him, is a matter of lived experience with reference to attunements (*Gestimmtheiten*). Having raised the question of a 'secularized' possibility of measure, Marx once more turns to Heidegger, though asserting that the elements of measure that originate in the onto-theo-logical tradition "still seem to be valid." But, clearly, if the tradition of metaphysics has arrived at its completion – which proposition he accepts – then the dependent and derivative standards of practical rationality likewise are at an end, i.e., defunct in their normative authority, despite their continuing presence in moral and religious discourse. Marx thus wavers between finding these elements of measure "seemingly valid" and acknowledging that they have "lost much of their effectiveness today; they have fallen into ruin." Presumably, in this time of waning standards of practice, we may yet rely on the traditional definition of the essence of measure while finding a way to express and appropriate the standards of practice without appeal to the element of transcendence in particular. As a Jew himself, of course, Marx is aware of the force of the post-World War II question: "Where was God in Auschwitz?" – a question that has all the force of Nietzsche's lament at the death of God.

Heidegger's later thinking presents us with a manifest constraint on Marx's aspiration for a normative measure. Even though Heidegger engaged Schelling's treatise on the essence of human freedom in 1936, one cannot consider this commentary without accounting for his reflections on the essence of human freedom with reference to Kant in a lecture course in the summer semester of 1930 at the University of Freiburg. There, from the outset, Heidegger acknowledges the "hopeless fragility" of the human being, insofar as humanity is faced with "history with its fates," "the ineluctable powerlessness" of "fortunes," and the "inexorable transitoriness" of human history. Yet, he accounts for the historical conceptualization of both *negative* freedom and *positive* freedom.

[62] Ibid., 20-21.

The former is understood as autonomy in the sense of "independence from world (nature and history) and God," i.e., "world and God as what *do not bind* the one who is free."[63] This negative concept is, for Heidegger, inadequate without accounting for positive freedom, since "it is just this *positive concept of freedom* which *in the first instance* marks out the domain of the problem of freedom..."[64] Notwithstanding, both together elicit the question of the *essence* of human freedom, in which case Heidegger offers three elements of what he means by 'essence': "1. what-being, what it (freedom) as such is. 2. how this what-being is in itself possible. 3. where the ground of this possibility lies."[65] Accordingly, Heidegger clarifies further what is salient to the problem of essence in relation to the problem of freedom:

> If we proceed according to the negative concept, then with the question concerning the essence of human freedom we are inquiring into the essence of man's independence from world and God. We do not want to decide whether this or that individual is independent of this or that world, of this or that God, but we seek the essence of the independence of man as such from world and God as such. If we wish to grasp the essence of this relationship, of this independence, we must inquire into the essence of man, and also into the essence of world and God.[66]

This moves the question from the particular – the problem of human freedom – to the general/universal, viz., "the totality of what is," which is inclusive of "world" (nature and history) and "God" (the totality of divinity and not this or that God/god of a given religious tradition), and, given the totality of what is, to the problem of being in general.

For Heidegger, the "first breakthrough" to the problem of human freedom is to be found in Kant's practical philosophy; for, here the problem of freedom – which concerns the totality of what is – is connected to "the fundamental problems of metaphysics," i.e., to the problems of ontology, theology, onto-theo-logy, fundamental ontology, and, thus, the problem of the meaning of being in general. It is here, then, *and not with Schelling*, that the breakthrough is compel-

[63] Heidegger, *The Essence of Human Freedom*, 6.

[64] Ibid., 7.

[65] Ibid., 8.

[66] Ibid., 9.

ling.[67] Marx would have had to engage Heidegger's thought in this context of encounter with Kant if he hoped to find a non-metaphysical – or better said, *post*-metaphysical – measure for the differentiation of good/evil and right/wrong. Marx, however, does not appreciate the significance of Heidegger's assessment of Kant's "breakthrough." His search for a measure on this earth has no substantive discussion of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* or the *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals*. In fact, given his preference for Schelling's conception of the essence of human freedom, Marx's reference to Heidegger's 1930 lecture course on the essence of human freedom is wholly dismissive.[68] Yet, for Heidegger, it is Kant rather than Schelling who provides the guiding orientation to interrogate the problem of human freedom.

Kant breaks through the problem by linking metaphysics and morals and thus the problem of being and human freedom. Thus, Heidegger writes, "if we hold to Kant's perspective, this means inquiring into the essence of human freedom, after what freedom is in its inner possibility and ground."[69] For Kant, this means linking *transcendental* freedom and *practical* freedom, in which case Heidegger clarifies:

> The self-determination of action as self-legislation is a self-origination of a state in the specific domain of the human activity of a rational being. Autonomy [practical freedom] is a kind of absolute spontaneity [transcendental freedom], i.e., the latter delimits the universal essence of the former. Only on the basis of this essence as absolute spontaneity is autonomy possible.[70]

Indeed,

> if we really inquire into the essence of freedom, we stand within this question concerning beings as such. According-

[67] Heidegger, ibid., 21, does say: "But we do not regard Kant as the absolute truth, only as the occasion and impetus for the full unfolding of the problem."

[68] Marx, *Is There a Measure*, 161, writes: "This whole lecture exhibits a general tendency to deal with freedom as an 'ontological problem' [...]. The 'miracle of freedom' (Kant) is not what moves Heidegger there, but rather the 'unfathomable or wondrous' fact that man exists as that being 'in whose Being and essential ground the understanding of Being takes place'. Since for Heidegger the understanding of the Being of beings implies an understanding of the truth of beings in their Being and of the truth of the Being of beings as a whole, the question concerning the essence of freedom turns into a question concerning the essence of truth [...]."

[69] Heidegger, *The Essence of Human Freedom*, 22.

[70] Ibid., 18.

> ly, the question concerning the essence of human freedom is necessarily built into the question of what beings as such properly are.[71]

In short, Marx, to be coordinate with Heidegger's interrogation of the problem of measure, would have to accept, rather than dismiss, the urgency of questioning concerning the meaning of being in general, without which one cannot comprehend human freedom in its "inner possibility" and "ground."

IV. National socialist ideology contra Marx's hope for attunement

Again, notable in Marx's approach is the lack of appeal to deliberative reason for the possibility of a transformative *ethos*. But, if intuitive reason is the pathway to a non-metaphysical ethics that deliberative reason could not achieve, then Marx's appeal to the positive goal of attunement to neighborly love and compassion may not suffice for the intended transformation. As Thomas Nenon reminds,

> appeals to Christian compassion, human reason, the dignity of each autonomous individual, or the necessary progress of history, of community as *Sittlichkeit* had not proven powerful enough to prevent the brutal barbarism [of National Socialism] that was the result of that other, darker side of modernity, technology without reason or the recognition of human freedom and dignity.[72]

It seems, then, that the task of thinking of a measure "on this earth" returns us to Heidegger's elevation of Protagoras's theorem and to the acknowledgement of what Heidegger does – to denominate it "the highest principle" (*obersten Grundsatz*) of all philosophizing and to ask what must ensue from appropriating this principle for a *post*-metaphysical *ethos*.

But, in doing so, following Edward Schiappa here, one cannot ignore the work of those such as Eric A. Havelock who sees the pre-Socratics involved in a "conflict between two contrasting ways of thinking about and understanding the world" – a "conflict between the common sense of the general populace," i.e., "the mythic-poetic tradition" and, on the other hand, "the more rationalistic tradition represented

[71] Ibid., 23.

[72] Nenon, 205.

by certain Sophists and philosophers."[73] The former was "situational," even "empathetic," Schiappa suggests, while the latter was "abstract," with critique of the mythic-poetic because of its error: "The world described by the poets and perpetuated by the general populace was one of constant change and contradiction where people and things were constantly 'becoming' something different."[74] If such was the concern of Parmenides in his day, then it makes sense to say Protagoras's thesis was contraposed to the Eleatic doctrine to allow for the "truth" to be found in ways in which the general populace encountered and described their individuated and individually measured reality. Thus, Shiappa opines, "Protagoras' clash with Parmenides struck at the very heart of the Eleatics' monism and distrust of common sense."[75]

Common sense allows for the relativity of individual sensory perception, such that the propositional truth of a judgment becomes determinate in the moment of individual sensory perception and is, one may say, indeterminate prior to that moment. Thus, the wind may "be" *neither* warm *nor* cool in and of itself (one may say, it is *indeterminate* in its flow). But, it may *feel* warm to one person and cool to another (in both cases, the perception is made *determinate* in the individual respective sensory perception), in which case the one person asserts the proposition 'the wind is warm today' while the other person asserts the proposition 'the wind is cool today', both propositions being "true" (*qua homoiosis, adaequatio*, correspondence) with reference to the respective sensory perception. In this sense, Protagoras's *anthropon metron* allows for the relativity of individual sensory perception and the truth of individual judgment of perception consistent with the given subjective determination. Empirically this is not problematic, since there is any number of factors and variables that can and do influence a perception that involves sensory intuition. However, the more important question here is whether the same relativity applies in the case of *moral judgment* – i.e., that, a proposition that asserts a moral judgment is "true" for this or that person notwithstanding a contradictory assertion of moral judgment on the same matter from another person.

Recall that Marx is concerned to identify a non-metaphysical *ethos* that allows for the virtues of justice, compassion, and neighborly love (including friendship, fraternity, and solidarity) as a corrective to indifference, and do so with reference to awareness of a common human

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[73] Schiappa, 123. See here Eric A. Havelock, "The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics," *Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy,* ed. Kevin Robb (La Salle: Hegeler Institute, 1983), 7-82.

[74] Schiappa, 124.

[75] Ibid., 125.

mortality. But, in the modern era of sovereign nation-states, as Marx himself understood given his Jewish heritage and experience with the rise of National Socialism in Germany, the fact is that an individual can manifest compassion, neighborly love, fraternity, and solidarity in a way that is restricted to his or her understanding of lawful citizenship in a given nation-state and, therefore, limiting the domain of care or solicitude for others. Even Nazis expressed these "virtues" among themselves while excluding others who did not subscribe to their Aryan master race ideology. Nazis made what they considered moral or legal judgments and considered them to be "true" vis-à-vis (relative to) the *Führerprinzip*[76] that governed their thoughts, words, and deeds. This, too, can be explained as a function of their intuitive reason – no deliberative reason involved at all – even granting that this intuitive reason was "infused with a sadistic passion" (to use Raphael Gross's words here to emphasize the degree of sentiment at work in the expression of Nazi morality).

Gross, e.g., argues that the law in Nazi Germany had both a "moral foundation" and an "underlying Nazi moral agenda."[77] "Nazi ideology," he opines, "was based on 'moral' notions such as honor, loyalty, comradeship, and decency" as essential to the racial purity of "the German *Volk*" – "the Aryan community of blood," the *Volksgemeinschaft* as *Blutsgemeinschaft*. Wolfgang Bialas similarly argues that the Nazis maintained an "'ethnic conscience' which restricted moral obligations to members of their own race community [...]. The universal ethics of humanism got turned upside down and replaced with the particularistic selective racial ethics."[78] Nazi "ethics" expressed "moral feelings" or moral sentiments, without appealing to principles or maxims such as obtain in deliberative reason. Obvious to anyone reading these terms, in the Nazi context "the moral feelings at play here – the shared sentiments about what constitutes vice and virtue – are drastically different [from] [...] one adhering to more traditional values commonly tied to Western, Judeo-Christian tradition."[79]

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[76] See George Boutlas, "Führerprinzip or 'I Was Following Orders' in Jus in Bello Era," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2023): 77-93.

[77] Raphael Gross, "Guilt, Shame, Anger, Indignation," trans. Joel Golb, in *The Law in Nazi Germany*, ed. Alan E. Steinweis and Robert D. Rachlin (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 89-103. Gross developed his thoughts earlier in his *Anständig geblieben: Nationalsozialistische Moral* (Frankfurt, 2010). See here also Raphael Gross, "'Loyalty' in National Socialism: A Contribution to the Moral History of the National Socialist Period," *History of European Ideas* 33, no. 4 (2007): 488-503.

[78] Wolfgang Bialas, "Nazi Ethics: Perpetrators with a Clear Conscience," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 27, no. 1 (2013): 3-25.

[79] Gross, "Guilt, Shame, Anger, Indignation," 90.

In fact, it is reasonable to argue that the whole of Nazi Germany's "anti-Semitic legal corpus," inclusive of the Nuremberg laws, had its normative provenance in the typology of moral sentiments Gross identifies. Those sentiments formed a populist solidarity of "enthusiastic devotion" to Hitler and "a wish to enjoy Aryan sociability free from Jewish contact,"[80] thus what was construed as an "existential struggle" for racial and ethnic purification.[81] But, it was more than this. As Berel Lang put it, there was also the element of imagination involved, to the detriment of the European Jews:

> *Should* a human imagination be able to conceive of the possibility that it is being willed out of existence, not for something it has done or been, but only because of its existence? An imagination which fully anticipated this possibility would, it seems, be that of the agent, not of the victim [...].[82]

Such was the consciousness of the Nazi agent. Lang reminds,

> The sense of individual agency or identity that is a condition of moral consciousness cannot be imposed from the outside; still more pertinently, no one acts or speaks in moral terms as a universal consciousness. If the history of ethics has any single lesson to teach, it is that the status of moral agents is determined by their own places in space and time: they act always, if not only, as individuals and always and only in a context.[83]

In this reflection, we may say, Lang returns us to Protagoras, i.e., to the principle that acknowledges the individuality of judgment, and recalls the task of having to discern where, and with whom, the truth of moral judgment resides. In short, for the devoted Nazi, there could be no compassion, no neighborliness, no recognition of the human dignity of the Jew *qua* Jew, no "racial defilement" (*Rassenschande*) permissible within the Third Reich; for, the shared sentiments of Nazis prohibited that, not as a prescribed rule (until the expression of positive law in the Nuremberg laws) but as an ideologically motivated *moral sentiment*

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[80] Ibid., 93-94.

[81] See Asaf Kedar, *National Socialism Before Nazism: Friedrich Naumann and Theodor Fritsch, 1890-1914* (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2010).

[82] Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

[83] Ibid., xx.

first and foremost, even if one grants as motivation a warranted fear of reprisal from Nazi authorities. This led inevitably to the overwhelming majority of the German people appealing to ignorance of the death camps and Nazi genocide, hence their denial of personal responsibility. As Holocaust survivor Primo Levi put it,

> Shutting his mouth, his eyes and his ears, he built for himself the illusion of not knowing, hence not being an accomplice to the things taking place in front of his very door.[84]

Levi's acute observation links essentially to the effort since Kant and the Enlightenment to articulate a universalist (as opposed to a relativist) ethics. For, as Lang put it, the Enlightenment posited an "abstract, ahistorical self" as "an ideal of humanity," which, he argues, "entails in its converse appearance the implication that historical difference (and all the more, an historical definition of identity) will be suspect." [85] But, more than that suspicion,

> the principle of universal reason or judgment implies that the grounds on which such distinctions are based may be – should be – challenged: not only can everyone be judged by one criterion, but the consequences of being included or excluded by it are, in terms of the principle of universalizability, without limits.[86]

Accordingly, Lang concludes,

> The 'difference' of the Jews was judged by the Nazis to be fundamental – and with this decision, there was nothing to inhibit the decision subsequently made about what followed from that judgment; there was no 'reason' *not* to destroy the difference.[87]

Universalist reason, the appeal to a universal principle of morality, was no obstacle to Nazi genocide of the Jew as Jew, in his difference as Jew irrespective of any claim of humanity and the dignity due.

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[84] Primo Levi, *The Reawakening* (New York: Collier, 1965).

[85] Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide*, 194-195.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

V. Concluding reflections: Between Hölderlin and Marx

Hölderlin wrote that there is no measure to be found on this earth after the flight of the gods. Marx believed otherwise, holding out hope for a measure to be found relative to Schelling's onto-theo-logy and his conceptualization of the divine ground of human freedom. Heidegger engaged Schelling's treatise on the essence of human freedom, but ultimately found the first breakthrough to an understanding of the essence of human freedom in Kant's practical philosophy, in the concept of autonomy *qua* self-legislation linked to transcendental freedom *qua* absolute spontaneity. Even so, Heidegger left for others the task of elucidating an ethics that would be potentially efficacious in the human confrontation with the planetary rule of technology. Heidegger could merely point ahead and work to prepare the ground and till the soil, hence the notion of his "formally indicative" thinking that leaves to us the task of thinking a post-metaphysical *ethos*.

The task is to listen to Hölderlin as well as Sophocles if we are to discern that *ethos* and to disclose what it means to dwell poetically on this earth.[88] A post-metaphysical ethics cannot be found in the calculative thinking (*rechnendes Denken*) that Heidegger finds contributing to planetary danger and an existential crisis for global humanity. Ours is not a time for "technological fixes" but a time for a reorientation in our thinking, for what Heidegger finds in Hölderlin's poetic thinking (*Dichtung*) to be a "thoughtful reflection" (*Nachdenken*). As Heidegger put it, "What threatens man in his very nature is the view that technological production puts the world in order [...]."[89] On the contrary, it puts the whole of the life-world in disorder due to the inherent contradictions of technoscience and the existential threats that arise therefrom, including transformation of the essence of being human. It will not do, during the time of the flight of the gods, for humanity to be in flight from the thinking that is necessary but that is other than that of calculative thinking. Hölderlin as poet is essential to the task of thinking. Hence, if there is a measure to be found "on this earth," a measure to be made efficacious for both thinking and human conduct, it cannot be disclosed without examining what this poet of rank has to say, even though he himself said "*Es gibt keine*." It is to Hölderlin, then, and not to Schelling, that Marx

[88] Norman Kenneth Swazo, "The Poetic Task of 'Becoming Homely': Heidegger Reading Hölderlin Reading Sophocles," *Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2021): 91-108.

[89] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language Thought*, 14.

should have turned for that measure that is at once a measure for thinking and doing.

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