

# Recovering Play: On the Relationship Between Leisure and Authenticity in Heidegger's Thought

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*This paper attempts to reconcile, what appear to be, two conflicting accounts of authenticity in Heidegger's thought. Authenticity in Being and Time (1927) is commonly interpreted in 'existentialist' terms as willful commitment and resoluteness (Entschlossenheit) in the face of one's own death but, by the late 1930's, is reintroduced in terms of Gelassenheit, as a non-willful openness that "lets beings be." By employing Heidegger's conception of authentic historicity (Geschichtlichkeit), understood as the retrieval of Dasein's past, and drawing on his writings on Hölderlin in the 1930's and 1940's, I suggest that the ancient interpretation of leisure and festivity may play an important role in unifying these conflicting accounts. Genuine leisure, interpreted as a form of play (Spiel), frees us from inauthentic busy-ness and gives us an opening to face the abyssal nature of our own being and the mystery that "beings are" in the first place. To this end, leisure re-connects us with wonder (Erstaunen) as the original temperament of Western thought. In leisurely wonder, the authentic self does not seek purposive mastery and control over beings but calmly accepts the unsettledness of being and is, as a result, allowed into the original openness or space of play of time (Zeit-Spiel-Raum) that lets beings emerge-into-presence on their own terms.*

*Have leisure and know that I am God*

Psalm lxx, 11

One of the more widespread assumptions during the nineteenth century was that new forms of technology, with machines replacing humans, would decrease work and increase leisure. Philosophers like John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx envisioned a leisure society where material abundance would reduce the need for busy workdays and free up time for more authentic—creative and intellectual—pursuits.<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, it did not quite work out this way. Identifying which combination of social, religious, and economic factors increased busy-ness and impeded the possibility of leisure—whether it was the emerging influence of the Protestant work ethic or the growth of mechanized forms of mass production, which required accelerated rates of consumption of goods and services—is beyond the scope of this paper. It is enough to say, as Heidegger does, that we have been thrown (*geworfen*) into the technological world and, as a result, we invariably fall prey to its assumptions and habits, with its emphasis on speed, efficiency, usefulness, and productivity. As a result, we have become fettered to busy-ness. How-

ever, looking back just a few hundred years to pre-industrial Europe reveals an entirely different picture concerning the relationship between work and leisure. Thomas Anderson explains the difference:

In Medieval Europe, holidays, holy days, took up one-third of the year in England, almost five months of the year in Spain—even for peasants. Although work was from sunrise to sunset, it was casual, able to be interrupted for a chat with a friend, a long lunch, a visit to the pub or the fishing hole—none of which a modern factory office worker dare do. The fact is that American workers of the mid-twentieth century with their 40 hour week were just catching up with medieval counterparts; and American workers at the end of this century have fallen behind their medieval ancestors! Our incredible growth in technology has not resulted in a corresponding increase in leisure.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I explore this contemporary loss of leisure in light of Heidegger's conception of authenticity. I suggest that the pre-modern conception of leisure may provide a link that unifies, what appears to be, conflicting versions of authenticity. Authenticity in *Being and Time* (1927) is commonly interpreted in terms of willful commitment and resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) in the face of the anxiety of one's own death but is, by the late 1930's, reintroduced in terms of *Gelassenheit*, as a non-willful openness to the enigmatic emerging-forth of beings, an openness that "lets beings be." I argue that in *Being and Time*, authenticity is not, at its deepest level, to be interpreted in 'existentialist' terms, as a way of being that individualizes the self, that severs ties to the world and allows the subject to confront her own finitude and take future action on the basis of this confrontation. For Heidegger, to be authentic is to own up to one's being *as a whole*, and this means coming to grips not only with Dasein's future (being-towards-death) but also with the communal past (being-towards-the-beginning). Authenticity, in this regard, involves a retrieval or repetition (*Wiederholung*) of Dasein's beginnings, what Heidegger calls authentic historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*), referring to the cultural possibilities that belong to our shared history but have largely been forgotten, covered over by the conformist assumptions and prejudices of modern life.

By focusing on Heidegger's writings on Hölderlin in the 1930's and 1940's, I suggest that the ancient interpretation of leisure and festivity

may play an important role in this authentic retrieval. Genuine leisure, understood as a form of play (*Spiel*) frees us from busy-ness, from the stabilizing routines and practices of the technological work-world and gives us an opening to face the abyssal nature of our own being and the mystery that “*beings are*” in the first place. To this end, leisure re-connects us with wonder (*Erstaunen*) as the original temperament of Western thought. In leisurely wonder, the authentic self does not seek to instrumentally control and master beings but calmly accepts the unsettledness of being and is, as a result, allowed into the awesome openness or clearing (*Lichtung*) that lets beings emerge-into-presence on their own terms.

### *I. Technology, Busy-ness, and Authentic Historicity*

According to Heidegger, the history of philosophy, beginning with Plato and Aristotle, is the history of metaphysics, a type of reflection “concerned with the essence of *what is*.”<sup>3</sup> Metaphysics attempts to rationally identify the being of beings (*Seiendes*), where being is interpreted in terms of substance—the enduring properties or ‘what-ness’ of beings, properties that are constantly present.<sup>4</sup> For Heidegger, this type of reflection marks the dawn of forgetfulness of a more fundamental experience of being (*Sein*). The metaphysical tradition has forgotten that being was originally grasped not in terms of knowing the static properties of beings but as the way in which beings manifest or emerge-forth out of concealment.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as Heidegger points out, it is only on the basis of beings emerging-forth in a particular way—i.e. *as* a tree, a number, a cultural artifact, or a human being—that philosophers can even ask the question of what something is. Throughout Western history, this metaphysical assumption prevailed, where substance has been interpreted in different epochs in terms of *ideas* (Plato), *energeia* (Aristotle), *ens creatum* by God (Christendom), *res cogitans* (Descartes), and today, as empirical resources, a standing reserve (*Bestand*) of raw materials that can be efficiently mastered and controlled by calculative reason.

The technological age, in this regard, is violent because it sets upon (*stellt*) nature and forces beings to show up or reveal themselves in *only one way*, as an object-region available for use. This violent aspect of modern technology is what distinguishes our epoch from the technological disclosure of previous eras. In pre-modern culture, according to Heidegger, technology was not understood in terms of challenging (*Herausfordern*) available beings. The Greeks, for instance, understood technology in terms of the original

sense of *technē*, of craftsmanship that releases beings, letting beings emerge-forth on their own terms. The Greek craftsman is one who builds the old wooden bridge that lets ‘the river run its course’.<sup>6</sup> The epoch of modern technology, in contrast, builds the hydroelectric dam that forces the river into water power.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, modern technology is tyrannical insofar as it enframes (*Ge-stell*) the totality of beings and blocks off or conceals any other way for beings to reveal themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Caught up in the technological worldview, our lives have become busier, sped up with machines and institutions that allow us to consume, produce, and exchange beings at increasingly faster rates. Exposing the downside of technological busy-ness is an enduring theme in Heidegger’s thought. As early as his 1921-22 Freiburg lecture course on Aristotle, Heidegger was questioning the “untrammled, explosive rushing” of everyday existence, identifying unrest (*die Unruhe*) as one of the central characteristics of inauthenticity, referred to in these early lectures as ruinance (*die Ruinanz*).<sup>9</sup> A ruinant life, for Heidegger, is the life of anyone and everyone (*das Man*), a life where one “has no time” because one is endlessly consuming and managing ‘what is’—gadgets, information, resources, others.<sup>10</sup> Heidegger expands on this critique of modern life in his *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936-38) when he identifies acceleration—understood as the aspect of life shaped by “the mechanical increase of technical ‘speeds’” and the “mania for what is surprising, for what immediately sweeps [us] away and impresses [us]”—as one of the fundamental symptoms of the technological age.<sup>11</sup> However, the suggestion that authenticity requires a temperament of slowness or tranquility is potentially misleading if we look at Heidegger’s own remarks on tranquility (*Ruhe*) in *Being and Time*, where everyday busy-ness is itself understood as tranquilizing (*beruhigend*).

Again, for Heidegger, it is important to remember that human existence (*Dasein*) is not to be interpreted through the lens of traditional metaphysics, where beings—including the self—are understood in terms of substance. The substantial characteristics of the human being have been interpreted at various times in the West as the immaterial soul, the autonomous mind, and more recently, as the quantifiable, causally determined body. *Dasein* is properly understood not as *a* substantial being—as an encapsulated mind or body—but as a shared, socio-historical existence or happening (*Geschehen*) which opens up a world, a there (*Da*) on the basis of which beings can emerge-forth *as* the very beings that they are. As a communal happening, our current understanding of things is mediated in advance by the fast-paced

technological world that we are thrown into. To this end, we all have an inveterate tendency to fall into a pre-given, public understanding that is comforting and familiar to the extent that we are doing and believing what everyone else does and believes. This tendency towards inauthentic public conformism is, according to Heidegger, tranquilizing and is characterized in the modern age by three overlapping aspects, idle talk (*Gerede*), curiosity (*Neugier*), and ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*).

Heidegger describes idle talk as the way language or discourse (*Rede*) manifests itself in our everyday acts and practices. On this view, idle talk already “understands everything” because it is caught up in and adopts today’s public interpretations, assumptions and prejudices.<sup>12</sup> In our turbo-capitalist world, for instance, idle talk has a tendency to circulate around the “very newest thing,” the latest celebrity and political gossip, the fastest gadgets, the most productive and efficient worker, and interprets what is newest, fastest, and most efficient in a positive light. Idle talk dovetails into curiosity, which captures the ways in which modern existence is restless, excitedly moving, traveling, and consuming, as we search for the latest adventure and public novelty. In our restlessness, we are, all too often, “everywhere and nowhere” as we are pulled apart by competing commitments and distractions.<sup>13</sup> And, because we are thrown into a common world, the things that we gossip about and are distracted by are the same things that anyone and everyone gossips about. This means that our everyday beliefs and choices are ambiguous. Techno-scientific Dasein has already figured everything out, deciding in advance how we will interpret things and what we will believe in. Ambiguity, therefore, reveals how it has become increasingly difficult for us to come to grips with the unsettling, enigmatic aspects of being.

To be absorbed into the pre-given assumptions of everydayness (*Alltäglichkeit*) is soothing and tempting insofar as it disburdens us from having to face the difficult question of the meaning of our own being and convinces us that our choices and commitments are in “the best of order” because we are doing what everyone else does.<sup>14</sup> Thus, regardless of the fact that we are not calm and composed but “sucked into the turbulence” of *das Man* and convinced to “live at a faster rate,” we are still tranquilized.<sup>15</sup> We are carried away (*mitnehmen*) by the current fads and fashions.<sup>16</sup> In order to address the possibility of an authentic response to public tranquilization we have to first dismantle the popularized, ‘existentialist’, interpretation of Heideggerian authenticity.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger identifies the future as *the* primary temporal dimension of existence, a dimension embodied by our projec-

tion (*Entwurf*) forward into future possibilities. Projection captures the way in which our existence is always ahead-of-itself as we ceaselessly press into already available social roles, practices, and commitments until our greatest ownmost (*eigenst*) possibility, death. As such, the self should not be interpreted as a stable thing with a fixed identity—a wife, a lawyer, or a homeowner—but as a not yet (*noch nicht*), a finite event that is always pressing forward, always on the way. Indeed, we become something, on Heidegger's account, only when we *are* no longer. However, it is because we are tranquilized by everydayness, by the stabilizing assumptions, institutions, and routines of *das Man*, that we remain largely oblivious of the fact that our life, as being-towards-death, is fundamentally unsettled. In everydayness, our relationship to death is inauthentic to the extent that the public world is in denial, covering over a sincere awareness of our own finitude.

Authenticity, on this existentialist reading, depends heavily on Heidegger's notion of anxiety (*Angst*) which is the mood that allegedly individuates us, making us self-determined by severing us from our comforting absorption in *das Man*. Anxiety makes it possible for us to clear-sightedly face the possibility of our own death, to be resolute as we anticipate our end rather than fleeing from it in our public routines. The authentic self is one who accepts anxiety and soberly acknowledges that any future action or decision must ultimately be made against the background of sheer nothingness, of being-towards-death. The ability to willfully disengage oneself from the familiar busy-ness of *das Man* is crucial on this reading of authenticity because “*das Man*’ does not permit us the courage for anxiety in the face of death.”<sup>17</sup> This brand of authenticity has long been criticized for yielding a kind of extreme subjectivism or—as Heidegger's students Karl Löwith and Hans Jonas called it—“*decisionism*,” where the level of commitment to one's own decisions in the face of nihilism is the sole measure of authenticity. The result, as Jonas suggests, is that “decision as such becomes the highest virtue.”<sup>18</sup> I suggest this existentialist interpretation of authenticity overemphasizes individuation and the futurity of existence and overlooks the crucial role that historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) and our having-been-there (*da-gewesen*) play in Heidegger's conception.

In the fifth chapter of the second division of *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims there is a “more radical” conception of authenticity, one that can be understood “in a way that is *more primordial* than in the projection of its authentic existence.”<sup>19</sup> If authenticity involves owning up to one's being *as a whole*, the account must recognize that being-towards-death is “just *one*

of the ends by which Dasein's totality is closed around."

The other 'end', is the 'beginning', the 'birth'. Only that entity which is 'between' birth and death presents the whole we have been seeking. Accordingly the orientation of our analytic has so far remained 'one sided', in spite of all its tendencies toward a consideration of existent being-a-whole and in spite of the genuineness with which authentic and inauthentic being-towards-death have been explicated.<sup>20</sup>

Heidegger refers to coming to grips with the beginning of Dasein as authentic historicity. It involves recovering the historical origins or sources (*Ursprung*) that underlie our current understanding of being, sources that have been largely concealed and covered over by inauthentic busy-ness.<sup>21</sup> In order to properly understand the notion of authentic historicity we must unpack Heidegger's distinction between heritage (*Erbe*) and tradition (*Tradition*).<sup>22</sup>

It is true that anxiety leaves us disoriented by disrupting our familiar ties to the institutions, assumptions, and norms of our tradition. But this does not mean that anxiety results in a solipsistic kind of authenticity, where the individual makes resolute (*entschlossen*) decisions against a background of nothingness. Because we are always already being-in-the-world, any decision or action that we take, whether authentic or inauthentic, is made possible by the historical culture that we are thrown into. Heidegger explains:

Anxiety individualizes Dasein and thus discloses it as '*solus ipse*'. But this existential 'solipsism' is so far from the displacement of putting an isolated subject-thing into the innocuous emptiness of a worldless occurring, that in an extreme sense, what it does is precisely bring Dasein face to face with its world as world, and thus bring it face to face with itself as being-in-the-world.<sup>23</sup>

Dasein—as a historical *way of being*—stretches forward towards death *and* backward towards its beginning, and it is for this reason that anxiety never severs us wholly from *das Man*. Rather, it opens us up to the possibility of retrieving the common heritage (*Erbe*) that our current tradition conceals. Anxiety, on this reading, is not individualizing; it actually opens up a deeper relationship with the world understood in terms of our shared history. Thus, the individualistic reading of authenticity fails to the extent

that it over-emphasizes the self-determinative aspects of our being-towards-death and neglects the other direction of existence, our past, our being-towards-the-beginning.

Authenticity, on this view, has a twofold structure. Initially, it is to be understood in terms of being decisive and steadfast in the face of death. More fundamentally, this decisiveness frees us from traditional assumptions and prejudices that today seek mastery and control over all things and reveals other, more original, historical and cultural possibilities. In this regard, it is helpful to rethink Heidegger's emphasis on courage, decisiveness, and, particularly, resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) in *Being and Time*, a term that, as Joan Stambaugh reminds us, contains within it the literal sense of "letting," "being unlocked," or "being open for something."<sup>24</sup> In his 1941 interpretation of Hölderlin's hymn "Remembrance" (*Andenken*), Heidegger makes this point explicit by revisiting core themes of authenticity, not in terms of heroic resoluteness but in terms of shyness (*Schüchternheit*). For Heidegger, shyness has nothing to do with being cowardly, bashful, or fainthearted. Shyness refers to the "expectant decisiveness to be patient... the courage to go slowly, a courage *decided long ago*."<sup>25</sup> In shyness, the authentic self does not impatiently manipulate things, forcing them to show up in a particular way but rather courageously "sets what is slow and patient on its way."<sup>26</sup> To this end, shyness is a recollection of a more original way of being that is open to beings and "lets beings be." Authentic historicity, in this regard, reminds us that the original temperament of shyness is already ours; it already belongs to the heritage of *das Man*. Authenticity, therefore, ultimately involves a reverence for and repetition (*Wiederholung*) of what has already been handed down to us by our heritage.

The resoluteness which comes back to itself and hands itself down, then becomes the repetition of a possibility of existence that has come back to us. Repeating is handing down explicitly—that is to say, going back into the possibilities of the Dasein that has-been-there.<sup>27</sup>

The question now becomes, what kind of activity—in the wake today's busy preoccupation with beings—lies in our heritage that can free us from traditional prejudices, and can such an activity be retrieved?

I want to suggest that clues might be found in uncovering the original meaning of leisure, an experience that manifests a temperament or mood more original than the dark dispositions of anxiety and boredom that, for



Heidegger, are characteristic of the technological age and signal the total withdrawal of the question of being. This other mood is wonder (*Erstaunen*), and it can be recovered by staying attentive to our heritage. Wonder is a disposition that does not flee from the enigmatic event of being but celebrates it. It is here that Heidegger's notion of authenticity makes contact with the work of the distinguished Thomist philosopher Josef Pieper and his influential analyses of leisure and festivity. This connection is worth exploring in more detail.<sup>28</sup>

## *II. Leisure and Openness to Mystery*

In the summer of 1946 at the University of Münster, Pieper offered a course entitled "Defending Leisure: On Philosophical Education and Intellectual Work." This course led to the 1948 publication of his pioneering work, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture (Musse und Kult)*. In this book, Pieper challenges the modern cult of productivity and busy-ness, where the activity of leisure is interpreted as less important than 'getting things done'. Pieper, like Heidegger, sees workaday busy-ness as an inauthentic way of being, one that remains forever distracted by consuming and producing beings and flees from owning up to the unsettling question of the meaning of one's own life. The worker remains caught up in

the hurly-burly of work-and-nothing-else, in the fine-spun exhausting game of sophisticated phrase-mongering, into incessant 'entertainment' by empty stimulants—in short, into a no man's land which may be quite comfortably furnished, but which has no place for the serenity of intrinsically meaningful activity, for contemplation, and certainly not for festivity.<sup>29</sup>

Retrieving overlooked aspects of our own Greek heritage plays a key role in Pieper's account of authenticity. In Plato's *Symposium*, for instance, Pieper focuses his attention on the character Apollodorus, who before meeting Socrates, was ambitiously caught up in the bustle of the marketplace. "I went about," says Apollodorus, "driven along by events, and thought I was being very busy, while at the same time I was more wretched than anyone."<sup>30</sup> It was Socrates who introduced him to leisure (*skole*), a life that had been freed from workaday ambition and the need for mastery over beings.<sup>31</sup> The Greeks, according to Pieper, had a very different interpreta-

tion of busy-ness and work. These terms were interpreted only negatively. Indeed, the Greeks did not even have a word for work. Rather, “to work” is to be “un-leisurely.”

Literally, the Greek says “we are un-leisurely in order to have leisure.” “To be un-leisurely”—that is the word the Greeks used not only for the daily toil and moil of life, but for the ordinary everyday work. Greek only has the negative, *a-scolia*, just as Latin has *neg-otium*.<sup>32</sup>

Pieper suggests the Greeks would have been confused by our modern emphasis on busy-ness and work because, as Aristotle confirms in the *Politics*, leisure is to be understood as “the centre-point about which everything revolves.”<sup>33</sup> For the Greeks, therefore, the contemporary motto that “one does not work to live; one lives to work” would be absurd. Aristotle reverses this dictum when he says “the goal of [work] is leisure.”<sup>34</sup>

From the modern perspective that privileges busy-ness and productivity, the Greek conception of leisure, according to Pieper, appears as “something wholly fortuitous and strange, without rhyme or reason, and, normally speaking, unseemly: another word for laziness, idleness and sloth.”<sup>35</sup> On this view, hard work represents the cure to one of the seven cardinal sins, the despair of idleness and boredom—which Pieper traces back to the Greek word *acedia*. But leisure is nothing like idleness. Indeed, idleness is the utter absence of leisure.

Idleness, in the old sense of the word, so far from being synonymous with leisure, is more nearly the inner prerequisite which renders leisure impossible: it might be described as the utter absence of leisure, or the very opposite of leisure. . . . Idleness and the incapacity for leisure correspond with one another. Leisure is the contrary of both.<sup>36</sup>

What Pieper is suggesting in this passage is that the modern emphasis on busy-ness *and* the despair of boredom amount to the same thing, a fundamental indifference to the most serious, unsettling questions of life. Pieper’s views resonate strongly to Heidegger’s position in his 1929/30 lectures, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, when he identifies boredom—as he did with anxiety in *Being and Time*—as an underlying mood of the technological age.<sup>37</sup>

For Heidegger, boredom reveals the fact that modern life has become

wholly preoccupied with consuming and producing beings. And, on the basis of this utilitarian worldview, all beings become equalized. This makes it increasingly difficult to qualitatively distinguish which worldly choices and commitments matter to us insofar as all beings show up *in only one way*, as objects to be used and manipulated. The consequence is a disposition of indifference to the world, to “*beings as a whole*.”<sup>38</sup> The world—understood as the totality of public institutions, equipment, acts, and practices—is boring to the extent that we are “entranced” (*bannen*) by the technological frenzy of things and remain oblivious to the enigmatic movement of being and to the meaning of our own being. In this regard, boredom is particularly dangerous because our very busy-ness conceals the oppressiveness of our own indifference. In short, the cultural atmosphere of flatness and indifference in the technological age is embodied in the fact that we are too busy, too restless to be bored, to experience our own emptiness. Thus, “this absence of oppressiveness,” as Heidegger says, “is only apparently hidden; it is rather attested by the very activities with which we busy ourselves in our contemporary restlessness.”<sup>39</sup>

For Pieper and Heidegger, therefore, the despair of *acedia* in the modern age stems not from idleness or sloth. It comes from an inability to step outside of the accelerated busy-ness of the work-world. In his *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger will refer to this inability as “not-being-able-to-bear-the-stillness,”<sup>40</sup> and Pieper will call it the “incapacity for leisure.”<sup>41</sup> The leisurely attitude, on this view, has nothing to do with recreation or time off from work. Weekends and vacations are still largely interpreted through the lens of busy-ness. They are not only caught up in the familiar consumption of beings—by means of shopping, dining, movies, travel—they are also viewed instrumentally as a means to an end to the extent that they rest and refresh us for the sake of becoming more efficient and productive workers. Thus, the modern holiday is, as Heidegger says, “essentially correlated to workdays, [it is] taken to be just an interruption in our working time...nothing more than a pause that is established, finally for the sake of work itself.”<sup>42</sup> Pieper echoes this sentiment when he writes:

A break in one's work, whether of an hour, a day or a week, is still part of the world of work. It is a link in the chain of utilitarian functions. The pause is made for the sake of work and in order to work, and a man is not only refreshed *from* work but *for* work... the point of leisure is not to be a restorative, a pick-me-up, whether mental or

physical... That is not the point.<sup>43</sup>

Identifying a core theme that was already crucial to Heidegger's project, Pieper suggests leisure might best be understood as a form of play (*Spiel*); a non-willful activity that is meaningful in itself and has no rational purpose or measurable usefulness.<sup>44</sup> Pieper rejects the commonly held view that play is to be interpreted as a form of relaxation or entertainment—playing golf, racquetball, and video games—that is less significant, less serious than the reality of hard work. Heidegger's student Eugen Fink is helpful in this regard when he suggests that play should be viewed as an essential structure or condition of existence, what Heidegger would call an *existentiale* (*Existentziale*). Fink writes:

Play is not only a peripheral manifestation of human life; it is not a contingent phenomenon that emerges upon occasion. In essence, it comes under the ontological dispositions of human existence. It is a fundamental phenomenon.<sup>45</sup>

Play, on this view, is regarded as “just as original and basic in itself as death, work, and domination.”<sup>46</sup> Opposed to the rationally controlled atmosphere of work and busy-ness, purposeless play opens us up to the spontaneous event of being, the clearing (*Lichtung*) that gathers and appropriates beings, allowing them to emerge-into-presence *as* the very beings that they are. For Heidegger, being, understood as the appropriating event (*Ereignis*), is itself playful to the extent that it hides from us.<sup>47</sup> Being reveals itself in particular ways only in terms of the beings that show up or emerge within it. Thus, we cannot point to or find the openness. The luminosity of being that allows beings to appear is self-concealing. Heidegger explains

If we stand in a clearing in the woods, we see only what can be found within it: the free place, the trees about—and precisely not the luminosity of the clearing itself. As little as the openness is simply the unconcealedness of beings, but is the clearing for the self-concealing, so little is this self-concealment a mere being-absent. It is rather a vacillating, hesitant refusal.<sup>48</sup>

Play, in this regard, has a twofold meaning. First, play can be interpreted

as a kind of spontaneous, leisurely activity that frees us from the stress of our workaday existence and opens us up to a horizon of disclosure that is mysterious and incalculable, “where man,” as Fink writes, “experiences the proximity of the gods, heroes, the dead, and where he [finds] himself in the presence of all of the beneficent and dreadful powers of the universe.”<sup>49</sup> Second, play can be interpreted as the abyssal ground of being itself, what Heidegger will call the original space of play of time (*Zeit-Spiel-Raum*), the self-concealing clearing within which all beings manifest, emerging and withdrawing in different ways, in different historical epochs.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the activity of play, understood in the first sense, reveals our absorption into play understood in the second sense, an absorption into the primordial opening on the basis of which beings can come into play. In this regard, “all playing,” as Gadamer says, “is a being-played.”<sup>51</sup>

In his writings on Hölderlin, Heidegger situates this kind of playful activity in communal celebrations or festivals. Heidegger interprets the festival in terms of the holiday (‘holy-day’), as an event that celebrates and remembers the sacred rituals, myths, and practices that root us to a particular dwelling place or homeland (*Heimat*), creating a sense of belonging to regions and communities with a shared history. These pre-modern festivals might include the seasonal celebrations that follow a bountiful harvest, the public performances of Sophocles’ tragedies at the Greek amphitheatre, or the Christian Eucharist that gives thanks to divine mystery. Such events stand outside of the workaday horizon of willful mastery and self-certainty and reacquaint us with an affirmation of the unsettledness and fragility of the world, of beings *as a whole*.<sup>52</sup>

In his reading of Hölderlin’s poem “As When On a Holiday...,” Heidegger develops this point by drawing our attention to the following lines that capture the source of the festive temperament:

Above the gods of Occident and Orient  
Nature is now awakening with the clang of arms,  
And from high Aether down to the abyss,  
According to firm law, as once, begotton out of holy Chaos,  
Inspiration, the all-creative,  
Again feels herself anew.<sup>53</sup>

According to Heidegger, Hölderlin’s use of the word nature (*Die Natur*) is

not to be interpreted in modern terms—as material bodies in causal interaction or as a standing reserve of calculable resources to be manipulated and consumed—but in terms of the Greek word for nature, *physis*, understood as the mysterious movement (*Bewegung*) of “emerging and arising, [of] self opening,” whereby beings initially “blossom forth” out of concealment.<sup>54</sup> Nature, on this view, is the primordial

lighting of that clearing (*Lichtung*) into which anything may enter appearing, present itself in its outline, show itself in its ‘appearance’ and be present *as this or that*.<sup>55</sup>

The holy (*Heilig*), therefore, is the awesome chaos of nature itself that engulfs us, “the yawning, gaping chasm, the open that first opens itself, wherein everything is engulfed.”<sup>56</sup> The celebration of our belongingness to nature transports us out of the “dull and gloom of everyday [busy-ness]” and gives birth to the primordial temperament of wonder and awe.<sup>57</sup>

In his 1937-38 lecture at the University of Freiburg entitled *The Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic,”* Heidegger offers his most sustained analysis of wonder. For Heidegger, wonder is not to be confused with marveling at the unfamiliar, at “exceptional, unexpected, surprising” things. Marveling at the latest technological construct—the newest car, the biggest casino, the latest Hollywood blockbuster—is nothing more than curiosity. Here, the routine production of the uncommon that “bewitches and encharms” us becomes permanent, a commonplace.<sup>58</sup> Heidegger explains using the example of the movie industry.

The uncommon thus obtains its own permanent character, form, and fashion. To do so it even requires an insidious habituality. We might think in passing of all the extraordinary things the cinema must offer continually; what is new every day and never happened before becomes something habitual and always the same.<sup>59</sup>

The original disposition of wonder is distinct from everyday forms of marveling at what is newest and latest to the extent that it is not restricted to individual beings—cars, casinos, movies—that are taken as unusual. Rather, in wonder the world *as a whole* shows up as unusual, “anything whatsoever as such and *everything as everything* become the most unusual.”<sup>60</sup> In this sense, wonder is not a curious distraction or diversion from the usual. In

wonder, there is “no escape” from the unusual, no rational explanation that can penetrate it. In this regard, Heidegger will refer to wonder as being “in between” the usual and the unusual because one does “not know the way out or the way in.”<sup>61</sup>

In a state of wonder, the authentic self does not panic, “does not desire help” but rather opens herself up to and occupies the wondrous “between,” the abyssal, free openness where beings *as a whole* come into play. Heidegger says:

Wonder now opens up what alone is wondrous in it: namely, the whole as the whole, the whole as beings, beings as a whole, that they are and what they are, beings as beings. What is meant here by the “as” is the “between” that wonder separates out, the open of a free space hardly surmised and heeded, in which beings *come into play as such*, namely as the beings they are, *in the play of their being*.<sup>62</sup>

Heidegger is suggesting that wonder does not separate us from the commonplace. Indeed, “wonder sets *us* before the usual itself precisely as what is the most unusual.”<sup>63</sup> In short, the most ordinary claim that “*beings are*” is now experienced as wondrous. Wonder is the mood that “displaces us before and into the unusualness of everything in its usualness.”<sup>64</sup> Leisure, in this regard, is an active embodiment of wonder at the fact that “there is something rather than nothing, that there are beings and we ourselves are in their midst.”<sup>65</sup> Needless to say, this ancient disposition has been forgotten in the age of modern busy-ness. Today, the claim “beings are” is, according to Heidegger, not even worth questioning; it is interpreted as redundant, as “obvious, empty talk.”<sup>66</sup>

The displacement of wonder is accompanied by a “startled dismay” (*Erschrecken*) because the self of everydayness—who understands everything—is thrown into a state of deep questioning, into the mystery that “beings are.” Heidegger will refer to this as a kind of suffering (*Leiden*), but a suffering that is not to be interpreted in the common “Christian-moralistic-psychological way,” as a submission to life’s woes. Rather, the suffering of wonder refers to a radical acceptance or tolerance for mystery, a “letting oneself be transformed” by the enigmatic openness of being that appropriates and gathers beings.<sup>67</sup> Thus, authentic suffering comes from a genuine (*eigentlich*) willingness to let beings be, to dwell in the questionability of beings, which enables one to “draw close to [the] openness, without falling prey to the temptation to explain it prematurely.”<sup>68</sup> In this regard, the conception of authenticity that

is developed in his lectures in the late 1930's bears a striking resemblance to how authenticity was originally conceived in his early Freiburg lectures. In his 1921-22 lectures on Aristotle, for instance, Heidegger identifies the struggle for "questionability" as *the* key characteristic of authenticity, a characteristic that can keep us close to truth—understood as the original emerging-forth of beings out of concealment—by resisting the already understood assumptions and prejudices of our own factual (*faktisch*) situation. Questioning involves coming to grips with our own history in order to "let what is coming occur" on its own terms.<sup>69</sup> On this view, questioning is not a sign of weakness or insecurity. It is the steadfast awareness that everything is not obvious and explainable by means of rational principles.<sup>70</sup>

The interpretation of authenticity that I am offering suggests that the historical retrieval of leisure may provide contemporary Dasein with the means to be ready for the unsettling aspects of life, opening us up to a composed, patient disposition in the face of technological busy-ness, a disposition that "lets beings be." According to Heidegger, the origins of our current technological worldview are to be found in ancient Greece. In this epoch, technology did not manifest itself in terms of forceful mastery and manipulation but was experienced as something poetic, embodied in the craftsman or artisan who employed *technē* in order to "bring forth" and "preserve" the wondrous, allowing things to "thing," to emerge-into-presence as they are given naturally, independently of humans.<sup>71</sup> Because the Greeks were tuned—by means of the temperament of wonder—to the sacred emerging forth of beings, the Greeks exhibited a reverence and harmony with nature, letting beings come forth on their own terms.

However, for Heidegger, authenticity understood in terms of the complete retrieval and repetition of the original Greek temperament is impossible. Repetition is always incomplete to the extent that a hermeneutic situation—a pre-given cultural background of assumptions, institutions, and practices—always colors any recovery. What has-been-there can be handed down to us, therefore, only in terms of today's situation, namely, the harried world of planetary technology.<sup>72</sup> The question we are left with is this: Can an authentic retrieval of leisure take place today, in an age when the gods have fled, when the ancient sense of festivity has been obliterated, when technological progress, production, and busy-ness appear to be the only game in town?

Heidegger may offer reason for hope in his 1953 lecture "The Question Concerning Technology" when he writes,



We are thereupon summoned to hope in the growing light of the saving power. How can this happen? *Here and now and in little things*, that we may foster the saving power in its increase. This includes always holding before our eyes the extreme danger.<sup>73</sup>

This passage indicates that we are, undeniably, in danger to the extent that modern technology dominates our everyday lives and enframes the totality of beings. But it also appears to suggest that *das Man* is far too complex to be captured in one, monological worldview. The world is also composed of “little things,” of smaller communities, individuals, and practices that remain on the margins of mainstream busy-ness and productivity and constitute an overlooked fringe of our hermeneutic situation. These marginal practices may provide modern culture with a connective thread back to the ancient temperament by celebrating our fragile belongingness to beings *as a whole*. These communal or solitary acts of resistance are embodied in leisure and might include walking slowly in the nearby woods, playing music with friends, sitting quietly by a lake, or perhaps even focusing on one’s breath when stuck in traffic, just to be in the wondrous midst of beings, to be near the trees, the lake, the body that breathes.<sup>74</sup> Nietzsche captures this kind of purposeless, non-attached play in his poem “Sils Maria,”

Here I sat waiting, waiting—yet for nothing,  
beyond good and evil, sometimes enjoying light,  
sometimes enjoying shadow, completely only play,  
completely lake, completely noon,  
completely time without goal.<sup>75</sup>

Heidegger makes it clear that authentic action will not save us from planetary technology. Leisure, in this regard, is simply an act of readiness, of being prepared for the end of the technological age, an end that is marked when all beings are forced to show up in only one way, when every mystery and every god has been forgotten. Leisure can only keep us in contact with wonder, with other, more original horizons, and, perhaps, steady us for the possibility of the emergence of the “other beginning.” Heidegger makes no guarantees but wants us to be prepared “so that we do not, simply put, die meaningless deaths, but that when we decline, we decline in the face of the absent god.”<sup>76</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gary Cross, "A Right to Be Lazy? Busyness in Retrospective," *Social Research*, Vol. 72 (2) 2005, 267.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas C. Anderson, "Technology and the Decline of Leisure," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, Vol. 70, 1997, 1

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," trans. William Lovitt in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977) 115

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger says that "since antiquity the *traditional conception and development of the problem of being* has been governed by the fact that *ousia* is comprehended as *substance*, or better, as *substantiality*: substance as the proper being-ness of a being... *The innermost content of the concept of substance has the character of an enduring remaining, i.e. of constant presence.*" Cf. Heidegger, *The Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Ted Sadler (New York: Continuum, 2002) 46

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 10-11

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," trans. David Farrell Krell in *Basic Writings*, (San Francisco: Harper and Collins, 1977) 330

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 16

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 27

<sup>9</sup> Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) 111.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, 104

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 84-85

<sup>12</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 169. All references are to the original German pagination.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 172

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 177

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 174

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 174

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 254

<sup>18</sup> Hans Jonas, "Heidegger's *Entschlossenheit und Entschluss*," in G. Neske and E. Kettering (eds) *Antwort: Martin Heidegger in Gespräch*, (Pfullingen: G. Neske Verlag, 1988) 226-27. Cited in Richard Wolin, "Karl Löwith and Martin Heidegger—Contexts and Controversies: An Introduction," in Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, trans. Gary Steiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 8. The criticism of Heidegger's decisionism has been taken up more recently by Jürgen Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse*

of *Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987) and Richard Wolin in *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 372

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 373

<sup>21</sup> It is for this reason that Heidegger writes, “Inauthentic historicity lies in the title of ‘everydayness.’” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 376

<sup>22</sup> For this interpretation I am particularly indebted to conversations with Charles Guignon. Cf. Guignon, “Heidegger’s ‘Authenticity’ Revisited,” *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (1984): 321-339

<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 188

<sup>24</sup> Joan Stambaugh, “Heidegger, Taoism, and Metaphysics,” in Graham Parkes (ed) *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987) 86

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, “Hölderlin’s Hymn *Andenken*,” trans. Keith Hoeller in *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 153, my emphasis

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, “Hölderlin’s Hymn *Andenken*,” 153

<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 385

<sup>28</sup> Although they were contemporaries in Germany, there is no evidence of a correspondence between Heidegger and Pieper. This is unfortunate given the remarkable overlap concerning their critiques of modern busy-ness and their agreement on the significance of a historical recovery of the ancient understanding of leisure and festivity.

<sup>29</sup> Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1965) 21

<sup>30</sup> Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Random House, 1963)

<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that the English word for leisure comes from the Latin *licere* (“to be allowed”) which implies a freedom from restraint. Cf. Joseph Owens, “Aristotle on Leisure,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 11 (4) 1981, 715

<sup>32</sup> Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 21

<sup>33</sup> Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 21

<sup>34</sup> Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 20. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1333a11, in *Aristotle Selections*, trans. Terence Irwin and Gail Fine (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995) 515; Aristotle’s most detailed discussion of leisure is in the *Politics*, 1333a30-b5; 1334a11-40; 1337b29-1338a30. Cf. Owens, “Aristotle on Leisure,” 715

<sup>35</sup> Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 38

<sup>36</sup> Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 40

<sup>37</sup> This course, in many ways, is an elaboration of Heidegger’s inaugural Freiburg lecture given on July 24, 1929, “What is Metaphysics” where the mood of boredom is explored

for the first time.

<sup>38</sup> On this view, the mood of deep boredom (*tief Langeweile*) is not like “becoming bored *with* something” (*Gelangweiltwerden von etwas*) when, for example, we are waiting for our plane to take off in an airport, or “being bored *by* something” (*Sichlangweilen*) when, for example, we are caught up in the gossip and curiosity of a dinner party. “Becoming bored with” and “being bored by” are forms of boredom that are situational; they are moods that correspond to particular beings and are, therefore, transient; they come and go. In deep boredom, however, we are bored with beings *as a whole* and are therefore “*elevated beyond* the particular situation in each case and beyond the specific beings surrounding us.” Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 134, 137

<sup>39</sup> Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 164

<sup>40</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 84

<sup>41</sup> Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 40

<sup>42</sup> Heidegger, “Holderlin’s Hymn *Andenken*,” 126

<sup>43</sup> Pieper, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*, 43

<sup>44</sup> Describing festivity, Pieper writes, “I am referring to the concept of play. Does not play epitomize that pure purposefulness in itself, we might ask? Is not play activity meaningful in itself, needing no utilitarian justification? And should not festivity therefore be interpreted chiefly as a form of play.” Pieper, *In Tune with the World*, 8

<sup>45</sup> Eugen Fink, “The Ontology of Play,” *Philosophy Today* 4, 1960, 98

<sup>46</sup> Fink, “The Ontology of Play,” 101

<sup>47</sup> In his *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger identifies playing forth (*zuspiel*) as “preparation for the other beginning,” a new epoch that retrieves the hidden sources of the “first beginning” of classical Greek thinkers who experienced truth (*a-lethia*) as the unconcealment of beings. On Heidegger’s view, Greek philosophy and the subsequent metaphysical tradition soon forgot this sense of primordial truth by regarding the being of beings in terms of the constant presence of substance and re-interpreting truth in terms of correctness, of the agreement or correspondence between an idea in the mind (subject) and an outer state of affairs (object). This relation between subject and object has dominated Western history and has reached its historical endpoint, its zenith in the calculative worldview of modern technology, when the totality of beings shows up in only one way, as a static object-region to be manipulated and controlled. It is for this reason that Heidegger says, “we stand at the end—at the end of this [first] beginning” and must prepare for the “other beginning.”

<sup>48</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic”*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 178

<sup>49</sup> Fink, “The Ontology of Play,” 106

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 369

<sup>51</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum Press, 1994) 106

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Julian Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) 58

<sup>53</sup> Hölderlin, "As When On a Holiday..." in Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, 68

<sup>54</sup> Heidegger writes, "*Physis* [is] the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing forth, *poiesis*. *Physis* is indeed *poiesis* in the highest sense. For what presences by means of *physis* has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom." Cf. "The Question Concerning Technology," 10

<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, "Hölderlin's Hymn 'As When on a Holiday...'," *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, 79

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, "Hölderlin's Hymn 'As When on a Holiday...'", 85

<sup>57</sup> Heidegger, "Hölderlin's Hymn 'Andenken,'" 126

<sup>58</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 136

<sup>59</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 136

<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 144

<sup>61</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 145

<sup>62</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 147, my emphasis

<sup>63</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 150

<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 150

<sup>65</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* 52, "Holderlin's Hymn 'Andenken,'" F.-W. von Herrmann (ed.) (Frankfurt-on-Main: Klostermann, 1977) 64. As cited in Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*, 60

<sup>66</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 168

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 151

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 178

<sup>69</sup> Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, 112, 114

<sup>70</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 169

<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 13; *The Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 154

<sup>72</sup> Heidegger, "Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle: An Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation," in *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond*, trans. John van Buren (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002) 114. Cf. Charles Guignon, "Philosophy and Authenticity: Heidegger's Search for a Ground for Philosophizing," in Mark A. Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (eds) *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus, Volume I*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000) 95-97

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 33, my emphasis. Hubert

Dreyfus draws our attention to this overlooked passage in his essay “Nihilism, art, technology, and politics,” in Charles Guignon (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, (Cambridge University Press, 1993)

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Julian Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000) 122-127

<sup>75</sup> Nietzsche, “Sils Maria,” as cited in Stambaugh, “Heidegger, Taoism, and Metaphysics,” 86

<sup>76</sup> Heidegger, “*Der Spiegel* Interview,” Gunther Neske and Emil Kettering (eds), *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, (New York: Paragon House, 1990) 41-66